

Citation of the Honourable Mr Wee Kim Wee

President of the Republic of Singapore, 1985 to 1993 at his Conferment of Honorary Membership of the Singapore Medical Association (SMA) on Sunday 24 April 1994 at the SMA Annual Dinner Dynasty Hotel Ballroom, Singapore

by Dr Giam Choo Keong, immediate past president of SMA

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. The Honourable Mr Wee Kim Wee was born 78 years ago on the 4th of November 1915 in Singapore. He received his early education at Pearl's Hill School and Outram School. Mr Wee spend a further two years studying at Raffles Institution before leaving in 1930, at the age of 15, to join The Straits Times newspaper as a clerk in the circulation department. He later moved on to the advertising and reporting departments. Mr Wee resigned from The Straits Times in 1941 to join the United Press Association, an American news agency.

During the Japanese attack on Singapore, he served in the ARP (or air raid precautions) section. When Singapore was occupied, Mr Wee worked as a clerk in Japanese military establishments. Towards the end of the war, he was the supervisor and cashier of a large canteen which served Asian seamen working on Japanese merchant ships.

Following Singapore's liberation in 1945, Mr Wee rejoined the United Press Association. In 1959, he rejoined The Straits Times as Deputy Editor, heading the editorial department in Singapore. His journalistic career was both eventful and illustrious. He covered the civil war in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) as well as the official visits to Indonesia and parts of Eastern Europe by Singapore's former Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Mr Wee was also the first Singaporean journalist to enter Jakarta during the Confrontation in 1966 to interview the then Lieutenant-General Suharto (now President Suharto) and Foreign Minister Adam Malik when President Sukarno was still confined to his palace in Bogor. As a result of his exclusive interviews, Singaporeans and Malaysians learned, for the first time, that Indonesia was keen to end Confrontation.

In 1973, two years before Mr Wee was due to retire from The Straits Times, the Singapore Government offered him the post of High Commissioner to Malaysia. It was to have been a three-year term, but he stayed at the post for seven years, the last two as dean of the diplomatic corps in Kuala Lumpur. Mr Wee also served as a member of the Singapore delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in 1977.

He remained in the diplomatic service until 1984. During this period, Mr Wee was appointed Ambassador to Japan in 1980 and concurrently, Ambassador to the Republic of Korea in 1981. In 1979, he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal by the Government of Singapore in recognition of his contribution to its diplomatic service.



Mr Wee Kim Wee

Following his departure from diplomatic service in 1984, Mr Wee was appointed the Chairman of the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation. He had previously served on the Rent Control Board, the Film Appeal Committee, the Land Acquisition Board, the Board of Visiting Justices, and the National Theatre Trust.

Mr Wee takes a keen interest in community work and has served in various clubs and associations. He was the Chairman of SATA (Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association) for two years. In 1963, he was awarded the Public Service Star for his public work and in 1966, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace.

Mr Wee was elected the fourth President of the Republic of Singapore by Parliament on the 30th of August 1985. On completion of his first term in office, he was re-elected to a second term in 1989. During his second term, Mr Wee exercised all the new powers of the Elected President when the Constitutional amendments came into effect on the 30th of November 1991. He completed this term in the 1st of September 1993 and declined to contest in the first nation-wide election for the post of Elected President of Singapore.

Mr Wee was an active sportsman in his youth. He played badminton, table tennis, basketball and soccer. In 1937, he was the junior singles badminton champion of Singapore. Having spent many years serving various badminton bodies in Singapore and Malaya (later Malaysia), he went on to become the President of the Singapore Badminton Association and Vice-President of the Badminton Association of Malaya.

Mr Wee was conferred the Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (KGCB) by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom in 1989. He received the Darjah Kerebat Laila Utama Yang Amat Dihormati (The Most Esteemed Family Order Laila Utama) or DK (First Class) from the Sultan of Brunei in 1990. After he completed his second term as President in 1993, the Singapore Government conferred on him the Darjah

Cont'd on page 8

Utama Temasek (The Order of Temasek) First Class.

