

Honouring Outstanding Contributions

The SMA Honorary Memberships and SMA Merit Awards are traditionally given out during the SMA Annual Dinner. Due to the prevailing pandemic restrictions, the dinner was unable to be held this year. Despite this, the Association is proud to confer on A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean and Dr T Thirumoorthy the SMA Honorary Memberships – the highest honour that SMA bestows on individuals with significant contributions to the medical profession. Additionally, the SMA Merit Awards were presented to three well-deserving doctors. Congratulations to all our recipients!

SMA HONORARY MEMBERSHIP

CITATION FOR

A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean

Text by A/Prof Goh Lee Gan

I am delighted to give this citation for A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean for the SMA Honorary Membership 2021. Pak Yean is a man of many talents, with tremendous drive and a good heart. Let me focus on three areas where he has contributed greatly to the SMA and the medical profession; namely, as a leader-innovator, teacher-academic and generalist physician.

Leader-innovator

I first met Pak Yean when he was 15. That was 60 years ago in 1964, when he joined the stage crew of the Drama Society in Anglo-Chinese School. I was then his stage crew leader. Our job was the quick set-up of the stage for the actors and actresses to bask in the limelight.

He joined the Faculty of Medicine, University of Singapore (now the National University of Singapore [NUS]) in 1968. As President of the Medical Society when he was a third year medical student, he organised travelling health exhibitions which toured schools around Singapore. He moved on to helm the Asian Regional Medical Students' Association and used the opportunity to initiate rural health projects in Semarang, Central Java and Sumatra Utara in neighbouring Indonesia. These projects exposed medical students and young doctors to health issues of the developing world.

After graduation, Pak Yean did his national service and chose to specialise in internal medicine. 1979 was a fruitful year for Pak Yean, as he passed both the Master of Medicine in Internal Medicine from NUS and the Collegiate Membership of the Royal Colleges of Physicians.

At this juncture, Pak Yean decided to take the road less travelled. Instead of growing along the track of hospital senior clinician and administrator, he decided to start Cheong Medical Clinic in 1980 in the outback of Jalan Jurong Kechil, in a pre-war shophouse built by his grandfather, Mr Cheong Chin Nam, in 1923.



In his clinic practice, Pak Yean saw the benefits of GP clinics working together to share resources and also the need to upskill the clinic assistants of GP clinics. His innovative mind got to work and he championed the development of the Health Maintenance Office Pte Ltd (HMOPL), an innovative co-operative owned by doctors. The HMOPL also developed a pharmaceutical drug warehouse and a clinic computerisation programme with software running on affordable personal computers with a friendly interface.

Training of clinic assistants was boosted through the setting up of a clinic assistants' course in collaboration with the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and the Association of Private Medical Practitioners. The rest is history. He was appointed to the Board of Governors of ITE in 2003 to oversee the development of healthcare assistants for the nation.

Pak Yean served as President of the SMA for three years from 1996 to 1999. He contributed in three professional domains: he expanded the SMA Ethics Committee into a Complaints Committee; set up the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism with Dr T Thirumorthy; and advocated for a guideline of fees and actively participated in professional representation in a Parliamentary Select Committee investigating fees in primary care. In the context of fee guidelines, he also helped to define the ethical boundaries of fees such as "profit-sharing" of doctors with non-doctors, fee-sharing among doctors, and the pharmaceutical trade between doctors and pharmacists.

When the public sector healthcare system in Singapore was restructured in 2000, Pak Yean was invited to be a member of the Board of Directors of the National Healthcare Group and he served six years in the Group Human Resource committee.

Pak Yean also revitalised the Medical Association of South East Asian Nations during his term as its Secretary General.

Teacher-academic

From Pak Yean as a leader-innovator, we move to another aspect of his life work – that of a teacher-academic. Pak Yean was a member of the college team charged with the task of developing family medicine (FM) training on the broad front of Graduate Diploma, Master of Medicine (MMed) and Fellowship levels using the Dreyfus model of skill



The 38th SMA Council 1997/1998 when A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean was President of SMA

acquisition. He was appointed Adjunct Associate Professor at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine) in 2000 and at Duke-NUS Medical School in 2019, and participated actively in developing FM into what is now familiar today.

The first task for Pak Yean was the development of the MMed Private Practitioners' Stream (PPS) to be on par with the Ministry of Health Traineeship Programme, such that trainees in both the stream and programme sit the same MMed (FM) examination. He set up the Graduate FM Centre above his clinic in 1998 as a training venue for the first group of FM trainees. His energy and vision has yielded great results innovating portfolio-based learning and ambulatory care rounds. In fact, many of the FM leaders of today grew from this MMed (FM) PPS stream. The College of Family Physicians Singapore awarded him the Albert and Mary Lim Award for these achievements in 2010.

