

SAF MEDICAL TRAINING INSTITUTE – SAVING LIVES SINCE 1966

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception in 1966 as the Medical Orderlies Training School (MOTS), the SAF Medical Training Institute (SMTI) has been training and nurturing our people to the highest standards to set them up for success. Today, SMTI stands tall because of the achievements of our pioneers as we continue their legacy of saving lives and providing comfort and care to the wounded and the sick in the defence of our nation. Like our forebears, SMTI will continue to train our people to be technically competent and to have strong values so that they can be proud of their contributions and be powerful advocates for the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and Singapore.

THE EARLY YEARS

The story of the SAF Medical Training Institute (SMTI) began in 1966, following the birth of our nation. With Singapore's independence in 1965 came the immediate need for Singaporeans to build up a strong defence force to safeguard our nation's sovereignty. The critical need for soldiers to be trained as medics to provide medical support in the defence of a newly independent Singapore saw the introduction of military medical education through the establishment of the Medical Orderlies Training School (MOTS). MOTS was set up at Beach Road Camp in May 1966 by LTA S. T. Moorthy, a nursing officer who had initially served under the British Army Medical Corps. At the time, the SAF had only two infantry battalions: 1 Singapore Infantry Regiment (SIR) and 2 SIR. Hence, the medics who graduated from MOTS were mainly deployed to serve the medical needs of these two battalions.

With the introduction of National Service (NS) in 1967, decision was made to set up the School of Military Medicine (SMM) and LTA Moorthy was transferred to the SAF Training Institute (SAFTI) at Pasir Laba Camp to lay the groundwork for SMM, a two-storey building, which was ready to function in February 1968 and officially opened in April by the then Minister for Health, Mr Chua Sian Chin.

The first Commanding Officer (CO) of SMM, CPT(DR) Roy Paul from 2 SIR, worked with LTA Moorthy by literally starting from scratch as they developed and planned lessons as well as conducted courses for medical officers and medics during SMM's formative years. He eventually rose through the ranks to become the first Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of the then HQ Medical Services (HQMS) while his deputy became CO SMM.

“We formulated, planned and conducted our own courses for medical orderlies and medical officers. It was satisfying to see these programmes being implemented, and that they were useful and effective in training these men for important roles such as theirs.”

*- LTC(RET)(DR) Roy Paul, CMO HQMS
(1974-1976)*

“It was one of the most exciting phases of my life, because I was involved in building up something out of virtually nothing. I became so engrossed with my work, often staying up past midnight at home working on the lectures, lesson plans and formats for all the courses.”

*- CPT(RET) S. T. Moorthy, CO SMM
(1971-1978)*

As the SAF grew and more battalions were formed, the demand for medical officers and medics increased. Hence, SMM saw itself expanding and shifting to larger premises within SAFTI. In those initial years, SMM moved twice, in 1970 and in 1972, from the small double-storey building with trainees' accommodations on the upper floor and

classrooms on the ground floor to finally acquiring sufficient space to have 'its own general, medical, BCS stores, nine training sheds and a set of lecture rooms.'¹

THE JOURNEY TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Due to SMM's need to further expand its training capabilities to meet the growing healthcare needs of the SAF, it moved out of SAFTI to Ulu Pandan Camp in 1990. There, the Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) course accredited by the American College of Surgeons (ACS) was introduced to medical officer training in 1992 and the Paramedic Training Programme was inaugurated in SMM under the auspices of the Paramedic Academy of the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) in 1996.² It was at Ulu Pandan Camp that SMM became the first ATLS Training Centre in Asia and the national institution responsible for paramedic training, teaching trainees from the SAF as well as the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF).

In 2002, SMM shifted to Nee Soon Camp to be under one roof with the HQ Medical Corps (HQMC) and the HQ Army Medical Services (HQ AMS). In its continuous strive for excellence in the delivery of military medical education, SMM was reorganised into the SAF



Combat medic training during the early years.



The inaugural ATLS course conducted by SMM at Ulu Pandan Camp in 1992 was the first in Asia.



