

SMC appeals for leniency for doctor fined \$100,000

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Law Correspondent

The Singapore Medical Council (SMC) has appealed for a more lenient sentence for an orthopaedic surgeon, after a disciplinary tribunal fined Dr Lim Lian Arn the maximum \$100,000 for failing to inform a patient about the side effects of a steroid injection.

The tribunal's decision last November had led doctors to petition the Ministry of Health (MOH) to clarify its stand on taking patients' informed consent for routine procedures.

Yesterday, SMC's lawyer Chia Voon Jiet asked the Court of Three Judges to slash the fine to not more than \$20,000.

In February, MOH had asked the SMC to review the appropriateness of the sentence. The ministry said: "Whilst both Dr Lim and the SMC may have accepted the sentence, the decision in this case carries with it much wider professional practice implications and also has an impact on future cases."

"This case should not be viewed as or lead to the practice of defensive medicine, which would have an adverse impact on patient and clinical safety."

The SMC said it filed the appeal after considering the sentencing guidelines for professional misconduct by doctors.

Mr Chia said the tribunal did not have the opportunity to consider the wider implications of Dr Lim's sentence during his disciplinary inquiry in June last year, and learnt of the concerns raised by doctors only after the tribunal's decision was made public in January.

He said public sentiment was that the sentence was too harsh as the injection is a common procedure.

He asked the court to review the appropriateness of the fine and reduce it accordingly.

Dr Lim had given a patient a steroid injection on her left wrist in October 2014. Later, she developed "paper-thin skin with discoloration, loss of fat and muscle tissues" in the area.

In January 2016, she filed a complaint against him for failing to advise her on the possible complications. In June last year, Dr Lim pleaded guilty to a charge of professional misconduct for failing to obtain informed consent.

The SMC sought a five-month suspension, while Dr Lim's lawyer, Mr Eric Tin, asked for the maximum \$100,000 fine.

The tribunal concluded that a sus-

pension was not warranted, as the harm caused was limited and Dr Lim's culpability was low.

Yesterday, Mr Chia said the SMC's sentencing position at the time was based on the facts of the case and sentencing precedents.

Shortly after the tribunal's decision last November, the court issued a landmark judgment in another case, establishing the sentencing approach for professional misconduct.

Applying the sentencing approach, a fine of not more than \$20,000 would be more proportionate, said Mr Chia.

The court, comprising Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Judges of Appeal Andrew Phang and Judith Prakash, will give its decision at a later date.

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Dr Lim Lian Arn pleaded guilty to a charge of professional misconduct in June last year for failing to obtain informed consent from his patient.

More older S'poreans meeting daily expenses

Study shows number of such seniors rose 10 percentage points from 2009 to 2017

Felicia Choo

The proportion of older Singaporeans who could meet their monthly household expenses and have some money left over increased by about half to 30 per cent from 2009 to 2017, a local study has found.

But there were also slightly more people aged 60 and older who had difficulty in meeting these expenses.

The ongoing survey of more than 4,500 Singaporeans and permanent residents is being conducted by Duke-NUS Medical School's Centre for Ageing Research and Education and the Ministry of Health.

Called the Transitions in Health, Employment, Social Engagement and Inter-generational Transfers in Singapore Study, it also looks at respondents' physical health and healthcare utilisation, psychological well-being, social networks, social participation, intergenerational transfers within the family, volunteerism, lifelong learning, work and retirement.

In 2017, 29.5 per cent of adults aged 60 and above reported that they thought they had adequate income to meet their monthly household expenses, while still having some money left over, up from 19.5 per cent in 2009.

This was due to the sharp rise among men – the proportion increased from 9.4 per cent in 2009 to 39.8 per cent in 2017 – while the proportion of women declined from 28.1 per cent to 20.4 per cent, possibly because they left the labour force to become caregivers, said researchers.

Another factor was higher education level. "There are more older Singaporeans with a higher education background and who have also remained in the workforce. So this could have contributed to the increase in this proportion," said Dr Rahul Malhotra, the centre's head of research. "Higher education could mean higher income and remaining longer in the workforce as well," he added.

At the same time, however, a higher proportion of older residents also reported having some or much difficulty in meeting monthly household expenses.

Some 14.6 per cent of respondents had some difficulty meeting expenses in 2017, a slight increase from 13.8 per cent in 2009. And 3.8 per cent of them had much difficulty in doing so in 2017, up from 2.4 per cent in 2009.

Researchers said that there may be several factors that accounted for the increase in financial inadequacy.

These included an increase in the general cost of living and a rise in healthcare expenses among the oldest – the 80 years and above group, which had the highest proportion of income inadequacy.

"The introduction by the Singapore Government of healthcare-related cost mitigation initiatives for the Pioneer Generation and, more recently, the Merdeka Generation, might assist but their downstream benefits and changes in the financial burden of healthcare costs need to be studied in further detail," said Dr Malhotra.

The findings on income adequacy suggest that income disparities may be increasing among older residents, said researchers.

There are several caveats to the study findings. They are based on perceived income adequacy as researchers did not measure respondents' consumption or expenditure and have not analysed income adequacy as the dependent variable.

In addition, the proportion of people who did not respond to the question of income inadequacy in 2009 was double that in 2017 – 6.2 per cent (2009) compared with 2.9 per cent (2017).