Pak Yean introduced the paradigm of family medicine as "One Discipline, Many Settings". This paradigm has helped to develop family medicine in the intermediate care setting and also in long-term care. He was appointed Clinical Consultant to the FM Continuing Care Department when it was set up in Singapore General Hospital in 2006.

Even with these busy FM developmental activities, Pak Yean still finds time to be an undergraduate tutor and examiner for medical students in NUS Medicine. Many have benefitted from being in his clinic for their FM postings.

He also published numerous papers in medical literature including nine in peer-reviewed journals, and

was honoured with fellowships from the College of Family Physicians Singapore and Academy of Medicine, Singapore, as well as from the Royal Colleges of Physicians of UK and the American College of Physicians.

Generalist physician

Pak Yean, through his training as an internist and exposure in primary care, found psychotherapy to be valuable in integrating the various aspects of family medicine. In 2007, he embarked on formal training in psychotherapy and developed a biopsychosocial approach to practice which he documented in three published books. He now trains doctors in these integrative skills as generalists with a focus on medical communication and humanities.

From physician to family and friends

Pak Yean is not only a successful and innovative physician, he is also a man with a great family and close circle of friends. His wife Irene is the manager of his practice, and his life and soulmate. He has three sons: Sean, a film producer, and Ian and John who are both lawyers. His family is now extended by three talented young women, Yi Ling, Melissa and Janice, and two wonderful grandchildren, Mikaela and Micah.

He is privileged to have had a fulfilling professional career and to work with so many doctors in the roads towards the goals that epitomise SMA's slogan: "For Doctors, For Patients".

I present to you A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean as most worthy of being conferred the SMA Honorary Membership.

SMA HONORARY MEMBERSHIP

CITATION FOR

Dr T Thirumoorthy

Text by Dr Lee Pheng Soon

Dr T Thirumoorthy (Dr Thiru) grew up in Malacca and Kuala Lumpur and joined the University of Malaya as a student in 1967. He was heavily involved in student leadership for the final three years of his studies, successively holding the roles of President, Medical Society, University of Malaya; Secretary-General, Asian Regional Medical Students' Association; and finally, Chairman, Students' Council, University of Malaya Students' Union. All this notwithstanding, he graduated with his MBBS in 1972, with the Best All-Round Graduating Student Medal, University of Malaya. In time to come, he would earn clinical fellowships in dermatology from the US and the UK, as well as Master degrees in Healthcare Ethics and Law from the University of Manchester, and in Counselling from Monash University.

Training and medical service

Dr Thiru completed his housemanship in Johor Bahru General Hospital, then joined the Malaysian Armed Forces where he was commissioned Captain and awarded "Most Outstanding Trainee Officer, Malaysia Medical and Dental Corps".

He went on to be trained in internal medicine and dermatology in the UK from 1976 to 1979 and returned to Singapore to start as a registrar in Middle Road Hospital. He subsequently describes his career in medicine in five phases, parallels of which may resonate with many doctors.

An unexpected challenge: the AIDS epidemic

Dr Thiru recalls first hearing about AIDS at a conference in New Zealand in 1980. Before long, he was working alongside Dr VS Rajan and other colleagues, deeply involved in all aspects of combating this epidemic. He was especially busy with education in AIDS,

visiting Geylang to speak with commercial sex workers, as well as the Singapore Armed Forces to speak about condom use.

He was one of the founding members of Action for AIDS Singapore, which under the leadership of Prof Roy Chan and others, has grown from strength to strength. Dr Thiru worked in both Middle Road Hospital and its successor, the National Skin Centre, in dermatology and venereology till 1990.

Private practice

For the next 12 years, he worked as a consultant dermatologist in private practice.

SGH dermatology service

In 2002, he was invited by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan (the then-Chief Executive Officer of Singapore General Hospital [SGH]) to be the Founding Director of the Dermatology Service at SGH, where he and his team pursued dermatology as a part of multidisciplinary care. This was an especially meaningful time for him as a dermatology leader: he had noticed the dwindling interest in medical dermatology, and understood the importance of a dermatology department within a general hospital.



Building SGH dermatology would offer those patients with extensive and severe dermatoses and multiple co-morbidities the advantage of being cared for holistically by a multidisciplinary team of doctors and nurses, with the dermatologist as the primary physician. He would remain there for 15 years, leaving as Visiting Consultant in 2017.

Educator in Duke-NUS Medical School

From 2007 to 2017, he held a succession of positions in Duke-NUS Medical School (Duke-NUS), ranging from Associate Professor (Education); Director, Practice Course Year 2; and Faculty, Practice Course Year 1, where he taught subjects on clinical skills, professionalism, medical ethics, communications and healthcare law. He then moved to being Adjunct Faculty in the Student and Alumni Affairs office serving as College Master of Ransome College till July 2020. He currently holds the position of Adjunct Professor in the Academic Development Department of the Office of Academic and Clinical Development.

