

Citation of SMA Honorary Member: Dr Chen Ai Ju

Delivered by Dr Wong Chiang Yin

Editorial Note:

The SMA Honorary Membership 2003 was conferred on Dr Chen Ai Ju at the SMA Annual Dinner, on 16 November 2003, at the Raffles Town Club.

Good Evening, Minister of State for Health and Transport, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

It is a rare honour for a 35-year-old doctor like me to be given the opportunity to read the citation of a giant in the medical arena. A giant who has been boss, mentor and role model to a whole generation of doctors in the Ministry of Health's (MOH) Headquarters, including myself. I hope I am equal to the privilege and honour given me tonight.

Dr Chen Ai Ju graduated with MBBS from the local medical school in 1965. After housemanship, she was appointed as Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Social Medicine, in the same medical school. Some of her more prominent students include past SMA President, Prof Goh Lee Gan, who is unable to be here tonight as he is at the CFPS Dinner. Prof Goh, who subsequently obtained a distinction in undergraduate Social Medicine, remembers Dr Chen as an accomplished teacher in Biostatistics. Some of you will undoubtedly find this story incredible as Dr Chen looks so much younger than Prof Goh. And even as we speak, the gap continues to widen.

Thereafter, she went for further training in UK and obtained no less than three Diplomas: one in Child Health from University of London, one in Public Health from the University of Liverpool and a third in Tropical Medicine and Health also from the University of Liverpool.

Upon her return to Singapore, Dr Chen worked in the Maternal and Child Health Service from 1971 to 76. In 1976, she was appointed Director of Research and Epidemiology in MOH, a post she held until 1985, when she was promoted to Deputy Director of Medical Services (DDMS, Primary Health). In 1991, she was appointed DDMS (Hospitals). It was during her stint as DDMS (Hospitals) that I first encountered Dr Chen in MOH. I was called up for an interview for the post of medical officer in a new department to be set up in MOH HQ, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Department in mid 1995. She had this quizzical look in her eyes when she went through my records. She asked me no less than three times, "You are good in Chinese, and you are from ACS?" I suppose she must have been thinking, why would anyone recommend an ACS boy to me for a job that required a decent command of the Chinese Language?" Anyway, in what are in my recollection the only two displays



Dr Chen Ai Ju, SMA Honorary Member 2003, receives her award from Dr Lee Pheng Soon, SMA President.

of imperfect judgment, she gave me the job. As some of you would know, I have been trouble ever since, both to MOH and the medical fraternity at large.

The second display of sub-optimal judgment was of course agreeing to have me read this citation.

When the previous Permanent Secretary / Director of Medical Services (DMS) Dr Kwa Soon Bee retired in 1996, Dr Chen was promoted to DMS, the apex post for doctors in MOH. She held the substantive grade of Superscale C, a rare achievement attained by probably less than ten doctors in the history of the medical service.

During her stint as DMS and Registrar of Singapore Medical Council, the Ministry of Health saw many advances in the area of health policy and public health. As Registrar, Singapore Medical Council (SMC), she oversaw the revision of the Medical Registration Act and the promulgation of the Specialist Register. Voting for the SMC became compulsory.

Under her leadership as DMS, a new generation of health administration and public health doctors were recruited and trained. The many public health physicians that we may now deem as familiar faces after the last SARS outbreak were all in some way or the other, selected and trained by her.

Dr Chen's many other landmark initiatives in her years in MOH include strengthening the Healthy Lifestyle programme, especially in the area of Smoking Control. In the area of regulation, the development of control of Chinese Proprietary Medicines, Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners, and Advance Medical Directive, were all important milestones achieved during Dr Chen's term.

For her service to public health and to the nation, she was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of

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Physicians, Edinburgh, and has been decorated by the Singapore Government no less than three times: the Long Service Medal, the Public Administration Medals, Bronze and Silver.

Gainfully retired since 2000, she spends her time as a Director on the Board of the Health Promotion Board, a member of the Governing Council of Dover Park Hospice, as well as Advisor to the Ministry of Community Development

and Sports on programmes for Senior Citizens. She was also made a Justice of Peace this year.

Tonight, for Dr Chen Ai Ju's contribution to public health and the medical profession in Singapore, the Singapore Medical Association would like to confer upon her its highest honour, an Honorary Membership in the Association.

I would like to now call upon our President, Dr Lee Pheng Soon, and Dr Chen Ai Ju, on stage for the conferment. ■