

# 38<sup>th</sup> SMA National Medical Convention

## Breaking New Barriers in Pain Management

Guest-of-Honour: **Mdm Halimah Yacob**  
Member of Parliament, Jurong GRC &  
Chairman, Government Parliamentary Committee (Health)  
& 20 May, Suntec Singapore



(L-R): Dr Chan Sher Yi, Dr Michelle Tan, Prof Troels S Jensen, Dr Mary Cardosa and Dr Ho Kok Yuen.

## Breaking New Barriers in Pain Management

38<sup>th</sup> SMA National Medical Convention, 19 & 20 May 2007, Suntec Convention Centre

*"Few die of pain, many die in pain, even more live in pain."  
– International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP)*

**P**ain is now recognised as the fifth vital sign, next to respiratory rate, pulse rate, blood pressure and temperature. It is important that doctors are equipped with the correct attitude and knowledge to deal with, and more importantly, manage pain.

However, in Singapore and many Asian countries, pain management still faces the onerous challenge of getting its due recognition as a specialty amongst the physicians and regulatory bodies. In this regard, the Singapore Medical Association (SMA), together with the Pain Association of Singapore, National Arthritis Foundation, Section of Palliative Medicine, College of Physicians Singapore, Headache Society of Singapore and Singapore Orthopaedics Association co-organised the 38<sup>th</sup> SMA National Medical Convention on "Breaking New Barriers in Pain Management".

The aims of the Convention was to raise the awareness of pain medicine as a multidisciplinary discipline, as well as to provide a forum to discuss the subject of Pain objectively and openly, and to update fellow colleagues on what is currently available in the field.

The two-day Convention comprised a Special Lecture, a Plenary Session, a one and a half-day Medical Symposium, a half-day Workshop and a half-day Public Forum. At the plenary session, the impact of Pain and its management in Europe, Singapore, Australia, China, Japan and Malaysia were presented. At the workshop and the Public Forum, it was an East meets West flavour of pain

management where acupotomy, acupuncture and its applications were also discussed.

Dr Chong Yeh Woei, SMA 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, opened the Convention.

### KEYNOTE ADDRESS

This year, we were honoured by the presence of Mdm Halimah Yacob, Member of Parliament for Jurong GRC and Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee (Health) who delivered the keynote address. The subject of means testing and why it should not be hastily introduced was discussed. If means testing is introduced, there is the challenge of how to balance a system of co-payment and subsidies – what proportion of the total cost in a subsidised healthcare system should be borne by the individual and what portion by the state.

Points for and against SingaporeMedicine and Public Private partnership was also briefly touched on. In general, it was felt that Singapore may not yet be prepared for the huge influx of patients and there is the fear that the quality of healthcare service to the subsidised patients will be affected.

Mdm Halimah Yacob also congratulated SMA for choosing "Breaking New Barriers in Pain Management" as the theme for this year's Convention. In today's context, doctors and other healthcare professionals should be concerned not only with how to treat illnesses and prolong life but also how to improve their patients' and the general population's quality of life. (Please see feature on page 1.)

**SPECIAL LECTURE****Chronic Pain: Is it a disease entity? IASP's Role  
Chairman: Dr Yeo Sow Nam Alex**

The SMA was also honoured to have Prof Troels Staehelin Jensen, President of the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP), among our distinguished speakers.

Prof Jensen provided a general overview on chronic pain as a disease entity. He also introduced IASP's role in working towards bringing pain relief throughout the world.

Acute and chronic pains have different biological and psychological backgrounds and they should therefore be treated differently. He called on clinicians to know more about the relationship between chronic pain and sleep disorders and mood disturbances as this affects the quality of life of patients.

Prof Jensen concluded on the note that chronic pain should be seen as a condition in its own right and that a multimodal treatment can be offered which not only seeks at producing symptom relief but also at restoring function. It will also have implications for patient care, on research and funding and on public awareness.

**PLENARY SESSION****Impact of Pain in Asia and How We Cope****Chairman: A/Prof Cynthia Goh**

Prof Stephan A Schug spoke on "Pain Management in Australia". Australia is the only country with an accredited training programme in Pain Medicine through the Faculty of Pain Medicine of ANZCA.

