



Questions and More Questions

The following is a combination of two articles that were originally published on the Hobbit's Facebook page on 2 and 4 October 2011 respectively. To view the original versions and more, please add her as a friend at <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100002494936582>.

Being a writer is tough. Let's face it, inspiration doesn't quite come simply all the time from the tap, like water or draft beer. Every writer goes through bouts of writer's block. I was having one for the last couple of weeks. But just when I was vexing over what to write and wondering if I have lost my writing mojo or if the world has finally sorted itself out, the ever reliable Singapore Medical Council (SMC) has come to the rescue of this Hobbit again.

The latest letter from SMC to all doctors, "Application for Renewal of Practising Certificate", contained quite a few really tough questions that were never seen before and it's no surprise that many doctors are confused/upset/constipated by these new questions.

I recently spoke to an SMC member and even he was seeing these new questions for the first time. Obviously the "new normal" of politics, policy and consultation hasn't quite reached the folks running SMC yet.

Anyway, an alert reader of this column, Dr Tjio Pee Wee has written in for advice. We reproduce his letter here, sans expletives and grammatical mistakes.

Letter from Dr Tjio Pee Wee

Dear Hobbit,

I have just filed my application to renew my practising certificate. I am now in deep, deeper and deepest trouble. (The original letter contained the phrase "cheam, cheamer and cheamest trouble".)

I am in deep trouble because I had carelessly ticked the "no" box for all six questions, not realising the last question (i.e., Question 4) should be ticked "yes" when you do not owe SMC any money. Yes, it's my fault, I had fallen prey to the oldest trick in the multiple choice question business, that of not reading every question carefully and looking out for that old trick of putting in a question that should be answered "yes" after a slew of questions that should have been answered "no".

I am in deeper trouble because of Question 3a. While I have never been convicted of any investigation, I have been the subject of an inquiry. I think it was 25 years ago, when I was a medical officer on a Psychiatry posting, and some mad guy with a frontal lobe problem complained that I had assaulted his mother, stole his hospital *baju* and slept with his Hello Kitty toy. The psychiatric hospital conducted an inquiry and of course found his allegations to be baseless, especially when they found that the patient's mother had been dead for many years, and that I usually slept with my Ultraman toy, and it was the patient in the next bed (not me) who was sleeping with his Hello Kitty toy. He even tried feeding the toy hospital food in a vain attempt to pry open its nonexistent lips and eventually borrowed lipstick from a female nurse and drew lips on it. Lastly, and most importantly, of course everyone knows a doctor only steals doctors'

baju, never the patients'...

I had forgotten all this until now. I realise I had made a false declaration because at the time of my posting in this particular psychiatric hospital, it was not restructured yet, and was a government hospital and a department under the Ministry of Health (MOH). In other words, it can be construed to be "an authority" as the hospital was run by government officers. Do I now have to report this episode in my latest SMC declaration?

In addition, I was accused of overcharging in 2001 because I charged my patient \$50 for a housecall requested by him. I understand this difficult patient wrote to the SMA Complaints Committee, which decided my charging was entirely appropriate. Is SMA considered a "professional body" and hence, do I have to declare this as well?

Finally, I am in the deepest trouble because I have a deep dark secret which even my wife doesn't know about. You see, when I was a kid, I used to wet my bed. This continued till I was in primary school. My parents were rather distressed and brought me to see the family doctor. The family doctor reassured my parents that I would grow out of it. But my mother would not be persuaded and brought me to the specialists. The specialists included a urologist and (sigh) a paediatric psychiatrist. So now, do I tick "yes" to Question 3c, "Have you ever consulted a psychiatrist or are you currently undergoing psychiatric treatment?"

This is driving me nuts. I have not wet my bed since I was eight years old and even my wife doesn't know about this. Do I have to tell SMC? This is deeply personal, embarrassing and irrelevant to my medical practice now. I may start bedwetting myself again with all this stress.

Please advise me, dear Hobbit!!!

