

The SMA News Through the Years

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INTRODUCTION

The SMA News was first published in 1966 with the title of SMA Newsletter. It grew out of the need for a more timely medium for communication of news and events that are of interest to the Profession. The inaugural issue was published in 1996 Aug (Fig 1). The following entry in the 1966/67 Annual Report announced its beginning: "In Jun 1966, Council decided to start a newsletter. Mr A Lim was appointed as its first Editor. Mr A Lim whose idea it was to start the newsletter stated it would be his policy to run it on the lines of Reuters, ie., to report news and events without comment. Personal views would be recorded as such"⁽¹⁾. Comment there will always be. Indeed, a commentary from the Editor was already seen in the next volume of the Newsletter, although it was not named as such.

A review of the SMA Newsletter up to 1985 was done and published in the Mar/Apr 1985 issue of the SMA Newsletter on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the SMA. It was noted then that 108 issues were produced⁽¹⁾.

Since then, another 117 issues have been produced, bringing the number of issues produced to 125 issues as of April 1999 including the present issue. Being the 40th anniversary of the Association it is pertinent to thumb through the issues and make some observations on the Newsletter through the years.

Editors

There has been 12 Newsletter editors in the last 40 years. This is shown in Table I.

Table I – SMA Newsletter Editors

1966/67	A/Prof S M Arthur Lim
1967/68	Dr George Wong
1968/72	Dr Koh Eng Kheng
1972/73	Dr F Samuel
1973/76	Dr Koh Eng Kheng
1976/78	Dr Victor L Fernandez
1978/79	Dr Toh Keng Kiat
1979/80	Prof Charles Ng
1980/81	Dr John A Tambyah
1981/82	Dr Allan Ng
1982/83	Dr John A Tambyah
1983/98	A/Prof Goh Lee Gan

Changes in size and mast-head

By 1985, there were two changes in size and seven changes in the mast-head (Fig 2). The initial newsletter size was A3 (two A4 size). This gave way to B3 in 1980. A picture of the seven mast-heads is found in

the "Portrait of an Era" in the SMA News of this issue.

Since 1985, there has been one more change to A4 size. The President of the Association in 1992 debated passionately why the A4 size is a better size. For one, A4 is becoming the standard size of publications. More importantly, one could read it in bed more easily. The result was that the A4 size was adopted. It has remained so since the May/June 1992 issue.

In 1996, the need to modernise the layout was felt by younger members of the Editorial Board and Ms Hazel Goh joined the editorial board as the Design Editor. The new layout was implemented in September 1996 and with it a new mast-head. The new title "SMA News" was introduced to replace the title of "SMA Newsletter".

Since January 1997, the SMA News has been combined into one publication with the Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ). The reasons for such a decision was economic and convenience for the readership. It also means operationally that both parts of the publication must be ready on time since the delay in one part will prevent the combined publication to meet publishing datelines.

On-line

To move with the times also, the SMJ and SMA Editorial Boards decided to make the full-text of the combined publication available on the Internet from Jan 1997. This event was given coverage on the first page of the SMA News Jan 1997. The present and past issues can be accessed at the SMA Home Page URL at <http://www.sma.org>. With the exception of a few issues, the SMA News and the SMJ are on-line twenty-four hours a day.

Open letter

The SMA Newsletter had different policies on the extent of its circulation. In the initial years, the Newsletter was circulated not only within the profession but also outside readership. The Annual Report of 1968/69 of the Association reported: "The Newsletter has increased in volume and in circulation, under the editorship of Dr Koh Eng Kheng. It has become a very important Singapore Medical Association publication, keeping members informed of the Association's activities. It also enables the Association to make its views known to the public. It has a wide coverage, and is circulated to members of the Singapore Medical

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MARCUS IS PRESIDENT

THAMBIPILLAI VOTED PRESIDENT ELECT

At the last Annual General Meeting of the Singapore Medical Association Dr. Colin Marcus became the President of the Association. Dr. Marcus was formerly the Director of Medical Services in the Ministry of Health, Singapore.

Dr. V. Thambipillai, Senior Lecturer in anatomy at the University of Singapore was elected the President elect. The following are the other members of the Council.

Dr. E. C. Leonard
Hon. Secretary
Dr. Charles Wilson
Hon. Treasurer
Dr. Geese Ah Leng
Hon. Editor
Mr. George Wong
Mr. Arthur Lim
Mr. John Chong

CONTRACT PRACTICE

An important part of the annual general meeting was the postponement of discussions on contract practice to a special general meeting. This issue on contract practice was brought forward by a section of doctors who felt that there were certain undesirable ethical aspects to contract practice.

However, most doctors today agree that a higher standard of medical practice is maintained by group practices, which are today running most of the big contracts.

The special meeting held on 18/6/66 adopted most of the recommendations of the contract practice subcommittee which were circulated to members in the 1965-1966 annual report.

