



Singapore  
Medical  
Association

# GO THE DISTANCE

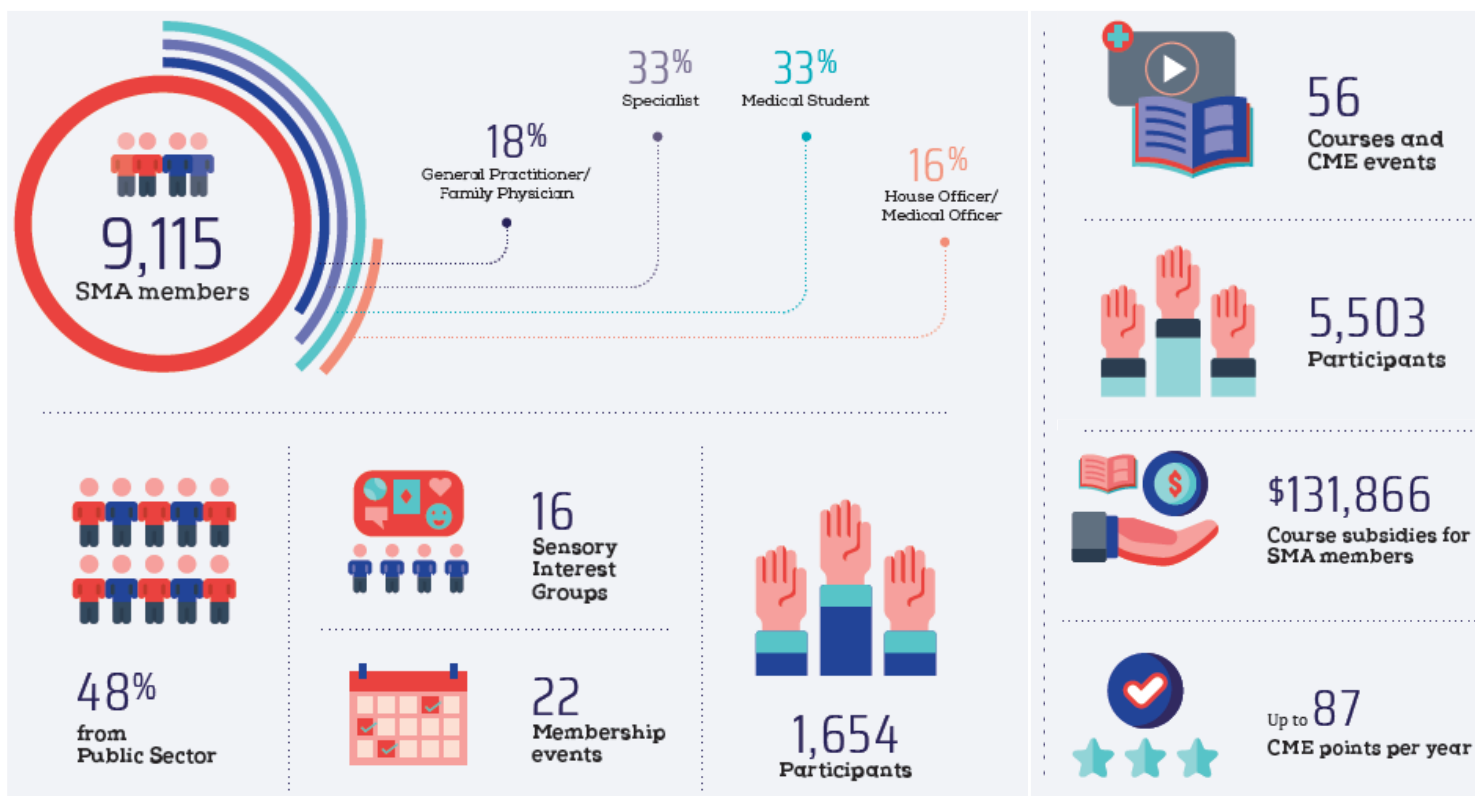


## Country Report

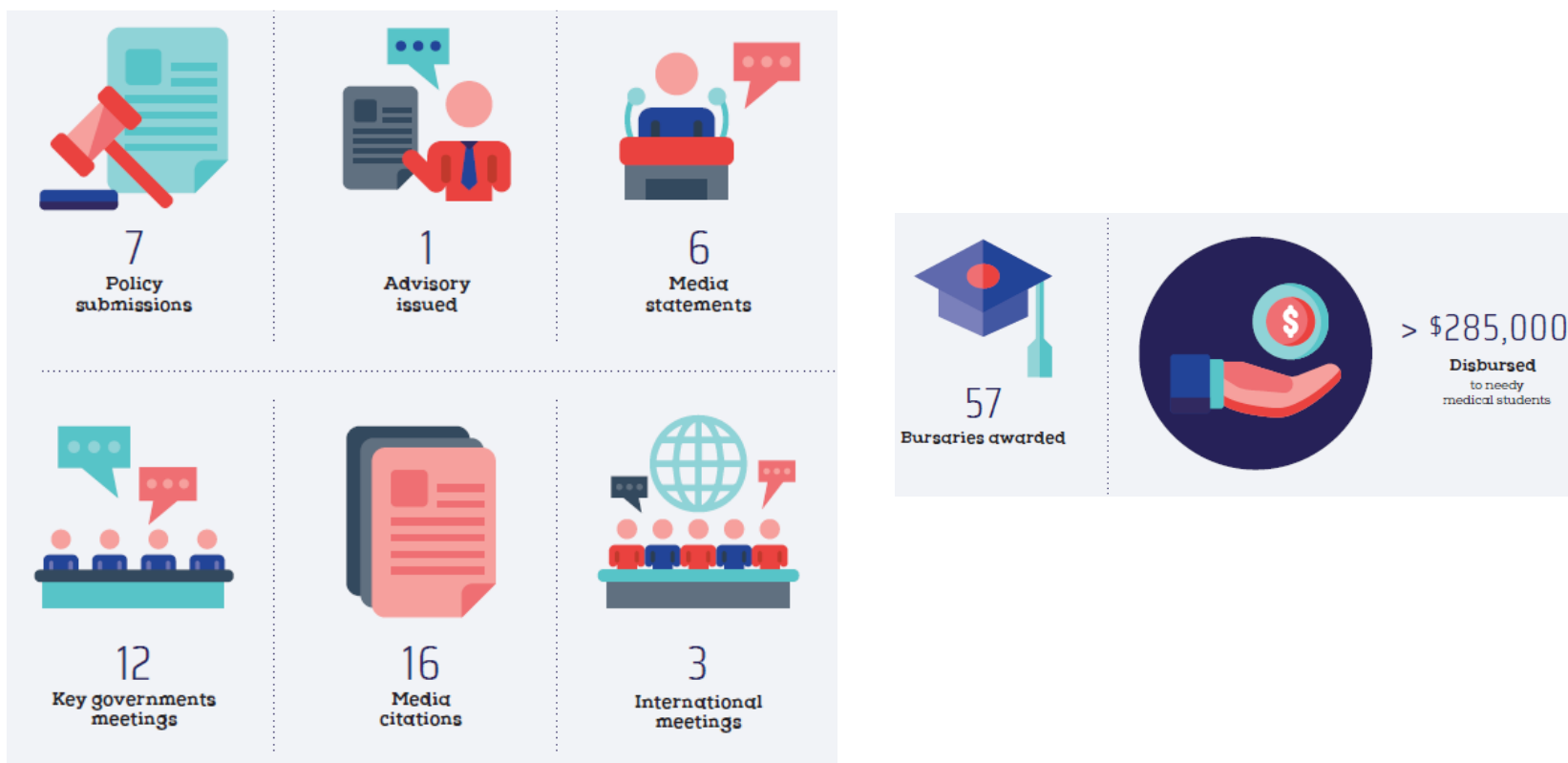
# OVERVIEW

- Key Statistics in 2019
- 61<sup>st</sup> SMA Council (2020/2021)
- Advancing PROFESSIONAL STANDING
- Advancing PATIENT INTERESTS
- Advancing COLLEGIABILITY & ENGAGEMENT
- Advancing MEDICAL TRAINING
- Advancing KNOWLEDGE
- Advancing MEDICAL PRACTICE

