

# A Tribute to Prof N Balachandran

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*Delivered by Prof Tan Ser Kiat*



Rita, members of the Navaratnam family, friends and colleagues.

We are gathered here this evening to bid final farewell to a great man. To us gathered here, he is a dear husband, brother, brother-in-law, uncle, teacher, friend and mentor. He will be deeply missed.

Navaratnam Balachandran is a legend in the medical profession. Born in Kota Tinggi to a Tamil scholar father and a teacher mother, young Bala was destined to live a life dedicated to the sick and the infirmed right at a very tender age. Having lived through the war where diseases and injuries abound, he resolved to help alleviate these sufferings. He realised his dream when he gained admission into the King Edward VII College of Medicine, graduating in 1956 as a doctor.

His life as a doctor and surgeon is exemplary to all in the medical profession. His care of patients and his concern for them are legendary. Bala will never allow anything or anybody to compromise the welfare and interests of his patients. He has on numerous occasions gone out of his way, beyond the call of professional duty, to help them be it financial, social or personal difficulties. As a young surgeon working under him, I was touched by him on many of these occasions that I happen to witness.

He placed no emphasis on the social standing of his patients who ranged from the destitute to dignitaries like Ministers and Heads of State. He treats them with equal respect, care and empathy. His only concern is their well-being and their recovery from their illness. His patients hold him in their highest regards, respect and admiration for his dedication to their well-being.

A highly respected and sought after teacher, Prof. Bala has taught countless

orthopaedic surgeons, nurses and other staff over four and half decades. A firm believer in the passing of skills, experience and knowledge to the younger surgeons unselfishly, he has always placed great emphasis on teaching and training the next generation of specialists so that our patients can benefit from better care. He has frequently stressed that:

“We must always aim towards excellence and not be selfish. The younger ones must overtake us, not only academically but also in operative skills. How wonderful it would be for all of us to be able to learn something new from one’s own pupil. We would have failed in our duties and responsibilities if our younger surgeons who come after us are not better than us.

One of our greatest responsibilities as senior staff is the training of our younger colleagues. To be allowed to teach and train itself is a privilege and honour which we must uphold.”

Perhaps more than teaching and the passing of medical knowledge to his students are the very valuable lessons of life he taught all of us. Humility, respect, integrity, honour and care and concern for our colleagues and friends as much as we care for our patients is the hallmark of his lessons in life for us. Behind that facade of serious and no nonsense look of his lies a man of great compassion and kindness. His concern for the welfare of his colleagues, in particular junior trainees, nurses, secretaries and other paramedical staff is well-known. No problems, professional or personal are too minor for him to deal with. I’ve known him to go out of his way personally to ensure that their difficulties are addressed adequately.

But perhaps what impressed his colleagues and friends is his willingness

and courage in defending principles and upholding justice even at the risk of going against otherwise popular and administrative opinions. I’ve known him to stand up for younger colleagues under severe criticisms and pressure when they are not at fault.

His wisdom and high professional standing saw him being elected to the Singapore Medical Council in 1987 and subsequently becoming the Council’s President. He set very high standards of ethical, moral and professional practice. During his years in SMC, he has always emphasised that whilst we must maintain the highest professional standards when judging fellow colleagues, justice must also be tempered with compassion. This has won him the highest respect from fellow colleagues, learned legal experts and the public.

Though a man of very high standing in the profession and community, his humility kept him in a low profile. Not many know much about his private life. He loved his wife Rita dearly and deeply and would do anything for her. During his entire illness, his only major concern is for her. Prof. Bala, please be at peace for we will look after Rita.

His passing will definitely leave a tremendous void in us both professionally and personally in our lives. We love him dearly and will deeply miss him. We will forever cherish the wonderful memories and the many lessons he taught us.

Goodbye my dear friend, teacher and mentor. Thank you for your friendship and guidance. You will always live on in our hearts.

Adios

May You Rest In Eternal Peace. ■