

# SMA Comments on NUH Probe into Patient's Death

SMA noted with concern the information reported in several news articles on a probe by the National University Hospital (NUH) regarding Mdm Heng Choon Noi, a patient who passed away while recovering from heart surgery. SMA also received feedback from SMA members relating to this case.

Refer to the links below for news reports on the case:

- <http://www.asiaone.com/Health/News/Story/AllStory20111210-315488.html>
- <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/nuh-probes-patient%E2%80%99s-death-after-heart-surgery.html>

SMA wrote to NUH for clarification on the circumstances surrounding the release of information (see letter printed on the right). SMA also managed to contact one of the doctors involved, who is a member, to offer assistance and support.

NUH replied that the status of the two doctors was revealed to the patient's family, but not to the press. NUH also wrote a letter to the *Straits Times* Forum (see [http://www.straitstimes.com/STForum/Story/STIStory\\_745037.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/STForum/Story/STIStory_745037.html)).

The SMA Council is of the opinion that the patient's welfare, and his or her right to information is important. This should be balanced by not prejudging our healthcare workers, before all the facts of the case are heard and the findings sensitively and knowledgeably evaluated in the appropriate context.

Members are welcome to provide their feedback by emailing [feedback@sma.org.sg](mailto:feedback@sma.org.sg). **SMA**

12 December 2011

## **A/P Benjamin Ong**

Chief Executive  
National University Health System  
1E Kent Ridge Road  
Singapore 119228

Dear Prof Ong,

### **RE: CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING NEWS REPORTS ON DR TAY JIA SHENG AND DR NG HUI CHONG**

1) We refer to the recent public articles<sup>1</sup> on the reported investigation into the death of an elderly woman recovering from a heart surgery. The articles made reference to a letter that NUH had sent to the family of the deceased which stated that registrar Dr Tay Jia Sheng had given 24 hours' notice and had since left the hospital. He was training to be a heart surgeon and was overseeing Madam Heng on the day before she died. NUH had also said that the medical officer on duty, Dr Ng Hui Chong, has since decided not to train in surgery.

We have received numerous queries from the medical fraternity surrounding the reported information. We seek your urgent response to the circumstances involving Dr Tay's departure and Dr Ng's decision not to train in surgery. We hope to clarify the queries surrounding these reports.

2) Among the many reports found in the print and online media, we note that:

- a) the doctors involved in this ongoing inquiry were named; and
- b) details seem to have been disclosed to the family of the deceased in a letter that NUH had addressed to them

3) We seek NUHS's response to the following:

- a) What details did NUHS provide to the media regarding this matter?
- b) Did NUHS provide the media the names of the two doctors involved?
- c) Did NUHS provide details to the media and/or the family of the deceased pertaining to Dr Tay's and Dr Ng's involvement in the case?

4) We seek your urgent response to these queries to allow us a clearer understanding of the circumstances that resulted in the above information being made public. We would also like to keep our concerned members abreast with updates and to respond to their queries on information that has found its way to the public domain.

Yours faithfully

## **Dr Chong Yeh Woei**

President  
52nd SMA Council

<sup>1</sup> Including but not limited to the *Straits Times* (10 December 2011), Yahoo! News (10 December 2011).