# KEY STATISTICS IN 2019



# KEY STATISTICS IN 2019



# 61<sup>st</sup> SMA COUNCIL (2020/2021)

President	Dr Tan Yia Swam	
1st Vice-President	Dr Ng Chee Kwan	
2nd Vice-President	Dr Tammy Chan Teng Mui	
Honorary Secretary	Dr Ng Chew Lip	
Assistant Honorary Secretary	Dr Benny Loo Kai Guo	
Honorary Treasurer	Dr Lim Kheng Choon	
Assistant Honorary Treasurer	Dr Chie Zhi Ying	
Members	Dr Anantham Devanand	Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee
	Dr Daniel Lee Hsien Chieh	Dr Tan Zhenwen Tina
	Dr Lee Pheng Soon	Dr Toh Choon Lai
	Dr Ivan Low Jinrong	Dr Wong Chiang Yin
	Dr Low Tchern Kuang Lambert	Dr Wong Tien Hua
	A/Prof Nigel Tan Choon Kiat	Dr Bertha Woon Yng Yng
	Adj Prof Tan Sze Wee	

# ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL STANDING

## ➤ Informed Consent and SMC Disciplinary Process

- Following the release of the grounds of decision of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) Disciplinary Tribunal (DT) inquiry of Dr Lim Lian Arn in January 2019, SMA sought clarifications from the SMC and subsequently met key officials to understand the rationale behind the decision and discuss its practical implications on consent-taking. Among other things, we highlighted the disproportionately heavy penalty, as well as the current ambiguity and resultant practical difficulties faced by young doctors over consent-taking for minor procedures.
- A letter to *The Straits Times Forum* was published on 11 February 2019 and a report on our meeting with SMC was issued on 25 February 2019 to help provide more clarity to members. The College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) and SMA also commissioned a survey to evaluate any changes in practice behaviour regarding H&L injections following the grounds of decision. The results show a decrease in the number of doctors who gave H&L injections and an increase in the median pricing of H&L injections, suggesting that disciplinary decisions may influence practice behaviour.
- In March, the grounds of decision for Dr Soo Shuenn Chiang's inquiry received similar scrutiny. SMA once again highlighted our concerns about the severe penalty imposed despite the mitigating factors and the challenges of identity authentication to the SMC and in a letter to *The Straits Times Forum*. SMA and the Medical Protection Society also jointly organised a talk to give young doctors practical advice on consent-taking.

# ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL STANDING

## ➤ Informed Consent and SMC Disciplinary Process

- On 14 March 2019, the Ministry of Health (MOH) appointed the Workgroup to Review the Taking of Informed Consent and the SMC's Disciplinary Process. SMA was invited to be a member of the Workgroup. The wide-ranging recommendations of the Workgroup was accepted by MOH in December 2019.
- SMA also issued a media release after the High Court set aside Dr Lim Lian Arn's conviction in July 2019, highlighting that not all breaches of the SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines amount to professional misconduct.

## ➤ Meeting with Minister for Health

- The SMA Council met with Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Health, and other senior MOH officials, including Senior Minister of State Dr Lam Pin Min and Director of Medical Services A/Prof Benjamin Ong, on 2 July 2019. Various issues were discussed, such as the recent anti-smoking measures, information technology security, engagement of GPs in the community, aesthetic medicine, managed care, and engagement with medical students and doctors in training.

# ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL STANDING

## ➤ Healthcare Services Bill

- On 22 January 2019, SMA participated in a consultation session with the MOH on proposed regulations under the upcoming Healthcare Services Bill, which will replace the current Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act. We provided MOH with input and requested for clarification on compliance. The consultation session was fruitful and we look forward to reviewing the amended document.

## ➤ Medical Insurance

- SMA provided feedback on a standardised preauthorization form for use by all Integrated Shield Plan insurers proposed by the Life Insurance Association (LIA). Some of our suggestions, including reducing the amount of information a doctor needed to provide, were taken up by LIA and will be incorporated into the next iteration of the form.