The pioneer batch of SCDF paramedics who graduated from SMM at Ulu Pandan Camp in 1998. They are seen here with their SAF and SCDF instructors.

Medical Training Institute (SMTI) in 2006 and in the following year, established its Medical Skills Training and Simulation Centre (MSTSC) which was officially opened by the then Chief of Defence Force, LG Ng Yat Chung.³

Not resting on its laurels, SMTI continued to seek new ways to enhance its teaching pedagogies and infrastructure to allow its trainees to hone their life-saving skills. The MSTSC concept was refined to incorporate wireless computer-controlled manikins and a new variety of realistic environments at the Medical Simulation Training Centre (MSTC) which was inaugurated in August 2012 by the Minister for Defence, Dr Ng Eng Hen.⁴

To enhance the continuous learning opportunities for SAF and SCDF paramedics, SMTI spearheaded the National Paramedic Training and Education Roadmap which was launched in October 2015 by the Minister for Education (Higher Skills and Education) and Second Minister for Defence, Mr Ong Ye Kung. The roadmap articulates the vision of '*Paramedicine led by Paramedics*', to transform them '*From Technicians to Clinicians*'. It charts the many pathways paramedics can take to pursue professional upgrading and was launched with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to cement the collaboration between the



Cyberpioneer



The official opening of SMTI's MSTC by the Minister for Defence, Dr Ng Eng Hen in 2012.



Cyberpioneer



The launch of the National Paramedic Training and Education Roadmap and the signing of the MOU for Paramedic Training and Education between the SAF, SCDF, ITE, NYP, UniSIM and JIBC in 2015.

SAF, SCDF, Institute of Technical Education (ITE), Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), SIM University (UniSIM) and JIBC.⁵

SMTI TODAY

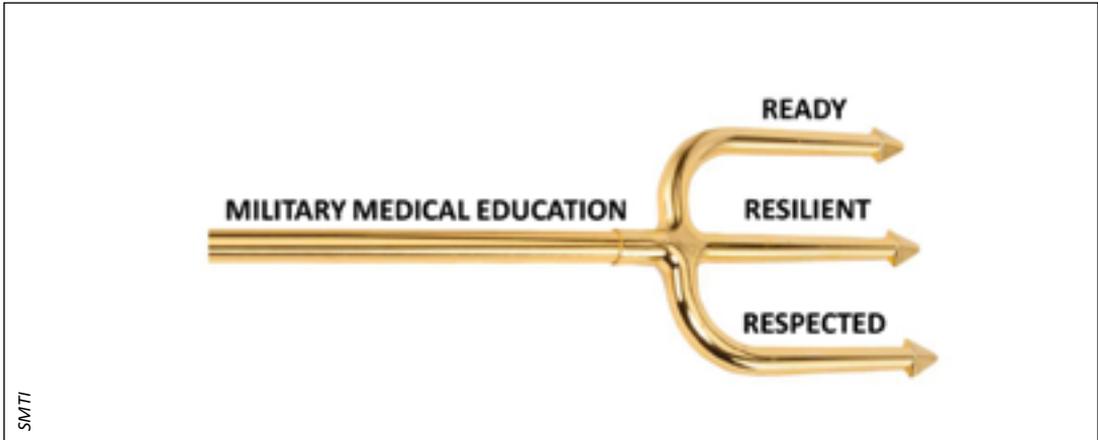
Today, SMTI continues to innovate and seek improvements to serve the learning needs of our trainees in order to support the healthcare requirements of the SAF. The trident or three-pronged spear aptly illustrates SMTI's three key thrusts of *Ready*, *Resilient* and *Respected* in military medical education.

(1) Training to be Ready

SMTI serves as a vocational school charged with the training of our medics who are at the

front-line of the SAF medical support system. Often, our medics are the first responders on the scene to resuscitate and evacuate casualties to the next echelon of care. SMTI ensures that every medic is Ready to take on the challenging task of saving people. Many of the medic trainees are lay people with varied educational qualifications from non-medical fields. In a matter of weeks, SMTI will transform them into medics who can work well under stressful circumstances to save lives.

SMTI ensures that every medic is Ready to take on the challenging task of saving people.