Pain Management was recently recognised as a specialty by the Australian Federal Government in 2006, and this has helped in the promotion of the concepts of pain medicine immensely. A considerable number of public pain medicine centres and private pain specialists are now available. He concluded that successful pain management requires not only specialist treatment, but also involvement of primary care providers and encouragement of self-management by patients.

Dr Alex Yeo spoke on the "Current Status of Pain in Singapore". He presented the findings of a cross-sectional survey carried out by the Pain Association of Singapore, Mundipharma and Taylor Nelson Sofres between February and April 2006 to determine the prevalence of pain in Singapore. Collaborated efforts to look at common factors in Malaysia, the Philippines and India were also carried out.

The findings: 8.7% of the study population had chronic pain, that is, about 392,000 people. The incidence of pain was higher in females and



*Prof Stephan Schug during the Q&A session.*

increases with age; one in six persons aged 60 and above has had prolonged pain for at least three months over the last six months, and the incidence was especially high in elderly women.

The question of whether Singapore was ready for the climbing incidence of chronic pain was raised as Singapore has a rapidly aging population, where at least 20% of the population will be 60 or older in 10 to 15 years' time.

Prof Song Wenge discussed the "Current Status of Chronic Pain Management in China". Pain clinics and departments of pain management have developed rapidly in China in recent years, especially in national and provincial hospitals or major hospitals affiliated to medical colleges, most of which have established as Pain Management Centre. In about two-thirds of municipal or county hospitals, pain clinics or departments of pain management have been established and multidisciplinary doctors are treating pain problems.

Dr Seiji Hattori spoke on "Pain Management in Japan". Recent advances and focus on palliative care and cancer pain management resulted in a rapid use of a variety of opioids. This led to an urgent need to educate not just the population but also the physicians and healthcare providers on the usage of newly available opioids. Regional experts were thus gathered and Japan Partners against Pain (JPAP) was launched in 2003, with an aim to provide appropriate information on cancer pain management and on adequate use of pain medications.

Dr Mary Cardosa spoke about "Impact of Pain in Asia and How We Cope in Malaysia". She said there is a severe shortage of pain specialist services in Malaysia. Acute postoperative pain is relatively well managed by the Acute Pain services but there is still a big gap in the management of patients with chronic cancer and non-cancer pain. The thrust of activities in Malaysia for the past five years has been education of doctors and other healthcare providers in current concepts of pain management, with particular emphasis on the biopsychosocial model of pain.

## INTRODUCTION OF OVERSEAS SPEAKERS

**Prof Troels Staehelin Jensen** is a Consultant in Neurology and Professor of Experimental and Clinical Pain Research, leading the Danish Pain Research Center at Aarhus University, Denmark. He is a reviewer for a number of pain and neurology journals and grant committees and chairs the Scientific Program Committee for the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Pain. He is also currently the President of the International Association for the Study of Pain.

**Prof Stephan A Schug** is a German trained specialist anaesthetist with an MD in pharmacology. He is also the Chair of Anaesthesiology in the Pharmacology and Anaesthesiology Unit of the University of Western Australia and Director of Pain Medicine at Royal Perth Hospital.

**Prof Song Wenge** is a doctor supervisor of Tongji Medical College, Director of the Department of Pain Management in Shandong Provincial Hospital of Shandong University, Director of Shandong Provincial Pain Clinical & Research Centre, member of International Study of Pain, Member of the Standing Committee of Chinese Association for the Study of Pain, President of Shandong Provincial Acupotomy Committee, Vice-President of Shandong Association for the Study of Pain, Editor of *Chinese Journal of Anaesthesiology*, Editor of *Chinese Journal of Pain Medicine* and Editor of *Journal of Clinical Anaesthesiology*.

**Dr Seiji Hattori** is currently practising palliative medicine based mostly on pain management at National Cancer Center Hospital in Tokyo. He is a regional opinion leader in JPAP (Japan Partners against Pain; www.jpap.jp) activities.