Regards,

Dr Tjio Pee Wee

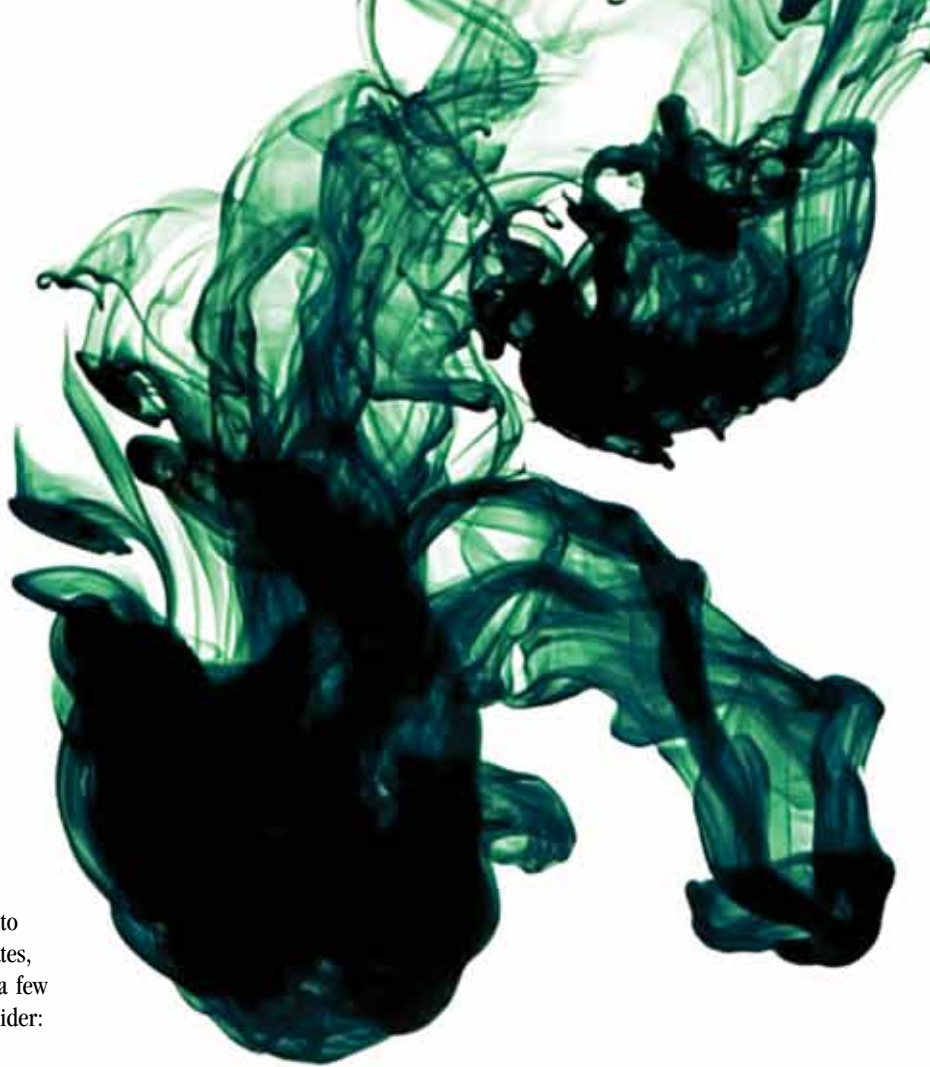
Hobbit's advice

Dear Dr Tjio Pee Wee,

Please do not worry about ticking the wrong box for Question 4 on money owed to SMC. First of all, no matter what you tick, civil servants always behave like you owe them money. Besides, at the rate SMC processes cases, it may be quite a few years before they get to you. By that time, you may well have retired.

As to your second problem, you should report to SMC on the inquiry by the authorities and civil servants, mainly because you did steal the doctor's *baju*, you bloody idiot.

As to the complaint on overcharging made to SMA, don't worry, I was told that some powerful but misguided soul has always thought that SMA



is nothing more than a “trade association” and not a professional body. So you should be okay if you keep quiet about this.

As to your enuresis problem when you were a kid and your wife not knowing, I don’t think your wife will respect or love you any less if she knew you wetted your bed when you were eight – unless you are still sleeping with your Ultraman toy now.

I hope this helps.

Yours shortly,
The SMA Hobbit

P.S. Can I have the Ultraman toy? Thanks!

Anyway, since SMC has added so many new questions to go with the application for the renewal of practising certificates, let us be constructive. The Hobbit would like to suggest a few more questions for the administrators running SMC to consider:

Possible additional questions for doctors

- Have you ever harboured evil or impure thoughts against any SMC member, or the Registrar or Secretary of SMC?
- Did you do your National Service in a military camp or a laboratory?
- Have you ever visited (accidentally or otherwise) any pornographic websites?
- Do you think we should introduce similar questions for lawyers, nurses, accountants and pharmacists when they renew their practising certificates, as well as to potential Elected Presidency candidates when these candidates apply for Certificates of Eligibility?
- SMC is a statutory body “self-funded” by doctors’ licence fees and MOH has a budget of billions. How is it that the biggest user of/complainant to SMC is MOH and MOH doesn’t pay practically anything to SMC to use SMC services? Do you or do you not consider this to be an utter irony?

For the avoidance of doubt, the SMA Hobbit advises all doctors registered with SMC to answer all those questions truthfully and to send in your application for the renewal of practising certificates before the closing date.

Possible additional questions for SMC

On the other hand, even as SMC introduces a plethora of questions, I think we registered medical practitioners should also be entitled to ask the chaps running SMC a few questions, such as:

- Do you know what the “new normal” in politics, government and policy implementation is?
- Have you heard of the subject of “questionnaire design” and “user testing” before you threw up all these new questions for every doctor to answer?
- Even though we know you know that you are empowered by the Medical Registration Act to do many things, do you have a clue what “stakeholder engagement and consultation” is before shoving new stuff down our throats, such as these new questions?
- Can you spell H-I-G-H-H-A-N-D-E-D?
- Why do you need all these new questions when doctors treating doctors are already statutorily bound to report to SMC’s Health Committee if they think their patients (i.e., doctors) are possibly incapable of medical practice?

Epilogue?

Dear Hobbit,

I am relieved. More relieved than holding my pee in for four hours while stuck on a coach on the Causeway and then finally letting go at the WC. Just when I thought I had made untrue declarations and my wife will find out about my enuresis problems, SMC now says that some of the questions were inappropriate. The feeling is indescribably *shiook*, like a relaxed and emptied bladder. . .

Thanks again for your advice.

I can now consult my psychiatrist friend again without fear – asking him if I should get a SUV or a MPV for my next car. . .

Yours gratefully,
Dr Tjio Pee Wee

P.S. You cannot have my favourite Ultraman toy. But I will pass you my old Seow Lang Geng *baju*, now a collector’s item. It’s on the way by UPEeAss courier to Middle-earth. **SMA**