SMTI's three key thrusts represented by the trident

(2) Training to be Resilient

SMTI is also where the art and the science of leadership are imparted to military medical leaders of the SAF. In trying and uncertain times, people look to their leaders for strength, direction and purpose. While every soldier needs to be strong, the leader must have the added fortitude to press on in the darkest of hours. This ability to overcome adversity is then transmitted from leader to men, and a *Resilient* medical unit speaks volumes of the quality of its leadership. At SMTI, our medical officers as well as military medical experts and specialists are trained in the professional aspects of military medicine and groomed to become leaders worthy of their men and women.

(3) Training to be Respected

SMTI provides training for our medical units so they can be *Respected*. Besides active personnel, SMTI trains volunteers from the SAF Volunteer Corps (SAFVC) and Operationally Ready National Servicemen (NSmen) all of whom have to put aside their work and family commitments to come for In-Camp Training (ICT). In addition to medical skills training, each ICT is designed to be meaningful, tough and realistic to bring out the best in them, so that at the end of the training or each successful medical mission, they return to their work places and families *Respected* for their contributions and strong commitment to defence.



SMTI gets our medics Ready to save lives.



SMTI builds Resilience in our military medical leaders through realistic and tough training.

OUR PARTNERS – BEYOND SMTI

Medical training does not end with SMTI. The need for Continuing Medical Education (CME) cannot be over emphasised. To achieve the best possible outcome in continual learning and in saving lives, SMTI partners with various organisations and institutions.

(1) Military Medicine Institute (MMI)

SMTI partners with MMI to ensure that our medics and medical officers continue to hone their skills after graduation from SMTI. Medical emergencies are uncommon in the SAF due to a robust safety management system and a young military population.



Like their active counterparts, NSmen and SAFVC volunteers trained by SMTI earn Respect through their commitment and contributions.

This results in medical personnel not getting much practice in handling life-threatening medical emergencies which can potentially lull them into a false sense of security. As part of CME, our medical centres are required to carry out individual and team-based resuscitation drills during their mandatory Protected Training Time (PTT) twice every quarter. To ensure that all medical personnel are constantly ready to save lives, the Mobile Medical Evaluation Team (MobileMET) comprising educators and evaluators from both SMTI and MMI, conducts on-site medical simulations and evaluations at the various camps and bases.

(2) Basic Military Training Centre

SMTI partners with Basic Military Training Centre (BMTIC) to equip every recruit with basic life-saving skills.⁶ While there are medics to rely on, nothing beats having a buddy nearby who can immediately respond when

a soldier is in distress. Already, the initiative to train all our soldiers in Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillation (AED) has seen positive results where non-medics are able to save lives. As part of their fundamental soldiering skills, all recruits are also taught how to provide first aid to their injured buddies through the medical immediate action drill.

(3) Strategic Partners for Professional Standards

SMTI partners with the SCDF, Ministry of Health (MOH) Unit for Pre-hospital Emergency Care (UPEC), Ministry of Education (MOE), Workplace Development Agency (WDA) as well as vocational and academic institutions like JIBC, ITE, NYP and UniSIM to maintain a high level of professional standards for pre-hospital emergency care. This ensures that our people's qualifications are accredited at the national level and the care we provide



On-site medical simulation and evaluation of medical personnel by MobileMET.



ME3 Silvakumar who administered CPR to an unconscious elderly man during a fire-walking event.



NSF medics 3SG Fahmi (in uniform) and 3SG Zulfadli (wearing cap) attended to an injured elderly lady at Yishun MRT Station.



While preparing for a badminton game, LTA Teoh Seng Hong responded to a male cardiac arrest victim and applied CPR to save the man's life.

are of the highest standards. Our people are our greatest asset. We invest in them so that after they transit into their civilian roles, their skills and qualifications acquired from SMTI will still be useful and recognised beyond NS and the SAF.

SMTI TOMORROW

2016 marked the 50th Anniversary for SMTI. 50 years is a long time and it may even lull people into the delusion of permanence. Yet, we know that 50 years in the grand scheme of things is but a blink. Humbled with that perspective, SMTI embarked on a project to clarify its mission amidst the changing operating environment, to define the Spirit of

SMTI and also to renew the resolve to pursue better ways to fulfil our mission. To stay relevant, SMTI must focus on the following three key aspects.