**Dr Mary Cardoso** is a Consultant Anaesthetist and Pain Management Specialist at Hospital Selayang, Selangor, Malaysia. She is also the President-Elect of the Malaysian Society for Anaesthesiologists (2005 – 2007), Secretary of the Malaysian Association for the Study of Pain, Chairperson of the Special Interest Group on Pain Management, College of Anaesthesiologists, Academy of Medicine of Malaysia and Fellow of the Academy of Medicine Malaysia. In addition, she is the Honorary General Secretary of the Malaysian Medical Association and a member of its Editorial Board, MMJ.

## MEDICAL SYMPOSIUM ON BREAKING NEW BARRIERS IN PAIN MANAGEMENT

### Cancer Pain

**Chairman: Dr Poon Keah How**

The first speaker of the Medical Symposium was A/Prof Cynthia Goh. She spoke on “Pharmacological Approaches”. Pain is a common symptom in advanced cancer, the incidence ranging from 65 to 85%. Most patients have more than one source of pain, and one-third of cancer patients may have four or more pains. Clear assessment of each pain has to be made and the likely cause defined before effective therapy can be prescribed.

Dr Seiji Hattori spoke on “Interventional Approaches”. The lack of pain medications and interventional equipment in Japan has led to people living with their pain, especially cancer patients. The recent launch of oxycodone and fentanyl had helped these patients greatly but there remains a group of patients who still



(L-R): Prof Troels S Jensen, Dr Alex Yeo Sow Nam and Dr Seiji Hattori.

suffer with severe pain despite opioid therapy. Several cases of patients on intrathecal morphine infusion and cases of other interventional nerve blocks in the treatment of severe cancer pain were presented.

## **Pain and Arthritis**

### **Chairman: Prof Feng Pao Hsii**

Dr Yoon Kam Hon spoke on “Osteoarthritis and Approaches”. Osteoarthritis is often under-recognised and undertreated, with many patients being treated by traditional medicine, resulting in delay in diagnosis and treatment. Family physicians are urged to initiate early osteoarthritis management and manage patients jointly with specialist rheumatologist and orthopaedic surgeons.

A/Prof Julian Thumboo talked about “Management of Rheumatoid Arthritis and Gout”. A brief overview was given of the available therapies as well as guidance on clinical features and investigations, which can aid in early diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis.

## **Headaches and its Approaches**

### **Chairman: Dr Andrew Pan**

Dr Charles Siow gave an overview on “Migraines”. Apart from avoiding triggers which may set off migraines, there are now effective preventive and abortive medications. Doctors should also recognise that chronic migraines, which occur daily or near daily, may be precipitated by medication overuse.

Dr Ho King Hee then discussed “Other Common Primary Headaches”. Different types of headaches and their causes were presented and doctors were again asked to watch out for medication overuse. They were cautioned that not every unilateral headache is a migraine. Hence, autonomic symptoms and duration of pain should be looked out for.

## **Back and Neck Pain**

### **Chairmen: Dr James Tan and Dr Tay Kwang Hui**

Dr Yue Wai Mun presented “Assessments and Surgical Approaches”. The majority of back pains are due to minor sprains or strains and degeneration of the spine. Most of these are treatable with conservative measures. However, a minority of patients with neck or back pain may have a more sinister pathology. Primary healthcare providers can distinguish this with a careful history and physical examination. The success of surgery hinges on the correct diagnosis of the patient’s symptoms.

Dr Alex Yeo spoke on “Interventional Pain Management”. The key to successful pain management lies in the use of a multidisciplinary and multimodal approach. Novel and the latest advances in the field of pharmacological, minimally invasive pain management techniques in the treatment of acute, chronic and cancer pain were presented.

Dr Leong Keng Hong spoke on “Osteoporosis and Current Updates”. The current trend is to use a 10-year fracture risk assessment to guide in deciding on the need for pharmacological treatment. In addition to medication, calcium intake, exercise and vitamin D status need to be considered. Prevention of falls is crucial in preventing fractures in the elderly.

Prof Song Wenge then spoke on “Non-invasive and Minimal Invasive Therapies for Failed Back Surgery Syndrome (FBSS)”. He presented a study to find effective non-invasive and minimal-invasive methods for treating FBSS.