## ➤ Medical Indemnity

- SMA named three medical indemnity providers as preferred partners: Medical Protection Society as the preferred mutual; NTUC Income as the preferred insurance company; and Jardine Lloyd Thompson Group as the preferred insurance broker. Our preferred partners are chosen based on many factors, including their track record in medical practice indemnity, their openness to suggestions, the transparency of their processes and the quality of their products.



# ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL STANDING

## ➤ Tripartite Meetings

- SMA met regularly with Academy of Medicine, Singapore and CFPS throughout the year to exchange information and deliberate on issues faced by the medical profession. As the issues affecting the medical profession become more complex and multidimensional, such regular meetings will help the three professional bodies to keep our ears to the ground.

## ➤ Response to COVID-19 Outbreak

- When COVID-19 hit the shores of Singapore in January 2020, SMA immediately responded by working closely with MOH to provide a reliable source of support, ground feedback and insights on real-life encounters. We also gave timely updates to SMA members as the crisis unfolded and secured N95 and surgical masks from MOH for sale to our doctors in the private sector.
- A workgroup, led by SMA 1st Vice-President, Dr Tan Yia Swam, was also formed to provide guidance to GPs on the use of telemedicine during an infectious disease outbreak. Besides issuing an advisory on telemedicine, we also produced a Telemedicine Quick-start Guide for medical practitioners and a Visitor Resource Pamphlet for distribution to tourists in Singapore.

# ADVANCING **PATIENT INTERESTS**

## ➤ **Pre-authorisation Form for Integrated Shield Plans**

- SMA believes that all patients have the right to confidentiality regarding their medical history, and that consent to access this information must be explicitly sought and the information judiciously used.
- Last year, SMA raised several concerns regarding a standardised pre-authorisation form proposed by Life Insurance Association (LIA) Singapore for use by doctors for all Integrated Shield Plan insurers. In particular, we were concerned that the requirement for doctors to provide information on a patient's comorbidities could potentially be used to build patient profiles, thereby prejudicing a patient.
- Our views were made known at a dialogue session with LIA on 22 October 2019 and a mutually acceptable solution was subsequently reached. LIA has since issued a clarification note with the pre-authorization form introduced on 1 October 2019, which states that doctors are required to only indicate comorbidities that are relevant to the treatment. The note also assures doctors that it is a standard procedure of insurers to have obtained the patient's prior consent to release the information provided by the doctor to the insurers. LIA has also affirmed that it will not use information in the form to build patient profiles and that the form requests consent only for the purposes of pre-authorisation and claims assessment, in compliance with the Personal Data Protection Act.

# ADVANCING **PATIENT INTERESTS**

## ➤ **Mediation**

- Mediation between a doctor and patient is the process of resolving a dispute without the need for escalation to the medical council or a court of law. It is a method of alternative dispute resolution. Some issues between the patient and doctor are a result of poor communication or misunderstanding. Over the years, the SMA Complaints Committee has stepped in to mediate between the two parties by providing a listening ear to the patient and seeking clarifications from the doctor involved, resolving the dispute before the doctor-patient relationship becomes irreparable. It is heartening to see a steady drop in the number of official patient complaints to the SMA, partly because some patients had withdrawn their complaints after our initial intervention. In 2019, we received 15 patient complaints, which is considerably fewer than the high of 34 cases in 2012.

