

**SPEECH BY DR S R E SAYAMPANATHAN, MASTER OF THE ACADEMY OF
MEDICINE, SINGAPORE AT THE INDUCTION COMITIA ON 22 SEPTEMBER
2018, 1400 HRS, HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD.**

Mr Amrin Amin, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs & Ministry
of Health;

Fellow Academicians;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon.

1. On behalf of the Council, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Induction
Comitia of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore. We are deeply grateful to Mr Amrin
Amin for setting aside some time of his busy schedule today to grace this special
occasion.

2. This afternoon, we bear witness to the induction of new Fellows into the
Academy. To our new Fellow Academicians, my heartiest congratulations. You are
now part of us, helping the Academy to advance our medical profession. The
significance of donning the Academy's gown and taking the Inductees' pledge is a

reaffirmation of your obligation in maintaining the highest standard of professional and ethical practices.

Professionalism and Ethics

3. Every profession has a code of conduct which its members are expected to adhere to. As a member of the medical profession, you are held in the highest esteem by the public and society, who depend on a reliable and trustworthy healthcare system and look to you for the relief of their suffering and ailments. This is stated in the SMC's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines. Much trust is therefore vested in you to do your best. This trust is contingent on the profession maintaining the highest standards of professional practice and conduct. You must therefore strive to continually strengthen the trust that has been bestowed.

4. Allow me to share what was mentioned by The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon at an engagement session with our Fellow Academicians early this year. In this special oration entitled *'Medicine and Law: Comparative Perspectives on Professional Conduct and Discipline'*, the Chief Justice highlighted on the importance of discipline which is the first virtue of a profession. He said: **"First, a profession must be disciplined in its devotion to the learned art which is its calling. Secondly, a profession must be disciplined in conduct and deed, as it strives to be worthy of the trust reposed in it by members of the public, which have entrusted to the profession some of the most important aspects of their lives. Thirdly, a profession must be disciplined in its devotion to public service, because it exists in the first place, not for the private interests of its**

members, but for the public whose interests it serves”. I hope you will carry with you this essential virtue to serve in this noble profession with excellence and ethics.

5. Professionalism and ethics remain the strategic priorities of the Academy and these were reaffirmed at our recent Strategic Planning Meeting last month. We will continually strive to help our Fellows develop and enhance professional capabilities so as to effectively deal with the complexity, uncertainty and challenge of contemporary medical practice.

Multidisciplinary Approach

6. In today's healthcare scene, the complexity of multiple chronic diseases requires multidisciplinary approach for effective and holistic patient care. Good teamwork is important in a multidisciplinary team and each member is bound by separate obligations, or duties, toward patients, which are based on the provider's profession, scope of practice and individual skills.

7. Team members also have ethical obligations to treat each other in a respectful and professional manner. Different knowledge and experience imparts unequal responsibility and authority to care providers with the most knowledge and experience to handle them. But also because of differences in training and experience, each member of the team brings different strengths. Team members need to work together in order to best utilize the expertise and insights of each member.

8. In a similar manner, the dynamic diversity within the Academy is a strength that we leveraged on, bringing together our collective knowledge, expertise and experiences. I urge our new Fellow Academicians to come forward and serve the profession and specialists' community. The Academy provides a network of opportunity for all and encourages inter-disciplinary engagements and work for a holistic approach to healthcare and patient care.

Challenges of Innovation and Technological Advancements: Defensive Medicine and Overservicing

9. Over time, with reliance on technology and provoked by the threat of liability, defensive medicine is a worldwide phenomenon that represents a deviation from ethical medical practice. The practice of defensive medicine increases the number of services offered by providers usually offering very little improvement in health outcomes while providing some protection from malpractice for the providers that order the tests.

10. The basic principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence are aligned with doing the right thing for our patients by providing the appropriate care at the right time. Guided by scientific evidence and established guidelines, we are in the best position to provide optimal care for our patients while simultaneously minimising the risk of malpractice litigation.

11. This brings me to the Singapore Medical Council's circular in March this year that reminded doctors of their ethical obligation to charge fair and reasonable fees for the services rendered. This is over and above the contractual and market forces

and is not superseded by any agreement between the doctor and his patients. A doctor must not subject a patient to unnecessary tests or procedures simply because he or she stands to benefit from the fees. Such conduct could constitute over-servicing and may be a breach of a doctor's ethical obligations even if the patient agreed to undergo the test or procedure. In the same vein, doctors should not conduct tests or provide treatment merely upon a patient's request unless there is a clinical basis for doing so.

12. The circular reiterated that doctors have a major role in managing healthcare costs, by advising patients on appropriate and cost-effective tests, medical procedures and treatments, and striving to keep fees fair and reasonable. A doctor must always place his patient's best interest above his personal interests and any business or financial considerations.

Conclusion

13. The Academy will continue to strive to make its role more relevant to all its members, to strengthen its presence, and to pursue its goal of maintaining professional standards. The future will be marked by exciting and challenging times and we need to be responsive to the health needs of society in a rapidly changing world.

14. Our founding Fellows have set very high and noble objectives for the Academy. The challenge is for the current and future generations of Academicians to work even harder towards realising the vision and mission of the Academy. We

look forward to the participation and contribution of new Fellows to uphold the high ideals of the Academy and to work towards their attainment.

15. Last but not least, I congratulate the graduates of the Master of Health Professions Education Singapore and Staff Registrar Scheme programmes. Today will mark the commencement of yet another life-long learning journey and I wish you all the best in your career advancement.

16. We have a heavy and important workload to undertake. Together, the future in healthcare is ours to build, and this is the time for us to get together and build it well. The responsibility to serve the public good is one we all take on by virtue of our oaths, and it follows us in all aspects of our practice.

17. I wish everyone a pleasant afternoon. Thank you.