## **Neuropathic Pain**

### **Chairmen: Dr Chan Sher Yi and Dr Michelle Tan**

Dr Mary Cardosa spoke on “Assessments and Clinical Tools”. The first step in managing neuropathic pain is to make a diagnosis and to differentiate it from nociceptive pain. The main tools for assessment are clinical ones, with history and physical examination being the most important. When assessing a patient with neuropathic pain, doctors should use a biopsychosocial approach and look into not just the pain but also the impact of pain on the patient’s life and the psychological and social factors that may contribute to any distress or disability associated with the pain.

Prof Troels S Jensen then spoke on the “European Guidelines for the treatment of Neuropathic Pain” published by the European Federation of Neurological Societies Task Force recently.

Dr Ho Kok Yuen spoke on “Advances in Interventional Management”. Careful patient selection is necessary to identify suitable candidates who may benefit from interventional pain techniques. The techniques, including radiofrequency thermocoagulation, neurolytic blocks, intrathecal or epidural drug delivery and spinal cord stimulation; as well as indications, contraindications, benefits and complications of these procedures were then discussed.

## **Opioids and NSAIDs for Chronic Pain**

### **Chairman: Dr Siau Chiang**

Prof Stephan Schug spoke on “Are We Addicting Our Patients? How should We Use Opioids in Chronic Pain?” In conditions of well-defined nociceptive and/or neuropathic pain, opioids offer a long-term management option devoid of the risks of significant organ toxicity carried by NSAIDs. However, the situation is most likely different in conditions of poorly defined chronic pain (sometimes called ‘pathological pain’), where opioids have shown no or very little benefit and carry the risk of considerable harm.

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He then went on to speak on “Are We Killing Our Patients? How should We Use NSAIDs in Chronic Pain?” Non-selective NSAIDs carry a significant risk of GI adverse effects leading to relevant morbidity and mortality. Selective Coxibs have a reduced risk of GI adverse effects, but should be combined with PPI for long-term therapy in high-risk patients. Non-selective NSAIDs and Coxibs carry an increased but similar risk of CV and renal toxicity. It was highlighted that NSAIDs and Coxibs should be used at the lowest dose necessary for the shortest period possible!

## LUNCH SYMPOSIUM

### The Use of COX-2 Inhibitors in NSAID Intolerant Patients

**Chairman: Prof Feng Pao Hsii**

The Lunch Symposium was sponsored by Merck Sharp & Dohme (IA) Corp. Dr Cheng Yew Kuang spoke on “The Use of COX-2 Inhibitors in NSAID Intolerant Patients”.

Buffet lunch on Sunday 20 May 2007 was kindly sponsored by Janssen Cilag. That marks a close to the one and a half day symposium which saw a total attendance of 286 participants.

## WORKSHOP

### Dealing with Opioids in Chronic Pain

**Chairman: Dr Ho Kok Yuen**

The Workshop was kicked off on Sunday afternoon with the presentation “Are Opioids Effective?” by Prof Stephan Schug. Case studies on using opioids in osteoarthritis, neuropathic pain and chronic lower back pain were discussed. He also highlighted the findings of an epidemiological study in Denmark.

The workshop continued with Dr Jane George speaking on “Are Opioids Safe?” She touched on the key issues physicians should consider when contemplating the use of opioids. These issues include abuse and addiction, tolerance, diversion of drugs, overdose, side effects, endocrine disturbances and immunosuppression, also keeping patients informed of possible benefits and risks and comprehensive follow-up.

Dr Michelle Tan spoke on “How Should We Prescribe?” Management of chronic non-malignant pain is different compared to management of acute or cancer pain. Evidence for efficacy, outcome measures, hospital versus primary care setting and chronic pain versus acute exacerbation of chronic pain were discussed.



Prof Song Wenge.



Participants at the exhibition booths.

## Acupuncture and Needling

**Chairman: Dr Swee Yong Peng**

Apart from listening to Western-trained doctors, experienced practitioners in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) were also invited to share their experience in pain management.