## ➤ **Medical Alert**

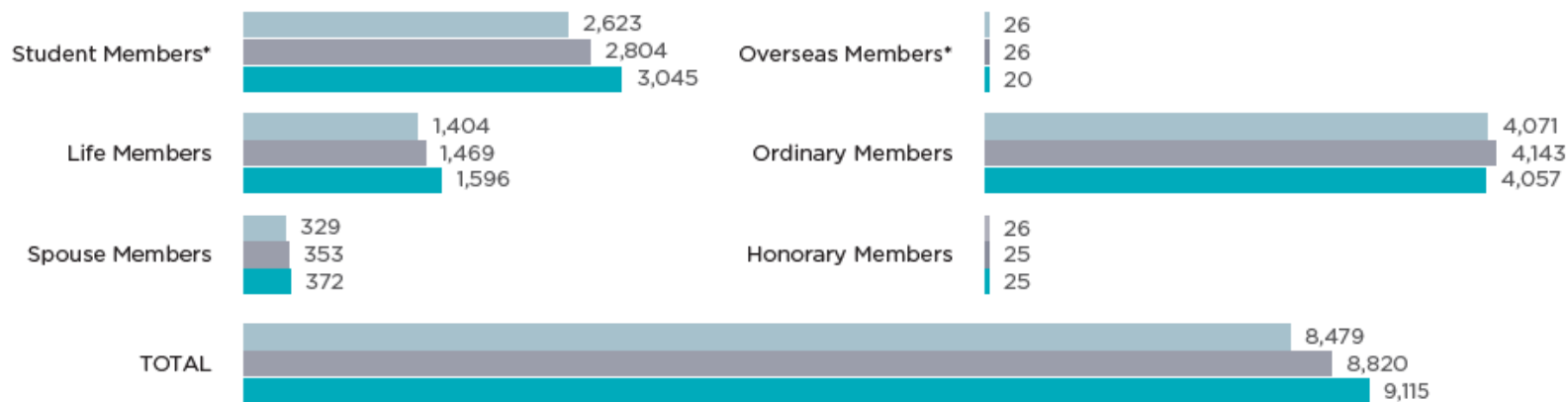
- The Medik Awas programme, started in 1970, aims to prevent medical mishaps among members of the public through the issuance of cards and amulets that alert medical and dental personnel of the specific health problems and allergies of the holder of these items. The issuance process includes review by a volunteer doctor to ensure its accuracy and reliability. Its portability also allows for the information to be available without electronic access and cross-border limitations. To date, we have issued more than 35,000 Medik Awas cards and amulets.

# ADVANCING COLLEGIALITY & ENGAGEMENT

	MEMBERSHIP TALLY	2019	2018	2017
Total no. of members (at beginning of year)		8,820	8,479	7,928
No. of new members		683	812	781
No. of resignations/deceased/expiry of student membership		311	410	135
No. of struck off in arrears		77	61	95
Total no. of members (at end of year)		9,115	8,820	8,479

## MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

● 2017 ● 2018 ● 2019



\*Non-voting members

# ADVANCING COLLEGIORITY & ENGAGEMENT

## ➤ Sharing professional insights and news

*SMA News*, the official newsletter of SMA, was established in 1966 to provide a timely medium for communication of news to members. Over the years, *SMA News* has become much more than that. The Editorial Board constantly strive to keep abreast of the latest trends in medicine that may impact the medical community, inviting influential thought leaders and practitioners to incisively address these issues in our Feature, Insight or Opinion columns. Some of the hot topics covered in 2019 included:

- telemedicine and its benefits and drawback,
- the use of complementary medicine in clinical practice,
- updates on the medico-legal climate and defensive medicine



# ADVANCING COLLEGIALITY & ENGAGEMENT

## ➤ Engagement with Student Leaders

During the year, representatives of the SMA Council regularly met with student leaders from the three local medical schools, as well as those from the Singapore Medical Society of Australia and New Zealand, the Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom, and the Singapore Medical Society of Ireland. Such engagements enhance our ongoing relationship and enable better assimilation of future generations of doctors with the rest of the profession. Beyond social engagements, many issues and concerns faced by medical students were also raised and discussed at these meetings, with SMA providing the necessary support to help prepare them for their professional life ahead.





# ADVANCING COLLEGIALITY & ENGAGEMENT

## ➤ Interest Groups and Get-Together Events

We organised a total of 22 membership events, with participation from over 1,600 members and friends. These events ranged from large-scale profession-wide events, such as the SMA Annual Dinner, the 3rd SMA National Medical Students' Convention and Inter-Professional Games, to small-group networking and lifestyle events



# ADVANCING MEDICAL TRAINING

## ➤ Third SMA National Medical Student's Convention

The SMA National Medical Students' Convention is a student-led event that has been running for the third consecutive year. The 2019 Committee, led by Ms Angela Tham, was drawn from volunteers across all three local medical schools. The convention introduced medical students to the current medico-legal climate and highlighted the importance of having knowledge on this often-neglected subject.





