



Dr Ho Yuen

## Citation of SMA Honorary Member Dr Ho Yuen

Delivered by Dr Chong Yeh Woei, SMA 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President

**D**r Ho Yuen was born in 1917 in Singapore, but moved to Kuala Lumpur (KL) when he was 7 years old to stay with his maternal grandmother. He studied in the St John's Institution in KL, completing with a Class 1 Senior Cambridge certificate, after which he joined the London Matric Class from which he graduated in 1936 with one of the only two Class 1 Certificates awarded in Malaya and Singapore that year.

With these results he applied for and obtained scholarships to both the Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine. He chose the latter, and in 1937 began studies in Singapore, based in Singapore General Hospital (SGH).

In 1942, when he was a student posted to KK Women's and Children's Hospital, the Japanese occupation began. This interrupted his studies, but all students of his final year class were allowed by the Japanese Administration to be tutored by the former Professors of the College who had also been interred, and in 1943 following an examination, he was given a Japanese Licence to practise medicine.

Armed with this, he started practice at the People's Dispensary in Rochore, standing in for

the father of Dr Chee Siew Oon, who sadly had been led away during this Occupation and was not seen again.

In 1945, the British returned, and the interrupted students were convened, and told by the Principal of the KE VII College that though they would be allowed to continue practice in Singapore with the Japanese Certificate, they could never expect GMC recognition. All 20 students agreed to return for six months of medical studies, followed by an examination, of which 19 then passed at the first attempt for the LMS.

Following this, Dr Ho worked in SGH under Dr CE Smith, who two years later, informed him that applications had been announced for the Queens Scholarship to study in London for the MRCP. Dr Ho applied, and got this, arriving in London six months late because he detoured to Switzerland for treatment of TB pleurisy, which he got while treating his paternal grandfather in SGH. He studied in the Hammersmith Hospital for two and a half years, completed his MRCP Edinburgh, and returned to Singapore in 1952.

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He then started work in MU2 with Prof Khoo Oon Teck and Prof Monteiro. A year later, the post of Consultant Physician Grade 2 was announced, and Dr Ho was the eventual winner after interviews.

Dr Ho continued to practise medicine until 1959 when a vacancy in the Ministry of Health occurred under the new PAP government, and he was asked to serve in the position of Assistant Director of Medical Services. He quickly rose to Acting DMS and Assistant Permanent Secretary Health under Ahmad Ibrahim as Minister. He worked a total of four years in the Ministry of Health's headquarters (MOH HQ), a time he remembers as “having significant conflict”, especially when he had to temper political requirements to meet what he understood to be important points of medical ethics.

After yet another disagreement in MOH HQ in 1963, he returned to SGH as a senior physician. His experiences in the four years earlier left him convinced that doctors in Singapore needed leaders prepared to stand up for them, and he therefore served two years, in 1963 and 1964, as SMA's 4<sup>th</sup> President. However, his love for internal medicine never waned, and he continued

practising, initially in the hospitals and later in private practice, till he was in his mid-80s. Neither did his love for the SMA – he followed its events in the *SMA News* and read the *Singapore Medical Journal*, and was present, actively participating, in the 2006 AGM 13 months ago.

The SMA elected him Honorary Member in 2007 for his many achievements, but more so for his spirit that has so many lessons for us even today. There are very few people who can say they held both a Japanese and later, a GMC practising license. Only he can say he was the first “local boy” to reach the post of Acting DMS and Assistant Permanent Secretary Health, and not many can say that they provided leadership to the Profession in Hospital Practice, in the Ministry, and as a President of the SMA – all the while still serving his patients well into his 80's. He cannot be present with us tonight because recent ill-health forces him to rest at home, but let us nonetheless offer Dr Ho Yuen, Past President of the SMA and Honorary Member, a round of applause.

Finally, may I conclude by announcing that our President, Dr Wong Chiang Yin, will visit him very shortly to confer the Honorary Membership in person. ■