

MH 14:19/1-2

2 Oct 2009

Dear Colleague,

TRANSFORMING POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

Singapore's ageing population with its concomitant increase in chronic disease, advances in healthcare and rising patient expectations have led to a need to increase manpower capacity and capability in both the public and private healthcare sectors.

Our healthcare institutions have been actively recruiting and training more doctors. From about 250 per year barely a decade ago, the number of doctors joining our healthcare system is now about 600 annually, an increase of more than two-fold. This presents a pressing challenge for postgraduate medical education in Singapore - to maintain sufficient opportunities for as many of our doctors as possible to train as specialists or family physicians, within an environment that remains conducive for their training.

A legacy of training under threat

Our public sector hospitals have a long and illustrious legacy of learning and teaching. We have many examples of outstanding or even legendary clinicians and mentors. They have nurtured generations of good doctors, who in turn, have helped to shape our excellent healthcare system.

The exponential increase in the number of doctors and the ever increasing service needs will diminish this legacy, if we do not take steps to transform the delivery of postgraduate medical education in Singapore. As it is, senior doctors appointed as supervisors or trainers today face a seemingly indomitable task to fulfill teaching and training duties. The very ethos of learning and teaching is being challenged by increasing service demands.

Current Training System – Good, but we can be better

There are many strengths inherent in our current system of postgraduate medical education. We have traditionally focused on broad based training, structured around hospital rotations under supervisors appointed by Heads of Departments, with intermediate and exit examinations. While many specialist and family medicine trainees do complete their training successfully, about half their colleagues do not go through formal postgraduate training at the moment.

MOH and the Specialists Accreditation Board (SAB) studied the postgraduate training systems of Australia, USA, UK, and Europe. There is a consistent trend towards more structured and formative training in these countries.

We have engaged many of our senior clinicians, senior management of our restructured hospitals, the Director of the School of Graduate Medical Studies, NUS, the Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore and the Deans of our medical schools to explore how we can incorporate the best practices of these training systems while preserving the strengths of our existing framework.

We have also engaged the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, USA, which has decades of experience in structured formative training, to assist us in this transformation. It is not our intention to adopt any particular country's training system completely or to discard our current system altogether.

MOH proposes to introduce significant enhancements to the postgraduate training system, while retaining current strengths:

Enhancement – More teachers & training structures

- Create well-defined organizational structures with clear responsibilities to support postgraduate medical education;
- Appoint core teaching faculty with protected time to oversee training.

Enhancement – Better curriculum

- Defined curriculum for each specialty with specified learning experiences and progressive, graded responsibilities;
- Regular formative assessments to assess competencies at each stage of training.

Retained Strength – Staying broad-based

- Although doctors would be given the opportunity to enter specialty training for most specialties on graduation, a broad-based educational experience will be ensured during the first year of training, satisfying current housemanship requirements for graduates of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. For the remaining specialties, doctors would have to complete the broad-based educational year before entering specialty training;
- For internal medicine specialties, trainees will begin with a common foundation programme before proceeding into specialty-specific training. A similar structure will also apply to most surgical specialties;
- Retaining approximately similar duration of training for most specialties to ensure adequate learning experiences.

Retained Strength – Ensuring standards

- Continue to require intermediate and exit examinations for specialties.

These changes will be implemented for the following specialties in May 2010: Internal Medicine, Paediatrics, General Surgery, Public Health, Psychiatry, Emergency Medicine and Pathology. For the remaining specialties, the changes will be introduced later.

The proposed enhancements will enable us to educate larger numbers of specialists and family physicians to meet the nation's healthcare needs. Senior doctors will have the satisfaction of relating to younger doctors as effective teachers and, in the process, rejuvenate the mentoring and learning culture of our institutions.

Collective Vision for Postgraduate Medical Education Essential for Success

Some of you, especially those who have thus far not been involved in our consultations, may have felt that there has been little official information regarding these initiatives. This was largely because the various stakeholders needed time to study the issues as the proposed changes are important and will affect everyone committed to postgraduate medical education in Singapore. We believe we now have sufficient details to have a meaningful and productive discussion.

MOH and SAB will be organizing dialogue sessions with doctors in all our restructured hospitals and also with medical students to clarify issues regarding the proposed changes. Details of these sessions will be announced through your respective institutions.

If you are interested in contributing to this transformation but cannot join us at the sessions in the restructured hospitals, a dialogue session has been specially arranged on 28 October 2009 at 5:30pm at the Auditorium, College of Medicine Building. Please return the enclosed reply slip if you wish to attend this dialogue session.

Conclusion

We owe it to our patients and succeeding generations of doctors to have in place a system of postgraduate medical education that we can all justly be proud of. Change takes effort and time. It needs collaboration and our belief in this common vision. The next generation of doctors must receive the education and training commensurate with the patient needs of their day so that they too can continue our legacy of providing high quality care to all Singaporeans.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K Satku', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor K Satku
Director of Medical Services
Ministry of Health

REPLY SLIP

I would like to attend the dialogue session on Transforming Postgraduate Medical Education on 28 October 2009 at 5:30pm at the Auditorium, College of Medicine Building.

Name: _____

Specialty: _____

Place of Practice: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Please mail / fax reply to:

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