# ADVANCING MEDICAL TRAINING

## ➤ A Voice for Doctors In Training

- SMA is fully aware that DITs face vastly different challenges from practicing doctors, and that their needs are best looked after by seniors who have gone down a similar path and are, therefore, more attuned to the challenges faced by junior doctors. The SMA DIT Committee comprises representatives from all the training institutions in Singapore. We constantly engage the leadership of the Ministry of Health and these training institutions, in hopes that we can help to fine-tune the training system so that it will evolve into one that works well for the profession.
- Last year, the issue of the night float system versus the night call system was extensively discussed, and a survey was conducted among peers to garner a deeper understanding of the different perspectives across the training institutions. The results of the survey are currently being analysed.
- Another area of concern among junior ward doctors arose from the differing interpretations of what constitutes 'acceptable standards' in the area of consent-taking for simple procedures, of which junior doctors carry out multiple times on a daily basis. In a *Straits Times Forum* letter ('Help young doctors by clearing up ambiguity') published on 11 February 2019, Dr Benny Loo, Chairman of the DIT Committee, highlighted the conundrum faced by young doctors in public hospitals, calling for relevant authorities to give clear instructions to resolve the current ambiguity, so that junior doctors can provide appropriate and sustainable healthcare, and not resort to the undesirable practice of defensive medicine.

# ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE

## ➤ SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (CMEP)

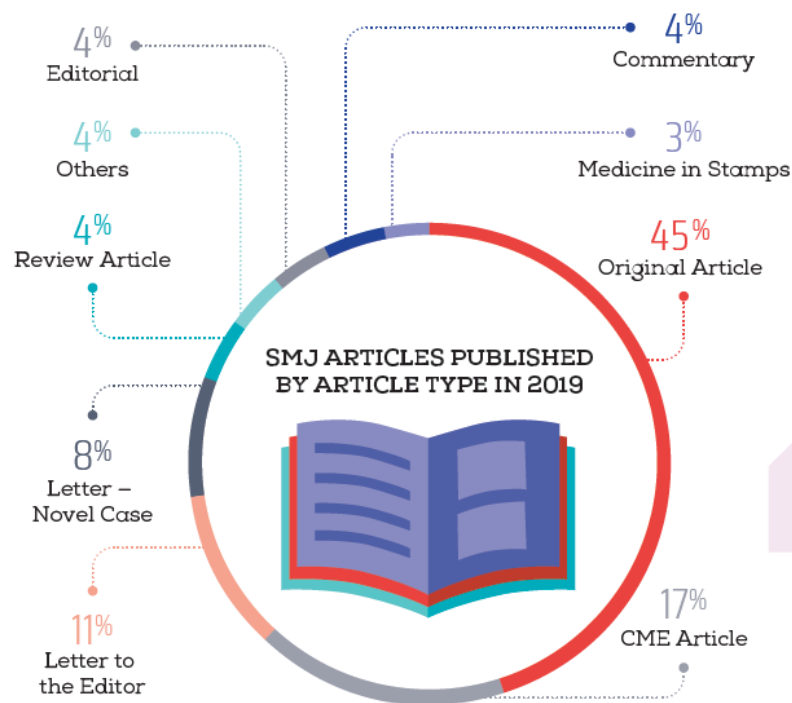
- In 2019, SMA CMEP saw a leadership transition, with Dr Lee Pheng Soon taking over the role of Executive Director from A/Prof Gerald Chua, and Dr T Thirumoorthy appointed as Academic Director.
- Following the recommendations of the Ministry of Health's (MOH) Workgroup to Review the Taking of Informed Consent and the Singapore Medical Council's Disciplinary Process, we hope that SMA CMEP will be of greater relevance to doctors' continual medical education under the new leadership team.



# ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE

## ➤ Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ)

- Last year, the journal achieved an impact factor (IF) of 1.141, based on the 2018 Journal Citation Report published by Clarivate Analytics. This is an improvement from the previous year's IF of 1.08.
- The *SMJ* continued to attract a wide range of articles from around the world. A total of 354 manuscripts were submitted from 34 countries last year, with about 45% originating from Singapore, followed by ASEAN, East Asia and the Middle East. Original research made up the majority of submissions, followed by CME articles, reviews and commentaries. Of the 143 articles published in 2019, more than 40% had been e-published and indexed in PubMed ahead of print.