Council Disagrees with Drug Restriction

The Council discussed the recent Government restriction of importation of certain drugs some of which are not available in the local pharmacy.

After much discussion the Council instructed the Secretary to communicate with the Director of Medical Services to reconsider the present position.

The matter was previously taken up by the 6th Council with the Ministry and has also kept the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Association informed of the Association's view point. Up to date there has been no satisfactory answer from the Ministry.

NEW MEMBERS

- (1) Dr. Tan Swee Teck, Michael, M.B. B.S. (Singapore)
- (2) Dr. Tay Chong Hal, M.B. B.S. (M.R.C.P. (Glas.))
- (3) Dr. (Mrs) Aleyamma Cheriyan, M.B. B.S. (U. Madras)
- (4) Dr. Isaac Seb, M.B. B.S. (Bombay), D.P.H. (Sing.)
- (5) Mr. Henry Kumar Sen, M.B. B.S. (Malaya), F.R.C.S. (Eng.)
- (6) Dr. Tung Hoo Eng, M.B. B.S. (Singapore), M.R.C.O.G.
- (7) Dr. Sing Ewe Hal, Jimmy, M.B. B.S. (Singapore)
- (8) Dr. Kanthapalli Thomas, M.B. B.S. (HK)
- (9) Dr. Sivanessan Somanathan, M.B. B.S. (HK)
- (10) Stephanie Perera (Miss)
- (11) Tan Sah Tee
- (12) Tan Sah Tee
- (13) Lucy Soon Geok Swee (Mrs)

STANDING COMMITTEE

At the first meeting of the 7th Council of the Singapore Medical Association the following were elected to serve on the Standing Committee:-

1. Government Medical Officers Committee
Chairman: Dr. Anbar Lim
Members: Dr. Fred Pais, Dr. Tan Khetng Khoo
2. Subscriptions Committee
Chairman: Dr. C.B. Wilson
Members: Dr. C. Marcus, Dr. Geese Ah Leng, Dr. Mohd. bin Abu, Dr. V. Thambipillai
3. Public Relations Committee
Chairman: Dr. C. Marcus
Members: Dr. Geese Ah Leng, Dr. Mohd. bin Abu, Dr. V. Thambipillai
4. Social Committee
Chairman: Mr. George Wong
5. Insurance Committee
Chairman: Dr. C.B. Wilson
6. Medical Advisory Council
Chairman: Dr. J. Chong
7. School of Post-Graduate Studies Representative
Chairman: Dr. V. Thambipillai
8. Alumni Medical Centre Liaison Committee
Chairman: Dr. Chee Phui Hung
9. Cancer Society
Chairman: Dr. Tan Khetng Khoo
10. Ethics Committee
Chairman: Dr. Geese Ah Leng, Dr. C. Marcus
11. Programme Committee
Chairman: Dr. Chew Pin Kee (Secretary)

TIME OFF AFTER NIGHT DUTY

The 7th Council at its second Monthly Meeting decided to support the stand taken by the Singapore Government Medical and Dental Officers Association regarding time off after night duty.

This followed a report to the Council by the Liaison Committee between S.M.A. and S.G.M.D.O.A. The Liaison Committee submitted a resolution passed at the Annual General Meeting of the S.G.M.D.O.A. The resolution reads as follows:-

"That this House deplors the delay of the official side in the implementation of the decision giving medical officers adequate time off after having been on duty the night previously and urges the incoming Committee to pursue this issue further."

The Council after much discussion directed the Honorary Secretary to write to the Director of Medical Services stating that the Singapore Medical Association fully supported the stand taken by the S.G.M.D.O.A.

Furthermore the Council was of the opinion that this prolonged duty could cause mental and physical exhaustion and would endanger the lives of the public.

Medical Facilities:

Peoples' Defence Force

The Council at its second Monthly Meeting held on the 29th June, 1966, elected a delegation to meet the Director of Manpower, Mr. Herman Hochstadt, to discuss the medical facilities which the Association may be able to provide for the Peoples' Defence Force.

This was a follow up of a previous meeting held in December last year between Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's Prime Minister, and a delegation from the Association under the Chairmanship of Dr. Goon Sek Mun, the past President.

At this meeting the Prime Minister asked for volunteers from the private doctors to provide a "free" medical service for the People's Defence Force as an inducement to encourage the public to join the force.

The matter was not freely settled and the present Council appointed Dr. Marcus as chairman of adhoc committee to look into the matter.

The other members of the committee consisted of Dr. Thambipillai, Mr. Arthur Lim and Dr. John Chong.

The delegation which consisted of members of the adhoc committee held a meeting at the Ministry of Defence with the Director of Manpower on the 19th July. The delegation will be reporting to the Council at the coming meeting.

specialist registration, the Associate Dean scheme for training and the need for quality assurance to mention a few pertinent items of information in recent past.