Improving working systems

In 2013, he was offered an opportunity to work in the area of clinical and professional governance and took on the role of Independent Advisor (Clinic Practice) at Parkway Hospitals. In 2017, he was appointed Group Chief Medical Officer of IHH Healthcare, a position that he held till he retired in 2019.

Service to the profession

Dr Thiru first got involved with the SMA's work in 1988 because of patient complaints. As a member of the Complaints Committee, he repeatedly saw very intelligent and capable doctors embroiled in all manner of dispute and strife. It occurred to him that sitting in the Complaints Committee was akin to firefighting, and there could be no reduction in the incidence of fires if there were no thought put to fire-prevention.

Strongly encouraged by two past SMA Presidents (A/Profs Cheong Pak Yean and Goh Lee Gan), Dr Thiru became the Founding Director of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (SMA CMEP) in

2000, within which he continues to tirelessly serve. Within four years, this very significant contribution to medical ethics and professionalism was recognised with the SMA Merit Award. He was subsequently re-appointed to helm the SMA CMEP as its Executive Director from 2011 to 2015, and then as its Academic Director from 2019 till present. He has been on the Lead Teaching Faculty of the Ministry of Health (MOH)/SMA Course on Ethics and Professionalism for Advanced Specialist Trainees since 2004, and he has therefore literally taught every Singapore-qualified specialist for more than 15 years.

He was an Elected Member of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) from 2005 to 2008 and from 2014 to 2017, and continues to sit on the SMC Ethics Committee. He served as a Member of the MOH National Medical Ethics Committee from 2005 to 2012. He was also the Censor-In-Chief of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS) from 2012 to 2016.

How did he do it?

Not every senior doctor has the chance to make a mark in so many aspects of medical professionalism. From a soldier helping to prevent disease and death during the AIDS epidemic, to a successful private practitioner being sought out to found the Dermatology Service in SGH; a teacher and mentor to batches of students at Duke-NUS, to an expert asked to improve systems in IHH Healthcare. One who has served in leadership roles in SMC, AMS and SMA. One whose dogged work over decades championing the thoughtful consideration of medical ethics and professionalism has resulted in an organisation like the SMA CMEP.

When asked how he did it, Dr Thiru thinks for a while. "Actually, it just happened; I did not plan this. Medicine has been good to me and has provided all these opportunities." Asked if he had any words of advice to others, he says, "It's important to try to be true to yourself. And if you can, be an advocate for medicine and the profession."

I therefore present to you Dr T Thirumoorthy – a man who has accomplished much and who has touched the lives of many – SMA Honorary Member 2021.



Founding forces of SMA CMEP reunited in friendship, c. 2018. L to R: A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, Prof Tan Siang Yong, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan and Dr T Thirumoorthy

SMA MERIT AWARDS

Inaugurated in 2003, the SMA Merit Awards are presented annually in recognition of the recipients' significant contributions to the SMA and medical profession, social service to the community, or commendable personal achievements. Award recipients may be SMA Members, doctors, or non-medical professionals. This year, three recipients were awarded the SMA Merit Award.



Clinical A/Prof Gerald Chua has contributed to the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (SMA CMEP) on its leadership team and as a faculty member on the Medical Ethics, Professionalism and Health Law courses for senior residents and other related workshops. He has taught many cohorts of doctors that are close to completing their post-graduate training journey on topics ranging from medical professionalism, managing conflicts of interest and informed consent, to the legal and ethical considerations surrounding end-of-life care in the intensive care unit. Clinical A/Prof Chua was also Head of Medicine at Alexandra Hospital and later Ng Teng Fong General Hospital (NTFGH). He is currently the Chairman, Medical Board of NTFGH.



A/Prof Cuthbert Teo is committed to the training of future generations of doctors and specialists. To this end, he volunteers his time with SMA and the Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS). In the SMA, he volunteers in the "Professionalism and Ethics" course for advanced specialty trainees, as well on the editorial boards of both *SMA News* and the *Singapore Medical Journal*. In the AMS, he was chair of the Chapter of Pathologists (2009-2015), and currently serves as vice-chairman. Outside of the medical field, he volunteers his time with the Singapore Children's Society, where he has been honorary secretary since 2015. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he worked with the chief executive officer to implement policies and processes to ensure continued service continuity and safety of staff and beneficiaries.



Dr Woon Yng Yng Bertha serves the medical community by being active in various professional associations and organisations. From 2007 to 2021, she served as Council Member of the SMA. Her other roles included the Vice-Chairman of the Medical Indemnity Committee, Board Member of SMA CMEP, and being one of the Directors of SMA Pte Ltd. She represented SMA as a Councillor of the Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania (CMAAO) from 2008 to 2018. Among other accomplishments, she was responsible for amendments to the CMAAO constitution to facilitate more timely inter-country medical cooperation in the face of increasing occurrence of natural disasters. ♦