# ADVANCING MEDICAL PRACTICE

## ➤ SMA Clinic Assistant Place and Train Programme

Our partnership with Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) continued in 2019 with a revamped Clinic Assistant Programme that utilises a two-pronged approach.

- Helping our members in the recruitment of suitable candidates through organising job fairs and hosting their job vacancies on SMA's clinic assistant jobs portal. Last year, four job fairs were organised in collaboration with e2i, with 220 potential job seekers in attendance. This was in addition to the 119 job postings and 284 job seeker accounts created on our jobs portal.
- Aimed to equip candidates with the necessary skills. Three runs of the Clinic Assistant Introductory Skills Course, followed by a three-week on-the-job training assessment, were organised. The course fees were significantly funded by e2i — up to 90% subsidy for the Introductory Skills Training Course and up to 70% subsidy for the newly hired clinic assistant's one-month gross salary. A total of 20 clinics and 36 participants benefited from this programme in 2019.



# ADVANCING MEDICAL PRACTICE

## ➤ Locum Online

Locums Online, which serves to seek out and hire locums, continued to be well received by our members. We hope that this members only portal will allow for a more collegial and transparent platform for fair dealings. SMA also provides advice to members facing issues while using the platform. Last year, 44 postings were made on this portal.

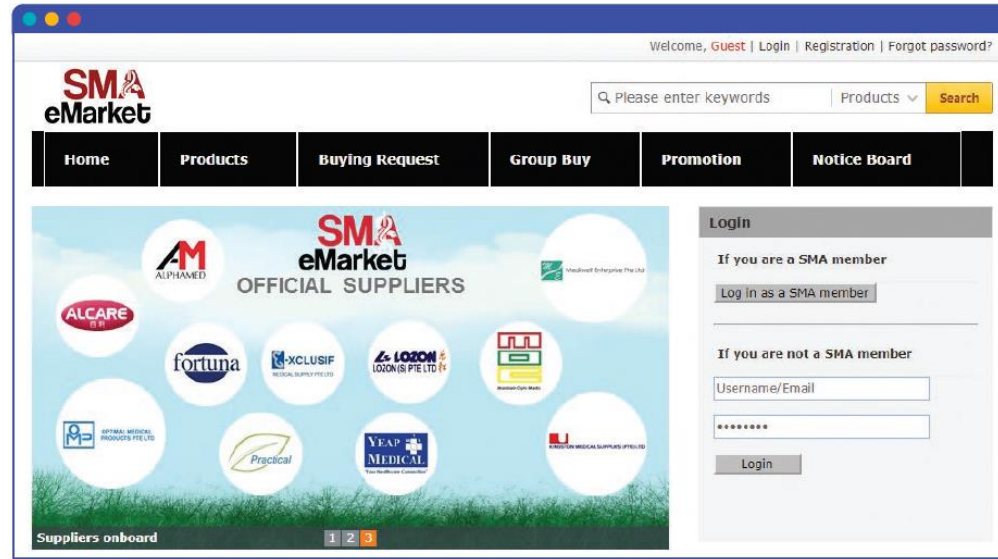
## ➤ Great Eastern Insurance

This is a risk-pooling insurance scheme in collaboration with Great Eastern Life Assurance, which was created more than 20 years ago to help small- and medium-sized clinics to obtain clinic hospitalisation, group term life and personal accident insurance schemes at group rates. While more of such policies are now readily available to individual small and medium enterprises, this scheme continues to benefit 80 members and their clinic employees.

# ADVANCING MEDICAL PRACTICE

- **SMA eMarket**

SMA eMarket was developed as an online marketplace to connect our members to clinic and medical equipment suppliers. The aim is to enable our members to enjoy greater time flexibility in the procurement process, which will result in improvements to their business processes. SMA eMarket is a constantly evolving platform, and we are always considering ways to improve it so that members can derive maximum benefits from being part of it. In 2019, 2,195 active members viewed the portal, and there were 11 suppliers on the platform.



# Thank you!