

# Role of Professional Bodies in Professional Governance

## – *The CMEP Example*

By A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean and A/Prof Goh Lee Gan

### Definitions

#### Professional bodies

These are societies, committees, task forces and centres formed by groups of people who are professionals – namely, people who have expertise that will benefit society. There are several purposes for forming such professional bodies, which could be grouped into: setting practice standards for members of the bodies, self-regulation to ensure the practice standards are maintained, and responding to society's needs and demands. The above listed are also the roles of the professional bodies.

#### Professional governance

These are the mechanisms that a professional organisation uses to ensure that its members follow its established processes and policies, and provides for corrective action in cases where the rules have been ignored or misconstrued. Professional governance, is akin to and complements clinical governance, which is a systematic approach to maintaining and improving the quality of patient care within a health system. Professional governance is about safeguarding professional standards and managing a system of professional accountability and disciplinary process that is competent, effective and fair.

### Why was CMEP created?

In the late 1990s, there were factors that led to the misalignment of patient and professional expectations. With the restructuring of hospitals and privatisation, there was a need to move from social capital-based healthcare financing towards economic capital-based healthcare financing. More investigations were often needed to clarify clinical situations. With new answers to healthcare problems, more costly forms of care became the staple. The cost of healthcare had to rise.

There was an increasing demand that doctors follow guidelines of care that were drawn up by various parties of medical professionals and the Ministry of Health. Uncertainty in healthcare and imperfect results were

regarded by patients as incompetence, and physicians became liable for compensation.

There were also issues where professional-led guidelines were more reflective of the challenges of the day. The Medical Guidelines on Fitness to Drive and Guideline on Fees are two such examples.

In short, there was a need to create a new social compact with the advent of a relevant organisation.

### From idea to reality

The idea of such a centre was mooted in 1999 during A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean's term of office as President of SMA. In 2000, after A/Prof Goh Lee Gan had assumed the SMA presidency, CMEP was started. The core purpose of CMEP is to develop and promote the art and science of medical ethics and medical practice, as well as their application, for the betterment of patient care and public health in the context of changing social norms.

It was the synergy of efforts of many like-minded colleagues who sat in the SMA Complaints Committee of the day – Drs T Thirumoorthy, Lim Teck Beng, both of us, and several others. One important person who deserves to receive our accolades is Dr Tan Siang Yong, better known as SY Tan. He unstintingly volunteered heaps of time in the setting up of CMEP and nurturing its growth through the fledging years. He is a Singaporean who is now a professor of medicine and an adjunct professor of law at the University of Hawaii. That A/Prof Chin Jing Jih trained under Dr SY Tan was an important connection in the former's contribution to the development of CMEP in concert with Dr Thirumoorthy to its present state.

### Role of CMEP

CMEP's role is nicely encapsulated in its website (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

### CMEP's first educational event

Its first educational event, from the perspective of medical ethics and professional ethics, was the launch seminar held on 10 June 2000 (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> During

## ABOUT SMA CMEP

The SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (CMEP) hopes to provide doctors with a platform for life-long learning in the area of Medical Ethics, Professionalism and Health Law.

The purpose of SMA CMEP is to develop and promote the art and science of medical ethics and medical care for the betterment of patient care and public health. The SMA CMEP also hopes to provide leadership in areas of academic training, discussions and research, to support a high standard of medical professionalism.

### Objectives of the SMA CMEP

#### Leadership and Education

- Develop course materials to meet the needs of the training of medical doctors
- Collaborate with other institutes or professional bodies for educational and research activities
- Provide thought leadership to the community of medical doctors in development of medical ethics and professionalism through conducting courses, seminars, conventions and meetings.

#### Resource and Research

- Develop position statements, articles of papers relating to medical ethics, health law and professionalism
- A resource centre on medical ethics, health law and professionalism for the SMA members
- Conduct discussions or initiate researches into areas of medical ethics, health law and professionalism so as to further develop insights and knowledge into these areas.



## Medical Professionalism – Our Badge and Our Pledge

Sat, 10 June 2000, Lecture Hall, National Cancer Centre Level 4, 2-5 pm

1.30 pm	Registration
2.00 pm	<b>Opening Address</b> by A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, President of SMA
2.15 pm	<b>Keynote address – “Medical Professionalism: Our Badge and Our Pledge”</b> by Prof SY Tan, Professor of Medicine and Adjunct Professor of Law, University of Hawaii Director, The St Francis International Centre for Healthcare Ethics
3.00 pm	<b>Vision of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism</b> by Dr T. Thiru Moorthy, Director, SMA Centre for Ethics & Professionalism
3.10 pm	<b>SMA Centre for Ethics &amp; Professionalism Foundation Laying Ceremony</b>
3.15 pm	Tea Break
3.35 pm	<b>Panel Discussion (I) – In response to the keynote address</b> - Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Singapore (ICPAS) - The Institute of Engineers, Singapore (IES) - The Law Society of Singapore (LS) - Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA) - Singapore Institute of Surveyors & Valuers (SISV) - Singapore Medical Association (SMA)
4.45 pm	<b>Panel Discussion (II) – open to the floor</b>
5.30 pm	Close

Figure 1: CMEP's role

Figure 2: CMEP's first educational event

that seminar, Dr SY Tan delivered a keynote address that defined medical professionalism operationally as our badge and our pledge to society for the protection of its health.<sup>3</sup>

### What CMEP has done these 15 years

Certainly, the leadership of CMEP have taken its stated roles seriously. To achieve that end, they have held many courses on medical ethics, law and professionalism. The many articles published in *SMA News* and the *Singapore Medical Journal* are testament to their efforts.

### Professional governance

CMEP exerts its influence on professional governance the last 15 years, by and large, through education and counselling of colleagues in need of advice or solutions for professional difficulties encountered in the course of their work. It also contributes to the resolution of complaints from patients.

### Moving forward

One future governing role of CMEP will be having its finger on society's "pulse" on matters of medical ethics and professionalism. This can be done through feedback surveys, dialogues, and forums between CMEP and medical professionals and the society at large. CMEP must also build on and emphasise what it has done well in the last 15 years – continuing education in both the essentials and details of professionalism, medical ethics, health law and practice management remain its core business.

### Acknowledgement

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### References

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3. Tan SY. *Medical professionalism: our badge and our pledge*. *Singapore Med J* 2000; 41(7):312-6. Available at: <http://www.sma.org.sg/smj/4107/articles/4107e1.pdf>. Accessed 9 May 2015.



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