



A Peek into the

DOCTORS, AND creatures of all shapes and sizes, who were affiliated to the healthcare sector once penned open letters to the Hobbit, in hope that she will address their concerns in the next instalment of the regular Hobbit column. Since any correspondence are now directly sent to the Hobbit's Facebook account (<http://www.facebook.com/hobbit.sma>) instead, we dug up long forgotten messages to the Hobbit that were printed in past issues of *SMA News* to revisit lessons learnt and timely reminders for the future. Many issues have been addressed and resolved over the years, albeit air conditioning being a privilege still reserved exclusively for those in higher class wards, but we picked out some tongue-in-cheek correspondence to the Wise One that are still relevant today.

To the Short One,

Surcharge More than Charge

I feel short-changed (nothing to do with you).

Recently I received a bill from Middle Earth Hospital which stated that my surgeon's fees were far more than what I expected. I questioned the billing clerk who said it was for a 200% surcharge. I am surprised. How can a public hospital allow a surcharge to be in the quantum of 200%? I.e, I paid three times the price of what the listed charge should be. I understand the need for a surcharge in many circumstances, but how can the surcharge be twice that of the normal price? The surcharge quantum should be less than the base price! If the surcharge is much more than the base price, then shouldn't the price be reset? Even peak-hour taxi surcharge costs only a few dollars and my Chinese New Year hair perm surcharge was only about 20%, not 200%!

Ms Liao Lui
Chartered Accountant and
Price-Conscious Patient

Dear Katek,

You Lose, We Pay

I am very concerned about recent developments in the Orc Healers Council. As you are well aware, the Council has been prosecuting and punishing many prominent Orc healers. It appears that there is a trend of these Orc healers successfully appealing to the Realm Courts to get these Council decisions overturned. All these mean that the legal bills have grown by a lot recently for the Council. Since the Council is self-funded through the Orc healers' subscriptions, does it mean that our subscriptions will increase in the near future? There is a strong market rumour that subscriptions are going to go up very soon due to these reversals.

More importantly, there is a moral hazard here – the regulators may be bringing the cases before the Council very enthusiastically; if they win, the regulators look good and get promoted. If they lose, it's no big deal because we rank and file Orc healers, and end up footing the hefty bills. There must

be some accountability here. We Orc healers should not be made to pay for others' unsuccessful actions in the name of self-regulation. There is a movement to pay for outcomes in healthcare. Maybe there needs to be a move to pay for outcomes in healthcare regulation too.

Dr See Beh Kiang
MBBS (Honours)
Cerebral Volvulus Clinic
888 Ziam Road



Hobbit's Mailbox



Dear Hobbit,

Singapore Better than UK

I am very upset. I am a UK grad Singaporean now working in Singapore. I was told to apply for Internal Medicine traineeship by my boss earlier this year. Dutifully I did. I just passed my MRCP. Now I am told that my years of training in Neurology and Gastroenterology as an SHO in London Royal Free will not be recognised as training by the STC here. In other words, though I have my MRCP now, I will only qualify to be appointed as AST (Registrar) in 2008! To add insult to injury, I have been offered a job in a reasonably prestigious university hospital in London and this university hospital has no problems recognising my training here in Singapore!

Does that mean that Singapore has a higher standard than university hospitals in London? Or are we just xenophobes? How do we expect to be a medical hub if we alienate ourselves from developed countries like UK? Are all of our older specialists trained in UK, USA or Australia? Or have we surpassed the British such that they will recognise the training we provide but we do not reciprocate this courtesy? There are several of us in the same boat and we are thinking of leaving our homeland to return to UK for further training if this is the kind of nonsense we have to put up with in our own country.

Yours faithfully,
Singapore Girl, Frustrated MOS,
UK Grad

Dear Ai-Chai,

I Not Foreign Talent?

I am a Hong Kong colleague of a Singaporean doctor, Chen Zhen, working in London. I have a MRCS and I attended one of those recruitment talks given by senior Singapore doctors when they were in London. They said they were short of doctors and wanted us to go to Singapore. I was very impressed and I applied for a General Surgery registrar job in Singapore. But I was told that they cannot give me a registrar job because registrar posts will be phased out soon. I have to apply to be a resident and begin training all over again under the American system. I find this strange. Anyway, I will just have to stay put in UK or return to HK.

Dr Ip Man
MBBS, MRCS
Leicester Square, London



Hobbit's Comments

Don't like that leh. Even if you don't qualify to be foreign talent, you can still come to Singapore for MBS, RWS, etc. As a sign of hospitality, we don't take \$100 from you when you enter the casino. Singapore is still a better place to be in than HK. For one - HK's version of wanton mee only has wanton; Singapore's wanton mee has wanton and char siew as well. Can you beat that?

Dear Ring-bearer,

How Come I Am Still Scum?

I am quite distressed. Recently, my head of department summoned all of us medical officers to a meeting. He declared, "Our housemen ratings are low and few housemen want to join us, despite the fact that we have some of the best teachers and training programmes. The most oft-cited reason is heavy workload. To address this problem, our department will, with immediate effect, consider housemen 'supernumerary'. They will do nothing serious. All of you are to regard them as superfluous to requirements. They will only clerk patients and perform procedures if they feel like it. All real work is to be done by medical officers. On top of that, they must get post-call, tea breaks, Sundays off and lunch. Please, *tolong, tolong, sayang* them a bit. This is a key performance indicator in our departmental scorecard. If we screw this up, none of your consultants will get our bonus!"

Just yesterday, my houseman said since he is "supernumerary" he will only follow ward rounds and do changes if he "feels up to it". I thought after I become a medical officer, I will cease to be the lowest living life form, but it appears I am still the scum of the earth!

Can I be a houseman again?

Yours lowly,
HOMO Tan ■