

# Recognition of MCs by Employers

**O**n 29 June 2011, Dr Yik Keng Yeong wrote to the *Straits Times* Forum, suggesting ways to reduce queues at polyclinics. He stated that many workers are “forced to visit government clinics as some employers refuse to recognise medical certificates (MCs) issued by GPs”. Subsequently, the Ministry of Health, SMA and the Ministry of Manpower responded to this issue. We reproduce all four letters published in the *Straits Times* Forum here.

**29 June 2011**

### **Simple ways to cut polyclinic queues**

I REFER to Health Minister Gan Kim Yong's plan to review the healthcare sector as a whole ('Healthcare review to take some time: Gan'; 27 June).

Beyond the fundamental and structural changes that he promised to bring about, there are other seemingly prosaic but important changes that need to be made.

One of the most important relates to the overcrowding and long waiting times at polyclinics.

Presently, only patients referred by polyclinics for tertiary level care in hospitals enjoy the maximum subsidy, whereas patients referred by general practitioners (GPs) get lower or no subsidies.

Medical colleagues I know who work in polyclinics constantly complain of attending to patients needlessly referred to them by GPs, just so the patients can enjoy larger subsidies. Polyclinic doctors thus have less time to perform other more pressing duties.

Many workers are also forced to visit government clinics as some employers refuse to recognise medical certificates (MCs) issued by GPs. This bumps up the patient load at government polyclinics and accident and emergency departments.

These and other similar human issues can be easily and quickly rectified while we await the redressing of brick and mortar or manpower issues that will bring benefits only in the distant future.

**Dr Yik Keng Yeong**

**7 July 2011**

### **Ministry urges bosses to accept MCs from any doctor**

IN HIS letter ('Simple ways to cut polyclinic queues'; 29 June), Dr Yik Keng Yeong felt that the queues at polyclinics are long because patients go there to get referred for subsidised treatment in hospitals, and because employers recognise medical certificates (MCs) issued only by government clinics.

Our polyclinics play an important gatekeeping role by allowing our doctors to assess if patients should be seen at our specialist outpatient clinics or continue to be treated at primary care level. This allows us to better target specialist resources and subsidies for patients with the clinical need.

Over the years, polyclinics have taken steps to cut waiting times through an appointment system and increasing use of nurses and other healthcare professionals where appropriate.

Polyclinics have also leveraged on technology, for example, teleradiology and teleretinal photography where patients get their reports on the same day.

Other than going through the polyclinics, general practitioner clinics under the Primary Care Partnership Scheme (PCPS) may also refer PCPS patients for subsidised treatment at hospital specialist outpatient clinics.

The ministry has progressively expanded PCPS and will continue to review it to make affordable primary care even more accessible to the public and further streamline the referral process to subsidised specialist care.

Under the Employment Act, employers can choose to accept MCs issued by private doctors. The civil service has already taken the lead by recognising MCs from any registered doctor, and we encourage other employers to do so as well.

**Karen Tan (Ms)**

**Director, Corporate Communications  
Ministry of Health**

**9 July 2011**

### **Change law to make firms accept MCs from any doctor**

WE REFER to Dr Yik Keng Yeong's letter ('Simple ways to cut polyclinic queues'; 29 June) and the Ministry of Health's response on Thursday ('Ministry urges bosses to accept MCs from any doctor').

The Singapore Medical Association (SMA) supports the ministry's call to employers to recognise medical certificates (MCs) issued by a registered medical practitioner regardless of whether he is in public or private practice.

While there are employers who recognise MCs issued by any registered medical practitioner, many companies continue to insist that employees are entitled to paid sick leave only when their MCs are certified by a company or government doctor.

MCs from a doctor in private practice may be accepted at the employer's discretion.

As employees should be allowed to consult a doctor in the vicinity of where they live and as medical resources in polyclinics and hospitals can be better employed, the Employment Act should be reviewed and amended to recognise MCs issued by registered medical practitioners.

**Dr Chong Yeh Woei**

**President**

**Singapore Medical Association**

**13 July 2011**

### **Most bosses accept MCs from any doctor**

WE REFER to last Saturday's letter by Singapore Medical Association president Chong Yeh Woei ('Change law to make firms accept MCs from any doctor'), as well as recent letters on the same issue.

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) would like to reiterate that employers should recognise medical certificates issued by any registered medical practitioner for the purpose of being absent from work due to illness.

However, in order to take sick leave with pay, the Employment Act states that an employee needs to obtain a medical certificate from a company or government doctor.

This is only a minimum requirement, and does not stop an employer from recognising a medical certificate from any doctor.

Provisions on sick leave with pay are included in collective agreements or employees' contracts of service. In a survey conducted by MOM in 2009, three in four private establishments accepted medical certificates issued by all medical practitioners for the purpose of granting paid sick leave.

We thank Dr Chong for his views. We will take the views of all parties, including employees, trade unions and businesses, into account in future reviews of the Employment Act to ensure a balance between statutory obligations and business needs.

**Farah Abdul Rahim (Ms)**

**Director, Corporate Communications  
Ministry of Manpower** 