Mr Wee is married to Madam Koh Sok Hiong. They have one son and six daughters. He is a man of great integrity and dignity. Mr Wee is without affectation, and has a deep interest in people. My parents-in-law, who have known him for more than 20 years, told me that he is still the same humble and unassuming gentleman today as he was when he was President and when they first knew him. I can also personally attest to this from the occasions that I had the privilege of seeing him when he was a patient of mine, as well as meeting him officially and socially when I was the President of the Singapore Medical Association.

He rose from humble beginnings through diligence and ability. Mr Wee brought honour and dignity to the office of President. His dedication to duty was exemplary. He won the admiration, respect and affection of Singaporeans, regardless of race, religion or social background. Having held the highest office in the land, Mr Wee remains a humble man whom Singaporeans will always remember for his friendliness and grace. We hope that current and future Presidents of Singapore will emulate him this and other aspects of his personality that have endeared him to the people of Singapore.

That is why, at the most recent Annual General Meeting of the Singapore Medical Association, when I proposed Mr Wee as the only person this year to be conferred the highest honour that our Association can bestow on any individual, his nomination was, as expected, not only unanimously approved by all present but also with acclaim. By accepting Honorary Membership of the Singapore Medical Association, which is the national professional organisation for all registered medical practitioners in Singapore, Mr Wee has the additional honour and distinction of being the first non-medical person among the 15 Honorary Members in the 34-year history of our Association to receive this award.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is now my privilege and honour to invite the President of the Singapore Medical Association, Dr Tan Kok Soo, to present the highest honour and award that our Association can bestow on any individual, the Honorary Membership,

to our most highly respected and greatly admired President of the Republic of Singapore 1985 to 1993, the Honourable Mr Wee Kim Wee, in recognition of his many years of meritorious and outstanding service to the community and the people of Singapore.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Managed Doctors' Care Self Management is a Beginning

An editorial in the BMJ January 1994 caught my eye. It was entitled "Appropriateness: The Next Frontier". Some of the statistics quoted in the short article reminded me about that inappropriateness translated to figures could be quite startling. For example, in Americans aged over 65 being treated in the fee for service system, carotid endarterectomy were performed for equivocal reasons in two thirds of cases; and upper gastrointestinal endoscopy and coronary angiography may be inappropriate in about a quarter of cases. These figures were assessed by a review panel rating on an appropriateness scale of 1 to 9. Not that all this is new to us, as those in the business of audit will know but that really the frontier now is a practical instrument for gauging appropriateness.

It is noteworthy that this inappropriateness exist both in the public and private health sectors and that restricting the volume of care by global budgeting or planning does not eliminate it. This has a bearing on the recent debate and exchanges regarding managed healthcare in recent issues of this newsletter and elsewhere. At the end of the day, doctors in Singapore have to live with the times and see the larger perspective. Just as there is change and development in the delivery of healthcare and new technologies so will there be development and changes in instruments for financing health care albeit ala Singapore in our increasing health consumer driven society. Instruments of financing healthcare will certainly not

be static. There will be spreading of the risks and burdens through as many viable instruments as possible. Insurance and managed health care or capitation is seen as one form of spreading the net of responsibility to clients, third parties and providers. Doctors, patients, insurance companies and governments shoulder risks and costs but these must be equitable and rational, acceptable by a common standard of good practice. Managed health care is one player in the health financing team. Certainly it must stand in context amongst the other players including Medishield, Medisave, group health insurance, private insurance, government subsidies, non-governmental organisations, welfare and religious organisations.

Coming back to appropriateness, it shows that healthcare has more than one bottomline. Financial costs may not tally with the health of the nation. Certainly the most expensive, the United State of America is by no means the most healthy. Appropriateness of treatment should be assessed by doctors themselves if they do not want unpleasant enforced audits. If misgivings or inappropriate managements were not checked, the profession will certainly bear the blame for not doing what is only appropriate to do. Appropriateness has to do with behaviour, attitude, knowledge and practice and these could be influenced by audit and appropriate continuing medical education. Indeed CMEs with vested

Cont'd on page 12