



# 13<sup>th</sup> MASEAN Mid-term Council Meeting

19-21 May 2009, Mandaluyong City, Philippines

By Dr Tan Yia Swam, Deputy Editor

This year's meeting of the 10 member associations of the Medical Association of South East Asian Nations was held from 19 to 21 May 2009 at the Edsa Shangri-la Hotel in Mandaluyong City, Philippines. It was an especially grand occasion as the host, Philippine Medical Association (PMA), timed the 13<sup>th</sup> MASEAN Mid-term Council Meeting to coincide with the 102<sup>nd</sup> PMA Annual Convention. The delegation from SMA comprised Dr Lee Yik Voon, who is also the MASEAN Secretary-General, Dr Tammy Chan, myself and two Secretariat staff, Krysania Tan and Gracia Ong.

When we arrived in the afternoon of 19 May at Ninoy Aquino International Airport, we were received by pick-up service staff who facilitated our checkout through immigration to the transit lounge, for transfer to the hotel. The fragrance of the fresh jasmine garlands given to us was most welcome in the hot city. The ride to the hotel was long as there was heavy traffic, but quite

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comfortable. Dr Martini H. Ventura and her team were on site to welcome all delegates, and to give us a quick briefing on the programme for the events. We settled in without any major problems, and got ready for the welcome dinner.

Our hosts started off the dinner with the Philippine National Anthem, followed by the PMA Hymn. Dr Marianne O. Dobles delivered the opening remarks as the overall Chairperson of both the events, followed by Dr Rey Melchor F. Santos, current President of PMA. Buffet dinner was served, allowing the guests to mingle and catch up with old friendships and gossip. For official entertainment, the Bayanihan Dance Troupe, the award-winning national dance company of the

Philippines, performed. The dancers were all skillful, with a lovely mix of traditional and modern influences in their dances. They have also recently performed in Singapore at a charity concert. After a night of song and dance, we went back to our room for a good rest in preparation for the meetings over the next few days.

Early in the morning on 20 May, we attended the grand opening ceremonies, where the various PMA officer bearers, affiliated societies, and heads of MASEAN delegations took the stage after a processional march. The Philippine national flag was also brought in by Honour Guards from the Marines. Welcoming speeches by Dr Santos, Dr Dobles and the current MASEAN

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chairman, Prof Somphone Phounsavath, from Laos were delivered. The MASEAN committee then adjourned to start our own session.

Each of the member associations first presented their country report, giving an update on the key events organised by the association since the last time we met in Vientiane, Laos, in November last year. Singapore shared our experience in managing the H1N1 flu in the community, our results of the survey on junior doctors, and some national policies that affects the practice of medicine, namely the ongoing discussion on the Guideline on Fees and the amendments to HOTA. Next, each country gave a short presentation on “The Relationship between Managed Healthcare Schemes, Health Insurance and Medical Practice”.

The next day, we continued with the MASEAN business meeting. Of note, there is one proposed amendment

to the MASEAN constitution. As member countries currently do not pay subscription fees, the proposal is to set subscription fees which reflect the developmental status of each member country, though payment will be on a voluntary basis. In addition, the proposal suggests that MASEAN work with governments, professional or commercial organisations to establish funding for the benefit of all member nations. A committee has been set up to discuss these changes, and it will present its findings at the 14<sup>th</sup> MASEAN Council Meeting in Myanmar next year.

The Council also passed a resolution to establish a Dr MK Rajakumar Oration at each biennial MASEAN Conference, to honour the founding father of MASEAN. The speaker shall be nominated and invited to speak on various topics, with an emphasis on primary healthcare.

After the official meetings, our gracious hosts kindly organised a shopping trip for us. The atmosphere was relaxed as we exchanged even more unofficial news of colleagues and friends we have in common, while trying to bargain for goods.

In all, it was a good meeting with some important outcomes, and it also offered further opportunities to strengthen the ties between the various medical associations. We thank the Philippine Medical Association for the warm welcome and excellent hosting over the few days, with good food, good fun, and most importantly, good company. **SMA**



*After a short stint in Geylang Polyclinic, she returns to the hospital setting with greater appreciation of the Polyclinic system.*

*She is also eagerly looking forward to visiting the Prada warehouse in Florence - must remember to save some cash for the plane ticket back to Singapore. Or perhaps getting stranded there, wandering in the rows of handbags forever isn't such a bad idea...*