

A Summary of  
Investigation Report on the Confidentiality of  
Examination Questions of a MBBS Examination in Surgery

On February 24, 2008, an anonymous e-mail was sent to the local press concerning an alleged leakage of examination questions of the Short Answer Questions (SAQ) of the MBBS Final Written Examination in Surgery to be held on the following day. On February 25, 2008, the examination of the SAQ paper was held as scheduled but a replacement question paper made up of reserved questions was used in place of the original SAQ Paper. On the same day, a 3-person panel (“the Panel”) was set up by the Vice-Chancellor to investigate the matter. The Panel was chaired by Pro-Vice-Chancellor Joseph H.W. Lee, and comprised of Justice Patrick S.O. Chan and Professor Grace W.K. Tang as members.

The investigation panel held 8 meetings from March to June, and has now submitted a report to the Vice-Chancellor. The Panel has reported the following:

- (a) On February 16, 2008, 5 MBBS final-year students approached a teacher in the Department of Surgery on an occasion where they served as volunteer helpers at a clinical examination held for the Year 4 students, with a list of areas and topics of what the students had collectively guessed as the most probable areas and topics which might be examined in the SAQ Paper. During the conversation, the students had tried to elicit from the teacher concerned indications, hints or clues relating to the SAQ Paper. The teacher had unintentionally but either consciously or subconsciously provided them with hints and clues from which the students made their own deductions on the areas and topics to be examined in the SAQ Paper, and produced a list of possible examination questions/topics, which was circulated to all MBBS final-year students. There was a significant similarity between the contents of this list and the SAQ in the original examination paper.
- (b) The Panel fully realizes that the teacher concerned is a compassionate teacher held in high esteem by his colleagues and students, and is a

caring mentor and counsellor in the eyes of students.

- (c) The Panel however is of the view that this teacher should be responsible for the incident. He should be aware of the importance of keeping the contents of examination papers with the strictest confidence. He should have avoided answering questions put to him by students touching upon sensitive matters such as examination topics, and should be more careful and prudent, instead of succumbing to the pressures of the students.
- (d) The Panel feels that students should also be responsible as what they have done was a planned and concerted attempt to pressurize a popular and well respected teacher into doing something which he should not do.
- (e) The Panel has concluded that the allegation that the teacher concerned leaked the SAQ questions to individual persons or students for personal favour is unfounded.
- (f) The Panel is satisfied that there is no question of any prejudice or unfairness caused to any individual student and any adverse effect on examination, as the list of possible examination questions/topics was circulated to all students in the whole class, and as in any event, the original SAQ paper was withdrawn and a replacement paper was set and used for the examination held on February 25.

The Panel has made the following recommendations:

- (a) that in order to avoid the potential conflict in the roles of a mentor/counsellor and a person in charge of or involved in endorsing the final version of the examination paper, Faculty mentors and counsellors should not be involved in the process of selecting questions for the final version of examination papers;
- (b) that the teacher involved in the incident who is a Faculty mentor and

counsellor should no longer be involved in the process of selecting the final version of questions in future written examinations; and that a letter of caution should be issued to this teacher; and

- (c) that Faculty mentors and counsellors should regularly inculcate in students the correct attitude towards learning and examination.

These recommendations have been accepted by the Vice-Chancellor who has taken the necessary actions as recommended by the Panel including the issue of the letter of caution. The teacher involved in the incident has relinquished his duties relating to the selection of final examination questions.

July 18, 2008