SMTI's primary mission is to save lives through the quality training it delivers. What has changed is the security environment which necessitates training to meet healthcare needs throughout the peace-war continuum.

(1) Saving Lives

This has not changed. SMTI's primary mission is to save lives through the quality training it delivers. What has changed is the security environment which necessitates training to meet healthcare needs throughout the peace-war continuum. What has also changed is that life-saving is no longer the exclusive privilege of medical personnel. The medic to soldier ratio approximates at 1:30. The buddy to soldier ratio is 1:1. Such is the life-saving potential of the SAF whereby every buddy is a life-saver in the SAF and the community. The enemy is less defined, will strike unexpectedly and will attack soft targets. Hence, continual efforts must be placed on strengthening the soldiering fundamentals, including life-saving skills. Every time the SAF saves a life, it validates our readiness and makes Singapore an unfavourable target to potential terrorists. Every aid rendered or every life saved by

the SAF reinforces the trust that the nation places on us and adds to our value in peace.⁷

(2) Collaboration

SMTI must continue to look beyond itself in order to achieve its mission to save lives. Within the SAF, SMTI must collaborate with MMI and ground units to ensure that medics and medical officers constantly hone their skills. This can only be achieved through a close partnership that provides updated curriculum, quality training material and necessary expertise. In addition, it must collaborate with BMTC to ensure that buddyaid lessons continue to be engaging and relevant. Outside of the SAF, SMTI must continue to collaborate with SCDF so as to cross-pollinate and raise the standards of paramedicine both in the military and the civilian settings. SMTI has and must continue to partner with the educational institutions both locally and overseas to benchmark our courses, so that the certifications received by our people during military service will be recognised by



CPL Kenneth Tan with the child he rescued from the bottom of a condo pool. His prompt action and CPR skills saved her life.

the industries. It is through collaboration, cross-pollination and learning from others that SMTI can continue to deliver the best lessons for our life-savers.

(3) Training Transformation

Today's soldiers are more tech-savvy, inquisitive and innovative because they are the product of Singapore's world-class educational system which equips students with 'critical competencies to succeed in a knowledge-based economy.'⁸ Properly harnessed, the collective potential of the new generation will bring the SAF well into the future as a formidable fighting force. The learner-centric culture advocated by SAFTI MI to encourage 'Thinking Soldiers' through the 'journey of self-discovery' continues today as SMTI embarks on the LEARNet journey to harness the power of technology by equipping every learner with a tablet computer to access courseware from the LEARNet portal and search the internet for relevant information to enhance their learning experience.⁹

As part of the SMTI's Curriculum Transformation Exercise (CTX), two state-of-the-art smart classrooms, which are named after SMTI's pioneers Roy Paul and S. T. Moorthy, have recently been completed. Together with the application of the latest teaching pedagogies acquired from the National Institute of Education (NIE), SMTI educators will be able to facilitate learning that is more interactive to engage the new generation of learners. To continue to be relevant, SMTI will constantly seek feedback, explore new ways to enhance training realism and review its teaching methodologies to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

OUR COMMITMENT - OUR WORD

SMTI is committed to the highest standards of training to nurture our people and set them up for success. We train our people to be technically competent and to have strong values so that they can be proud of their contributions and be powerful advocates for SAF and Singapore. The SAF Medical Corps' motto is '*To Seek, To Save, To Serve*'. This is inculcated in every SMTI trainee as we train each and every one of them To Seek excellence, To Save lives and To Serve the SAF.

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CONCLUSION

We in SMTI stand tall because of the achievements of our forebears as we continue their legacy of saving lives and providing comfort and care to the wounded and the sick in the defence of our nation. Our pioneers had run a good race and it is now our turn to carry the torch, as well as SMTI's trident to ensure that our life-savers are *Ready, Resilient* and *Respected*. We continue our run towards excellence to live up to the Spirit of SMTI: *So They May Live*.

ENDNOTES

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