Dr Swee Yong Peng who is fully qualified and licensed to practise both Western and Eastern Medicine, spoke about using “Traditional and Evidence-based Acupuncture in Headaches”.

Dr Cui Shu Li, a Senior Acupuncturist from Singapore General Hospital spoke on using “Acupuncture and TCM for Back Pain”.

Prof Song Wenge then spoke on “The Application of Acupotomy in Chronic Pain Management”. Acupotomy is a new medical method established by combining the basic Chinese traditional medicine and the modern western medicine.

Dr Adela Tow gave a presentation on “Myofascial Pain: Local Treatment and Needling Techniques”. Dr Tow is a Consultant at the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, Tan Tock Seng Hospital. She is a member of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture and is a registered acupuncturist.



*Overwhelming response at the public forum.*

### Faculty Dinner

A dinner was arranged for speakers, chairmen, representatives of co-organisers and sponsors, members of Organising Committee and SMA Council on Saturday, 19 May 2007. The Faculty Dinner which was held at One Degree 15, Marina Club, Sentosa Cove, was kindly sponsored by UBS AG.

### PUBLIC FORUM: “OVERCOMING PAIN WITH THE LATEST MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS”

The theme of “Overcoming Pain with the Latest Medical Breakthroughs” struck a chord with the public, as can be seen from the overwhelming responses. Almost 200 registrants attended the Public Forum on Sunday afternoon, 20 May 2007. Despite advance booking and arrangements made, additional seats had to be put in to cater for walk-in registrants. Many senior citizens were among the registrants and at least one registrant came in a wheelchair. In fact, the response was so overwhelming from the Mandarin-speaking public that arrangements were made to provide Chinese translation.

### Back Pain

#### Chairman: Dr Tan Kian Hian

Dr Alex Yeo started the ball rolling by presenting on “Lower Back and Neck Pain: Non-surgical Perspective”.

Dr David Wong then touched on “The Surgical Perspective” for low back and neck pain.

The traditional treatment of back pain was then covered by Dr Cui Shu Li, who spoke on “Acupuncture and TCM”.

### Nerve Pain, Headaches and Arthritis

#### Chairman: Dr James Tan

Dr Alex Yeo spoke on “Neuropathic Pain”.

A/Prof Julian Thumboo then spoke on “Arthritis and Rheumatism”.

The last speaker was Dr Charles Siow who spoke on “Headaches”.

Many questions were raised at the Q & A

### Responses from the Public

“I have attended the public forum held at Suntec on 20 May 2007. The forum was excellent, especially the sessions led by Dr Yeo! His presentation in both English and Chinese are very clear. Also, Chairman, Dr Tan Kian Hian did a very remarkable on-the-spot translation.

Thanks to all the speakers who make that afternoon a well-spent and meaningful one.”

“Thank you. The seminar was excellent.”

session after each topic. Many registrants were even asking the speakers during the tea-break and after the session had closed.

### APPRECIATION

We would like to thank our Guest-of-Honour, Mdm Halimah Yacob for taking time off her busy schedule to officiate at the Opening Ceremony and to deliver the Keynote Address.

We would also like to thank our invited guests, Prof Fachmi Idris, President of the Indonesian Medical Association and Dr Tran Huu Thang, Vice-President and Secretary General of the Vietnam Medical Association for taking time off their busy schedules to attend the two-day Convention.

The Convention Organising Committee and the SMA Council are grateful to all who have made the Convention a success:

- Overseas and local speakers and chairmen for their time and participation;
- Our five co-organisers for their support – namely the The Pain Association of Singapore; National Arthritis Foundation; Section of Palliative Medicine (College of Physicians, Singapore); The Headache Society of Singapore, and Singapore Orthopaedic Association;
- Our sponsors, exhibitors and advertisers in our souvenir magazines for their support. Namely Pfizer Singapore, Janssen Cilag, Rottapharm, Harpers (Tiger Balm), Merck Sharp & Dohme (IA) Corp, Mundipharma, Genzyme, IDS, Transmedic, Trumed, Humedical, UBS AG, Parkway, Bupa, Ms Yona Foo, Vital Base, NHG and MaxTea Tarikk;
- And the SMA Secretariat. ■