

Citation for

Prof Tan Chorh Chuan

Text by Prof John Wong
Delivered by Adj Prof Tan Sze Wee



President and Council of the SMA, distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, good evening. I am delighted to contribute to the citation on the conferment of the SMA Honorary Membership 2022 to Prof Tan Chorh Chuan. The Honorary Membership is the highest honour that the SMA can bestow on persons who are distinguished in public life, or who have rendered meritorious service to the SMA or the medical profession.

The SMA counts Prof Tan as one of its most illustrious members. He was recognised in 2014 when he was the SMA Lecturer, a distinction awarded to eminent and distinguished persons who have made significant contributions to medicine and the community.

Prof Tan has multiple roles nationally and globally. As this citation is for the SMA Honorary Membership, I will focus more on his contributions to medicine. If you want a full measure of the person, please do a Google search.

I cannot think of anyone who has made a greater impact on Singapore medicine over the last 30 years than Prof Tan. He has and will shape the health of Singaporeans from science to practice for years to come.

I have had the privilege of journeying with Prof Tan for the past 40 over years, and his analogy of how to deal with wicked problems like pitching a tent on a mountain in the face of a howling wind

– one peg at a time – is a useful piece of advice to all.

Prof Tan is an alumnus of St Joseph's Institution where he was already noted to have exceptional talent. He entered the National University of Singapore (NUS) on a Public Service Commission Merit Scholarship to study medicine and is remembered not only for being one of the best in his cohort – topping his year's third Professional Examination, winning multiple medals and book prizes, including the one for O&G – but also for doing a mean rendition of John Travolta's "Saturday Night Fever". It was as a medical student, and as the recipient of the Royal Free Exchange Scholarship, that he started his first exploration of the world – soaking up culture, history, and understanding what it means to be a global citizen – that would define him in years to come.

After graduating with the NUS MBBS Class of 1983, Prof Tan completed his National Service and went on to do Internal Medicine in the University Department of Medicine, winning the Gordon Arthur Ransome Gold Medal as the top candidate in the Master of Medicine (Internal Medicine) examination. He specialised in renal medicine, won a Commonwealth Medical Fellowship and Wellcome Fellowship to do his Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford on erythropoietin, and was a Visiting Scholar to Wolfson College.

In 1996 he was awarded the Singapore Youth Award, and in 1997, Prof Lim Pin, then Vice Chancellor of NUS, had the extraordinary foresight to appoint Prof Tan as Head, Department of Medicine, and shortly thereafter Dean, Faculty of Medicine. He was concurrently made Chairman of the Medical Board at the National University Hospital (NUH) – all at the age of 38. Prof Tan remains the youngest Dean of Medicine and Chairman of the Medical Board that NUS and NUH have ever had.

In 2000, Prof Tan went on to become the Director of Medical Services (DMS), Ministry of Health (MOH). This again was extraordinary, as not only was he barely 40 years old, but this was also the first time that someone from NUS had been appointed to the apex professional leadership position in the MOH. Prof Tan's tenure as Director of Medical Services will always be remembered for his leadership during our brush with SARS. The lessons learnt from SARS helped us significantly prepare for and withstand our current experience with COVID-19.

Although Prof Tan may be best known for his work on SARS during his tenure as DMS, few may know that he was responsible for the establishment of the integrated national Chronic Disease Management Programme; the launch of the Early Psychosis Intervention Programme; the introduction of the compulsory CME Programme for all doctors; the establishment of a revised and robust framework for the training

and accreditation of all medical specialists; and the development of a framework for clinical quality assurance in public sector hospitals.

For his extraordinary leadership, the Singapore Government awarded Prof Tan the Public Service Star in 2003, and the Public Administration Medal (Gold) in 2004.

In 2004, Prof Tan returned to NUS as Provost, and in 2008, was appointed President of NUS. In that same year, he was appointed as Founding Chief Executive of the National University Health System (NUHS), Singapore's first academic health system, and the first time that MOH and the Ministry of Education allowed the NUS Schools of Medicine (which includes Nursing), Dentistry and Public Health to come together with the NUH and the National University Heart Centre, National University Cancer Institute and National University Centre for Oral Health under a unified governance. The then Minister for Health Mr Khaw Boon Wan said that one of the key factors in allowing the creation of NUHS was because of the confidence the Government had in Prof Tan.

2008 was also the year in which he was awarded Singapore's pinnacle science and technology award, the National Science and Technology Medal, for his leadership in Singapore's Biomedical Sciences Initiative, a role he has played since its inception as one of Mr Philip Yeo's original musketeers; but more of that later.

In 2015, he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his leadership as NUS President, enhancing NUS' reputation as a leading global university centred in Asia.

In 2018, Prof Tan was appointed University Professor, NUS' highest academic appointment, and NUS recognised his service again in 2019 with its Outstanding Service Award.

On completing a remarkable tenure as President of NUS in 2018, Prof Tan was appointed to two newly created roles in the MOH – Executive Chairman, Office for Healthcare Transformation and Chief Health Scientist.

In 2018, he was also appointed as Chairman, Committee of Government Scientific Advisors, to advise the Singapore Government on research,

science and technology. His other major concurrent appointments include being Chairman, Health & Biomedical Sciences Executive Committee, and Member of the Board of both Singapore's National Research Foundation Board and Monetary Authority of Singapore.

It was from these positions that Prof Tan played a critical role in coordinating the science behind the policies that have shaped Singapore's COVID-19 strategy and response. We are now almost three years into the pandemic and have many to thank to be able to gather here tonight to celebrate and honour the achievements of one of our own.

In recognition of his contributions, the Singapore Government recently bestowed upon him the Distinguished Service Order in the 2022 National Day Awards.

If all of this is not enough, Prof Tan has been appointed Chair of the Healthier SG Implementation Office. This is arguably his greatest challenge and most important role in Singapore's health and healthcare landscape, given the burden and impact of chronic non-communicable diseases, much of which is preventable – either in terms of incidence or in terms of complications resulting from.

Prof Tan has also been honoured internationally. He is the first Singaporean to be elected to the United States National Academy of Medicine. He is also recognised by the French government with the *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* (Knight of the French Order of the Legion of Honour); has received honorary doctorates from Duke University, Loughborough University, King's College London and the University of Bristol; is a recipient of the Abdullah Bin Hamad

Al-Attiyah International Energy Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Advancement of Educating Future Energy Leaders; received the inaugural John Yu Oration and Medal of the George Institute for Global Health, Sydney University, and the Albert Schweitzer Gold medal from Polish Academy of Medicine.

He currently advises the World Health Organization's Universal Health Care Technical Advisory Group, the World Economic Forum's Global Coalition for Value in Healthcare, RIKEN – Japan's largest comprehensive research institution, the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, Verily (formerly Google Life Sciences), the Chief Scientist Office of the Scottish government, the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator, and the George Institute for Global Health, Sydney.

Prof Tan – an accomplished painter, trekker, birdwatcher, conservationist, scuba diver, dedicated husband to Dr Evelyn Lee, and a filial son and sibling of a large family. May I have the pleasure of presenting Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, physician extraordinaire, scholar, leader and living example of what a Singaporean born and bred here can do, as the recipient of the SMA Honorary Membership 2022. ♦

Due to prior commitments, Prof John Wong was unable to attend the SMA Annual Dinner and SMA Council Member Adj Prof Tan Sze Wee delivered the citation on his behalf.

Legend

1. Prof Tan Chorh Chuan receiving his award from Minister Ong Ye Kung
2. Prof John Wong who penned the citation
3. Adj Prof Tan Sze Wee delivering the citation