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80 media delegates from abroad visit new ST newsroom

Jolene Ang

About 80 journalists, editors and others from media companies around the world got a glimpse of The Straits Times' newly renovated newsroom and saw what goes on behind the scenes of its new daily talk show, The Big Story, in its broadcast studio.

They were touring the premises of Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) in Toa Payoh yesterday as part of Publish Asia, an annual meeting of media professionals around the region that is organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA).

The guests were some of the first few to see the studio, which broadcast its first programme last week.

It features a well-stocked and equipped kitchen, where cooking demonstrations and videos are filmed, a television wall, and a presenter's table for The Big Story.

The show, which kicked off on Monday, is broadcast every weekday at 5.30pm on Facebook and YouTube.

In each episode, reporters and senior editors come together to discuss the top stories of the day.

Marketing manager Dexter Yeh, 29, was impressed by the suite of equipment in the studio.

Said Mr Yeh, who works for The

Daily Express in Malaysia: "The studio is very well done – it was a good investment – and I'm intrigued by The Big Story. I think it's great for newspapers to explore such multimedia platforms."

The other stops in the tour were SPH's Chinese Media Group's office, SPH Radio studios and Integrated Marketing Department space.

Mr Aung Soe Win, 29, from Mon News Agency in Myanmar, said he learnt a lot from the visit, adding that this was his first time in Singapore. He manages a lifestyle and travel segment targeted at young people.

Chief operating officer of

Malaysia's Sinar Harian newspaper Farah Hussamuddin said: "The way the newsroom works is largely the same, no matter which country you're in. But I'm impressed that even in Singapore, where the population is so small, SPH is able to sustain itself well."

"That is also because of the engaging content and stories delivered... We came here to learn, and we are learning a lot."

Mr Warren Fernandez, The Straits Times editor and editor-in-chief of SPH's English/Malay/Tamil Media Group, said: "ST benefited much from the experience and expertise of newsrooms abroad, which we drew ideas and inspiration from. So, we, too, are happy to share our experiences."

"Newsrooms face many common challenges, and we can work with, and learn from, one another, to tackle them. We're all in this together."

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Delegates of Publish Asia 2019 getting a look at what goes on behind the scenes of The Straits Times' new daily talk show, The Big Story, in its broadcast studio. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Healthcare innovation centre opens in Novena

Rei Kurohi

A new centre to promote innovation across the public healthcare sector was officially opened yesterday by Health Minister Gan Kim Yong.

The Ng Teng Fong Centre for Healthcare Innovation (CHI) opposite Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in Novena aims to transform healthcare operations, help healthcare workers turn their ideas into working prototypes and increase access to information and knowledge.

Mr Gan said: "With rising healthcare demands from an ageing population and slowing local workforce growth, we need to innovate and transform our system to overcome constraints and seek new solutions. "I hope to see CHI play a pivotal role in promoting innovation in healthcare."

The building houses TTSH's new state-of-the-art command, control and communications (C3) system, jointly developed by TTSH and the Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS), the central IT agency for the public healthcare system.

The C3 centre, which will go live progressively from the third quarter of this year, is similar to an airport control tower and provides operators with real-time visualisation of the hospital's ground operations, said the hospital's chief operating officer, Dr Jamie Lim.

"Our approach to bed management has moved away from inventory management, which just looks at the number of beds we have available, to a patient flow concept. "What this means is that we are now following patients from the point of admission to discharge, and optimising how we assign beds to them," added Dr Lim.

Patients who enter the hospital's emergency department will be tracked and prioritised, depending on the severity of their conditions. The system will also use artificial intelligence to assign patients to the most optimal bed and ward according to their needs, predict potential choke points and keep track of beds that are occupied by patients scheduled to be discharged.

Mr Bruce Liang, chief information officer at the Health Ministry and chief executive of IHIS, said:

"We hope to scale C3 to other public healthcare institutions from 2020.

"When scaled at a national level, C3 will enable enhanced load balancing of our healthcare resources across the public hospitals to better serve our population, as well as allow for better coordination during a national crisis."

He said the system will make it possible for ambulances to coordinate with the hospitals and send patients to an emergency department with more available capacity, instead of a congested one.

The new CHI facility also features a "makerspace" – a collaborative work space – on the first floor, called the CHI Living Lab.

Healthcare professionals who come up with ideas can consult designers there who use various tools such as 3D printers to turn concepts into working products. For example, a prototype of a geriatric chair is currently being trialled for physical rehabilitation at TTSH, said Ms Lynette Ong, director of the hospital's Kaizen Office, named after the Japanese philosophy of continuous improvement.

A staff member of TTSH's rehabilitation ward came up with the idea for the chair, which can transform into a bed for caregivers or a bench for visitors.

It was developed in collaboration with Nanyang Polytechnic and conceptualised at CHI.

A new open knowledge repository called the CHI Learning and Development system, to be housed at CHI, is also in the works.

Associate Professor Wong Hon Tym, CHI's clinical director, said: "The system will allow Singapore's healthcare facilities to contribute their collective experiences, projects, lessons and best practices to a searchable database."

Prof Wong said his team has curated about 300 projects for the repository so far.

They are aiming to gather a total of 500 by the end of the year, when an online portal for the system is set to be launched.

Topics range from elder care and chronic wound management to population health and patient engagement.

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