

Professor Chan Heng Leong

(6 February 1941 – 26 May 2003)

By Assoc Prof Benjamin Ong and Dr Chew Chin-Hin



Professor Chan Heng Leong, Professor of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS), and Emeritus Consultant, National Skin Centre, died on 26 May 2003 at the age of sixty-two.

Born in Kuala Kangsar, Malaya, on 6 February 1941, he spent much of his childhood in Penang. He graduated MBBS from Singapore's Medical School (then the University of Singapore) in 1965 securing several gold and silver medals and prizes.

He worked briefly as a lecturer in Medicine at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. He obtained his MRACP in 1969 and MRCP (UK) in 1972. While in London he also received specialised training at the St John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin and obtained the Diploma of Dermatology in 1973.

On his return from Britain that same year, he was appointed Lecturer at the University's Department of Medicine at Singapore General Hospital. He proved to be an excellent physician with a quiet and meticulous approach to patient care that endeared him to patients, peers and colleagues alike. However, it was the effect that he had as a teacher and role model for students that stood out. Ever approachable and patient, he was an encouraging mentor, and was genuinely interested that his students benefited to the full from his bedside tutorials and lectures. He was particularly keen to inculcate in students a durable appreciation of what he called "medical humanities".

In the specialty of Dermatology, he proved a worthy champion and was instrumental in the early development of this area of clinical specialisation. He would subsequently spend many years involved with specialty training for dermatology. He was a visiting scholar at the University of California in 1979 and visiting professor in dermatology at the Harvard Medical School in Boston in 1987. Rightfully he was the foundation chairman of the Specialist Training Committee for dermatology and member of the parent

Specialist Accreditation Board. He had also served on the Singapore Medical Council, the highest medical statutory authority for the regulation of professional and ethical standards.

The NUS, in recognising his contributions to clinical service, teaching as well as research, rapidly promoted him to

Associate Professor in 1977 and Professor of Medicine in 1984. His academic contributions included over 100 publications that attest to his clinical interests in dermatological manifestations of systemic disease and adverse drug reactions. He authored two books in 1986 covering these areas and a third on Cutaneous Adverse Drug Reactions in 2001. Professor Chan also contributed as editor or editorial advisor to several medical journals both local and international. He served as Head of the Department of Medicine over two terms at the National University Hospital (NUH). More recently, Professor Chan took on the added task of formulating guidelines in clinical and research ethics and of providing a consult service for difficult cases. He was Chairman of the Research Ethics Committee and in the Committee of Bioethics at the NUH, and Chair of the Committee of Medical Ethics, in the Faculty of Medicine at the NUS.

He had also been actively involved with both Singapore and international medical bodies: a long-standing fellow of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore, of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and Royal College of Physicians of London of which he was Singapore's regional advisor. He was also a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow and the American College of Physicians. He was the Chief Examiner for the Master of Medicine, (M. Med) in Internal Medicine of Singapore's School of Postgraduate Medical Studies from 1993 and was much involved in the arrangements of having the MRCP (UK) in Singapore jointly with the M. Med, since 1995 and more recently with the PACES, the very first to be held anywhere (in 2001). Rightly he was Singapore's first member to serve on the MRCP (UK) Part 2 Board of the UK Royal Colleges of Physicians.

In addition, he initiated the Graduate Diploma of Dermatology in 1999 for the School of Postgraduate Medical Studies. In this as in all that he achieved in his life, Professor Chan was thorough and persuasive without being overbearing, and a fair and balanced examiner.

The many generations of doctors he taught, trained and nurtured will always be immensely grateful to him. They will be his lasting tribute. Professor Chan was also a devoted family man and he is survived by his doctor wife, Beang Khoon and two sons. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him. ■