The Newsletter as a forum to make known Council's views has certainly been effectively used in the past. One was the rebuttal to the press on the accusation that the Association is not keen to report and pass judgement on a doctor who was alleged to have failed to attend to a casualty in a road traffic accident. The points made by the SMA Council then was the case was sub-judice because it was being investigated by the Singapore Medical Council and also the doctor was not a member of the Association. When the press declined to publish this explanation, these points were published in the President's Column of the Newsletter.

Another more recent event was the exchange of letters between pharmacists and doctors on the issue of dispensing for minor ailments. The stand made by the Association was that pharmacists should be first class pharmacists and not second class doctors.

Shared values

Through the Newsletter too, the medical profession makes its professional values known and also defines what is unacceptable professional behaviour. Through the years, there have been editorials and articles on ethical position on various aspects of practice, issues facing the profession and what is expected of the medical profession.

A recent Straits Times review of the book "Corruption and the Destiny of Asia" by Prof Syed Hussein Alatas has a relevant point here in relation to shared values in the medical profession⁽⁴⁾. In his book he talks of of eradicating the love of money as the root of evil and that the sense of collective shame is important.

This paradigm can be applied to the medical profession as well. Instead of "love of money", we could substitute in its place, "unethical practice". It is important that the leadership of the medical profession points out what is not acceptable professional practice and share this in an open forum. The Newsletter is one such forum.

Garfield plus

The humanistic side of the medical practice is under threat in a high-technology, materialistic environment that society finds itself in today's world. And Singapore is no exception. There is a need for a voice and expression of the humour, wit and the ability to laugh at ourselves and sometimes at society. Garfield has it. We must not lose it.

Another column that has made its appearance on and off is "Materia-non-Medica". The experience of doctors outside the realm of medicine is wide ranging. They range from climbing Mt Everest, to bird watching to underwater photography, just to mention a few. The reader can sense the thrills and the passion exuded by the writers. Some readers will find these pursuits enchanting enough to follow suit.

Fig 1 - 1966 August, SMA's 1st newsletter.

Association, Sarawak Medical Association, the Ministry of Health and other government institutions⁽²⁾.

This practice was put to stop at the 9th Annual General Meeting in 1969. Some members were apprehensive of the circulation of the Newsletter outside the profession because the Newsletter contained personal information on doctors. Others felt that through the medium of the Newsletter, members could rebut false accusations of the lay press. Also, whilst it is possible that Newsletter items may be quoted out of context, it can also be argued that it is necessary that politicians, administrators and the lay public be able to share the medical profession's thoughts, views and aspirations.

In the years that follow, the latter became the prevailing view and the Newsletter was again circulated more widely. Certainly, the Newsletter can be seen as an open letter to the membership and outside.

Through it, everybody gets to understand what the medical profession is doing and thinking. The Newsletter could also amplify and reiterate important information circulated to practitioners or announced in speeches from the Ministry. Examples are the

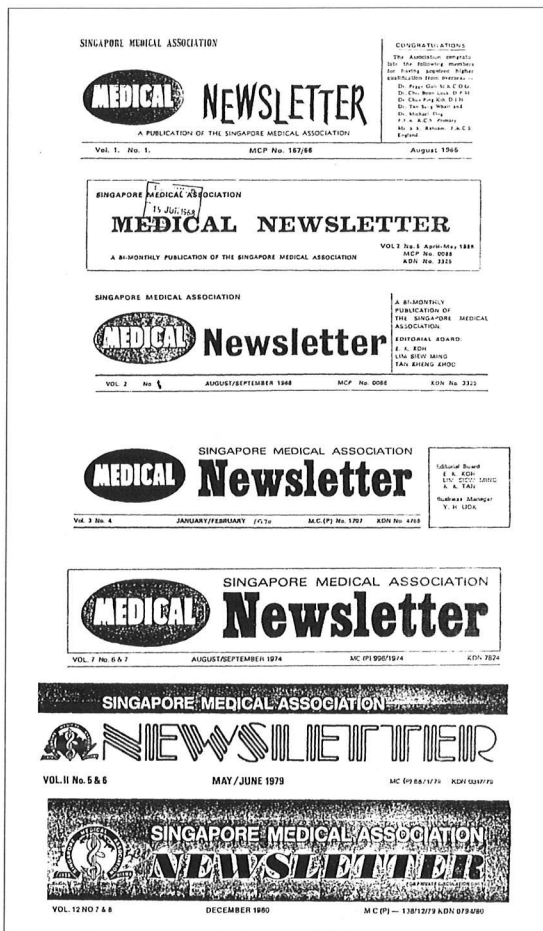


Fig 2 – Masthead of the SMA Newsletters up to 1996.

Notices and classified ads

The Newsletter has also an important function as a notice board to remind and inform doctors of CME activities, administrative and transactional matters. Such information is important for continuing professional development and practice management.

REFLECTION

The Singapore Medical Association Newsletter has a role to play in keeping the medical profession and the wider society informed of matters central to the profession, to share common values, experiences and to provide a channel of communication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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