

Practice promotion

MPS



Putting members **first**

Advice correct as of January 2015

The Malaysian Medical Association's (MMA) *Code of Medical Ethics* warns doctors of their professional obligations not to promote their practice, attempt to gain publicity, or indulge in self-promotion. This factsheet sets out your responsibilities.

Advertising and canvassing

You should not attempt to advertise, whether directly or indirectly, either to obtain patients or promote your professional advantage. Neither should you attempt to canvass for patients, or employ an agent to distribute visiting cards for this purpose.

However, the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC)'s *Guideline on Dissemination of Information by the Medical Profession* states that traditionally, members of the medical profession have been prevented or discouraged from advertising to safeguard against abuse and to avoid misleading the public. However, in view of the changing trends, there is a need for reviewing and perhaps revising some of these traditional codes in the interest of the profession and public, as evaluated and determined by the relevant regulatory bodies. (See Item 2.8 of the Guideline).

Announcements in the press

If you wish to publish an advertisement concerning your profession or practice, this can be done through the Honorary Secretary of the MMA Ethics Committee. Advertisements are limited to the announcement of a new practice, your resumption of practice, change of address, or change of telephone number. The press should not be used for making any other announcement. Notifications such as a change in surgery or consulting hours should instead be sent as a circular letter to the patients of the practice, and can also be displayed in the waiting room.

Nameplates

These should be plain and can include your:

- Name
- Registrable qualifications in small letters
- Title/s, if any.

A separate signboard to indicate consultation hours is permitted. Visiting practitioners may have nameplates, providing that their day(s) and hour(s) of practice are stated.

Signboards

A maximum of two signboards are permitted to indicate the identity of the practice – their total size should not exceed 3.0 sq metres (see Item 4.3.3 of the Guideline). The inclusion of the word “pharmacy” is illegal, unless the premises are a Dispensing Pharmaceutical Chemist shop. No additional signboards are allowed for a 24-hour clinic, but stating the availability of 24-hour service is allowed on the nameplate. This applies to maternity homes too.

If a new clinic or hospital is opening, a temporary banner outside the building to announce this is allowed, provided that it is no bigger than a signboard, is only displayed for one month prior to the opening, and only contains the date of the opening and the name of the clinic or hospital.

Telephone directories

A medical directory containing the name, address, specialty, place of practice and contact telephone numbers, email address and hours of consultation of registered medical practitioners should be useful for the public when in need of urgent consultation, and such entry is permitted.

The maximum size permitted should be no more than one page, and the frequency should be at every edition of the Yellow Pages or Medical Directory. Colour logos and photographs of the facility are permitted, and the content should be approved by the Medicines Advertising Board. (See Item 4.13 of the Guideline).

Calling cards and letterheads

Calling cards should include:

- Your name
- Registrable professional qualifications
- State and national awards
- Home, practice and email address(es), telephone and fax numbers.

They should not be used to solicit patients. Letterheads may contain the name of the clinic, address(es), telephone and fax numbers, email address and the names of doctors practising in that clinic with their registrable qualifications, state and national awards and clinic hours.

Writing articles

Publishing contributions to the lay press, or articles or books on medical or semi-medical topics that are in the public interest, are permitted as long as they do not aim to promote your professional status.

- It is permissible for the author's name to be published. The name can be followed by a brief description of qualifications. The place of practice of the author is permitted for purposes of seeking clarifications by the readers. These should not be unduly emphasised by large font or heavy type setting. (See Item 4.15.1 of the Guideline).
- Leave out any laudatory editorial reference to your professional status or experience.
- Be modest regarding personal achievements and show courtesy in relation to your colleagues.
- Decline to enter into any private correspondence with lay readers on clinical matters arising out of your contributions.
- Include a clearly stated disclaimer regarding any financial interest if the publication is connected to an instrument or drug provided by a commercial firm.
- Avoid discussions in the lay press on controversial points of medical science and treatment which are more appropriate for discussion in medical journals and professional societies.

Giving lectures

Before giving a lecture to the lay public, it is your responsibility to remind the Chairperson of the need to be circumspect in any introductory remarks concerning your professional status and achievements. If you know that the press are likely to be present at the event, you must ensure that any report of the talk does not carry your qualifications, professional status, or place of practice. The same applies for any promotion of the lecture prior to the event.

If you deliver a talk to doctors, you must ensure that this is only organised through professional bodies or hospitals, not solely by commercial enterprises. Information about such talks should only be circulated through professional bodies or hospitals, and, again, there should not be any laudatory reference to your professional qualifications, status or experience.

You should exercise caution against the press reporting any unproven forms of management or treatment. Be wary also in granting press interviews, as this may be seen as self-advertisement. The same principles against self-promotion apply as for the publication of written articles or reports of lectures. For more information, see MPS's factsheet, *Handling the Media*.

Website and homepage

The information that is disseminated through the electronic media has to be carefully designed and worded. The information on the healthcare facilities and services, and on the registered medical practitioners, their names and photographs and specialties, must be informative and simple without laudatory remarks.

If you are in doubt as to the safeguards necessary to avoid self promotion, contact the Secretary of the MMA for guidance.

Further information

- MPS factsheet, *Handling the Media* – www.medicalprotection.org/malaysia/factsheets/handling-the-media
- MMA, *Code of Medical Ethics*, (2002) – www.mma.org.my
- Malaysian Medical Council, Guideline on Dissemination of information by the Medical Profession (Guideline 001/2006) – www.mmc.gov.my

For medicolegal advice please call us on:

1 800 81 5837 (FREECALL)

or email us at: querydoc@mps.org.uk

www.medicalprotection.org

This factsheet provides only a general overview of the topic and should not be relied upon as definitive guidance. If you are an MPS member, and you are facing an ethical or legal dilemma, call and ask to speak to a medicolegal adviser, who will give you specific advice.

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