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SINGAPORE CARDIAC SOCIETY SPEECH

By Dr Chong Yeh Woei

President of the Singapore Cardiac Society, members and fellow colleagues. When I was invited to be the Guest of Honour at this meeting, I pondered about what I should speak on at such a meeting. I decided that I would speak a bit about the current and rapidly changing medical landscape in Singapore.

From my perspective at the helm of the Singapore Medical Association (SMA), we can identify a few issues that would be of concern to most of the medical fraternity.

I will bring all of us back to 2009 when we had the issue of the Medical Registration Act. The initial draft of

the Bill put a judge as the Chairman of the Disciplinary Tribunal with a casting vote. This of course gave rise to concerns from the fraternity and as a result, the final Bill puts in place a legal person on the Tribunal but with doctors having the final say in the judgment. One of the main reasons for the need to have a legal person is that there are doctors who have been brought before the Tribunal, and they have discharged the Medical Protection Society (MPS) and engaged their own lawyers, some of whom are heavyweights in the litigation scene.

As a result, the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) has to also engage a senior counsel in order to have a balance in the hearings. With two

senior lawyers doing battle, the hearings have become very technical in nature and the doctors are out of their depth when it comes to such matters. I see the legal person as a referee for the match and unfortunately quite necessary when legal heavyweights are present. This then brings to mind some of the current cases that are ongoing.

There is the liposuction death case and this is very unfortunate but does not just concern aesthetic GPs or plastic surgeons. In fact one response we hear from the public at large is that “this cannot possibly happen in Singapore”. After all, we are a medical hub of First World status and this incident has cast a long shadow over the whole profession.

REPORT

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Another ongoing situation is that of overcharging and the quantum involved are very large by all standards. This would mean that when the details are released and carried by the media, I have the feeling that international media like *Financial Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* would have a field day with the story. All this is not good for us.

On the aspect of fees, as you all know, the SMA had to withdraw its Guideline on Fees because of the Competition Commission. We have since applied for reinstatement of the Guidelines and this will take some time. As to when it will reappear and in what form and guise, we do not know as yet.

One other area of concern is the cost of practice, in particular the price of medical units. The price of Mount Elizabeth units is currently astronomical, and I believe that new units coming online will also be priced accordingly. The banks are all lining up to finance the doctors with favourable terms. Property prices are really a function of the leverage that we are willing to expose ourselves to, and of course, also to the lenders who think we are a good risk. Please think carefully before you commit long term to such a purchase.

Lastly is the shortage of doctors in Singapore. With a rapidly enlarging population that is aging as well, there

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(L-R): Dr Kenny Sin, President of SCS, Dr Chong Yeh Woei, and Dr Richard Ng.

has been an under investment in the public healthcare sector for some time. They are now catching up with building new hospitals including Khoo Teck Puat (KTP) and Jurong General. I understand that there may be yet another general hospital on the cards after Jurong. The shortage of manpower is particularly in the junior doctors. The Ministry has recruited some 2000 foreign doctors but the local population is very unhappy with the presence of foreign doctors at polyclinics and the like. Hence, the new initiatives to woo our local medical students to return from abroad. Previously the thinking was to restrict the number of doctors as they

would generate more demand. But it looks like the thinking has changed and healthcare is seen as a sector of economic growth, and they intend to increase the supply of doctors.

How all these changes will impact us is sometimes difficult to say. To be frank, as a fraternity we have done well and ridden the pendulum in the right direction in the last two decades. I fear that the pendulum is now reaching its zenith and will proceed to swing back, and perhaps we have to react quickly to get out of its way. With all this food for thought I leave you to digest some of the items I have mentioned. Thank you very much for the invite and it is indeed my pleasure to be here. **SMA**