

## LETTERS ON

# RESIDENTS' RESERVIST TRAINING LEAVE

The SMA Doctors-in-Training Committee received feedback from residents that reservist leave is currently considered in their total number of days of absence from medical training in some sponsoring institutions and specialties. If male trainee doctors' national service (NS) duties stretch for a longer period of time (ie, high-key reservist training), it could potentially delay the completion of their traineeship and in turn, career prospects.

SMA sought advice from all three sponsoring institutions' designated institutional officials (DIOs) about leave criterion within their organisations, and they reassured us that they have been abiding by the Ministry of Health's (MOH) training circular about guidelines for the absence from training for residents. In addition, programme directors

would generally assign residents who are going for reservist in a longer posting so as to avoid any delay in their medical traineeship.

The Association recognises that it is crucial for the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) to be aware of the views raised by their NSmen as well, so that both MINDEF and MOH could work together to address their concerns. SMA's letter to Mr Maliki Bin Osman, who is Chairman of the Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence (ACCORD); copied to Ms Kwa Hui Teng, Head of ACCORD, and Dr Lau Hong Choon, Director, Manpower Standards and Development Division, MOH is reproduced below. This is followed by an email reply from the office of the Permanent Secretary (Defence).

6 April 2016

### SMA's Letter to ACCORD

Dear Mr Maliki Bin Osman,

Singapore Medical Association is the representative professional body for medical professionals in Singapore. Among our members are residents (doctors in training) who have completed their studies and are undergoing training in the respective restructured hospitals/training institutions.

Under MOH Training Circular 10/2010 issued on the 23 August 2010, it is indicated that the total number of days of absence from training cannot exceed "X" days, following which, the posting has to be repeated. We note that "NS Leave" is interpreted by the training institutions to be part of the days of absence from training, and will therefore negatively impact the timely completion of the resident's training. For example, a 14 day high-key training in the midst of a posting of four months will cause the resident/NSman to exceed the allowable days of absence.

For your information, if the total number of days of absence from training exceed the stipulated days per the MOH Training Circular 10/2010, the residents can be made to do a repeat posting or extended posting, therefore delaying the completion of his traineeship and career prospects compared to their peers who do not have NS requirements.

We hope that ACCORD can engage with MOH in this regard and work out a favourable outcome so that the residents/NSman will not be penalised in his workplace for serving his NS obligations in the future.

**Dr Daniel Lee**  
**Honorary Secretary**  
**Singapore Medical Association**





### **MINDEF's Reply to SMA**

We refer to your request made through Dr Maliki Bin Osman, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence, for assistance to mitigate the impact of SAF's call-ups on Operationally Ready National Servicemen (NSmen), who are doctors undergoing the residency programme.

All NSmen are called up based on the SAF's operational and manpower requirements, and NSmen from the same unit are called back for In-Camp Training (ICT) together so that they can train as a cohesive unit. We are unable to defer a specific group of NSmen for an extended period or not issue call-ups for them as it would affect the SAF's operational readiness.

We recognise that National Service requires significant commitment from our servicemen. Currently, MINDEF already exercises flexibility to assist our NSmen in managing their NS and work commitments. SAF commanders are given the discretion to grant deferment to residents who are called up during their residency, subject to unit's training requirement; and the majority of deferment requests from residents have been granted. MINDEF will continue to advise our Unit Commanders to exercise more flexibility in managing NSmen who are doctors undergoing the residency programme. In the event that we are unable to accede to an NSman's deferment request, the Unit Commanders may also grant them time-off to facilitate their work commitments when the training schedule permits.

We have also been in touch with the Ministry of Health (MOH) on this matter. We note that the policy governing the leave of absence from residency training is pertinent in ensuring that the time away due to ICT will not adversely impact residents' clinical training and ability to acquire the clinical competencies within the standard duration of residency training. As NSmen are typically given a three-month and six-month notice for low-key and high-key ICTs respectively, MOH has advised the designated institutional officials to remind residents to give advance notice of their ICTs to their programme directors (PDs) for advance planning. The PDs will avoid placing residents on short rotations during the period of their ICT so that they need not repeat their residency training. We will engage the residents on this issue so that they are aware of the avenues for seeking assistance.

Thank you for sharing your concerns with us, and we look forward to your continued support of National Service.

**Ms Aw Wen Ling**  
**for Permanent Secretary**  
**Ministry of Defence**

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We appreciate the clarifications from MINDEF and the three DIOs, and that the relevant authorities are looking into this matter. SMA would continue to

work closely with the DIOs to iron out any additional queries about leave criteria within the respective organisations' programmes. ◆