

Physician, Teacher and Medical Historian

The citation for SMA Honorary Member Prof Lee Yong Kiat, delivered by Prof Fock Kwong Ming

Mr Khaw Boon Wan, Acting Minister for Health and Senior Minister of State for Finance; President of SMA; President of Malaysian Medical Association; colleagues and friends.

This evening, we are to witness the conferment of SMA Honorary Memberships on Dr Chee Phui Hung and Prof Lee Yong Kiat.

It is my single honour, double pleasure and triple excitement to read the citation for Prof Lee Yong Kiat, a physician, a teacher and a counsellor who had served the medical profession in Singapore for the last five decades.

Prof Lee Yong Kiat was born in Singapore on 8 October 1928. He received his early education at Anglo Chinese School where he was the top boy. He excelled in every subject, including Latin and Scriptures, the significance of which will become evident later on in his life.

Lee Yong Kiat went on an Entrance Scholarship to study Medicine at the King Edward VII College of Medicine at the University of Malaya, then sited in Singapore. In 1954, he graduated with distinction in Medicine. Four years later, he obtained his Membership from the Royal Colleges of Physicians, London and Edinburgh. On his return to Singapore, he worked for several years as a Senior Registrar in Medicine before changing course to take up medical administration. He served as the Medical Superintendent of Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and thereafter KK Hospital. Despite the heavy workload, he obtained a LLB in 1962. From his own account, he wanted to reduce weight and decided to study during his lunch hour to keep his mind off food. Law was the chosen study as his knowledge of Latin gave him an advantage. It was also during this period (1965) that he wrote his MD thesis entitled: "Non-medical aspects of induced abortion in Singapore". After 1965, Lee Yong Kiat decided to return to clinical medicine. The reasons for this career change have not been made known to me. Perhaps it is the calling of medicine, the instinct of a physician that prompted him to return to medicine.

He returned to serve as Physician under Dr Gwee Ah Leng in the newly created Medical Unit III in the General Hospital, and in 1970, was transferred to head the Department of Medicine in Toa Payoh Hospital, where he taught medical and dental undergraduates, as well as postgraduates for decades, and was made Clinical Professor of Medicine. Prof Lee was a popular teacher, and many generations of dental and medical students, as well as trainees, remember



• Prof Fock delivers the citation for Prof Lee.



• Prof Lee receives the SMA Honorary Membership from SMA President Dr Lee Pheng Soon.

him vividly. He made his bedside tutorials fun, interesting and beneficial to the students and trainees in his own unique way. Let me describe to you a typical tutorial. At the beginning of each tutorial, Prof Lee would appear with the record cards of the students, and the students would be asked to draw two cards out of the stack. The students whose cards were drawn became the candidates for the tutorial. Next, Prof Lee would introduce a medical officer trainee who would be the examiner for the tutorial. The trainee would have selected the cases beforehand and verified the physical signs, and had the opportunity to read up about the disease / condition. Prof Lee would encourage the trainee to question the student, and then encourage the

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He single-handedly realised that talk was abstract without a home; that virtual centres remain elusive without physical reality. He created the first home for the Singapore Medical Association, the Singapore Dental Association, the Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore, the Singapore Government Medical and Dental Officers Union, the Academy of Medicine, and the College of General Practitioners, all under one roof! When the Ayer Rajah Expressway ran right through the first home, he persuaded the Ministry of Health to provide the second home in its current premises.

So why are we honouring him again tonight? It is because we are a maturing society; one which realises that it takes more than academic brilliance to build and shape a nation. It requires loyalty and commitment. These are abstract concepts, but fleshed out when one remembers that we are all who we are because of our colleagues, mentors, and students. We know who stood by our side when we were medical students and young doctors. We know who gave us opportunities and listened to us when we were nobodies. It is because these memories

diminish with time that Dr Chee has hectored and driven us to remain true and faithful to one another no matter what the age and how far the distance.

As Dean of the Medical School, I cannot tell you how much we treasure these values. Only the alumni remembers, and in this day where professionals must take the lead in self-regulation, no one can help us more in this than a united and dynamic alumnus; an alumnus where everyone is known by their first name. The fact that that the "Agong" has lunch with every new Dean is a reminder to me that the past, present and future should be seamless.

As an old friend and colleague wrote of Dr Chee: it is ironic for someone who consciously sets out to be a maverick, to prick all the bubbles of hypocrisy and pretentiousness, to be smothered with kudos, medals, and lifetime achievement awards from the very people that he cajoles and terrorises. It must be because we can see through to the soft inner core: that of a caring and sympathetic man who feels passionately about his profession, friends, colleagues, and family.

It is now my pleasure to call upon the President of the SMA, Dr Lee Pheng Soon, to come on stage with Dr Chee Phui Hung for the conferment of the SMA Honorary Membership. ■

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students to question the trainee at the end of the session. The trainee and the student would be given feedback on their performance by Prof Lee. In this unique way, he combined undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, and emphasised the role of learning by teaching.

Prof Lee was generous with the students. At the end of the posting, they were invited to a departmental dinner paid for by Prof Lee. At these dinners, he would personally extol the virtue of a famous beverage from Scotland to the students and persuade them to partake this beverage. If the students needed further persuasion, Prof Lee would quote Saint John Chapter 2 to them. For those of you who may not be familiar with the scriptures, let me tell you John Chapter 2 described the miracle Jesus performed at a wedding in Cana, turning water into wine. Prof Lee interpreted this miracle as the importance of wine to Jesus. Those end-of-posting dinners became famous in KE Hall as the medical students tried to line their stomachs with butter and toast at teatime just before the dinner to delay absorption.

Prof Lee was a kind and non-threatening examiner, and many students actually prayed that they would meet him as examiner at the final MBBS. But Prof Lee did, in his career, fail a few students, who were, in his words: "So bad that it is only fair to the patient and the profession that they spend a further six months brushing up their medicine."

Prof Lee served as a member of the University Council, the Singapore Medical Council, where he was the Chairman of

Preliminary Proceedings Committee and MOH committees. He has been awarded the Public Administration (Silver and Gold), as well as the Long Service Medal, and is the Emeritus Consultant of Changi General Hospital. He has altogether, 96 publications to his name. Of particular interest is his SMA Lecture entitled: "Consumer or patient" published in SMJ in 1997. His special interest is the early history of medicine in Singapore. Next year, as the Medical School celebrates its 100th Anniversary, Lee Yong Kiat has prepared 11 papers that include the early history of anaesthesia, pathology, radiology, physicians, pharmacists, private practitioners and private hospitals, specialised nursing, the coroner, infanticide and registration of births and deaths in early Singapore, the 1926 General Hospital, and the founding of the medical school in 1905.

Prof Lee is married to Chye Neo, and I understand they will be celebrating their 50th Wedding Anniversary this year. They have three children and five grandchildren. In his retirement, he continues his clinical practice, attends the CME activities of the Medical Department in Changi General Hospital, attending the journal readings, case discussions and post-graduate teaching rounds.

To conclude, I would like to state that Prof Lee Yong Kiat is a truly remarkable man with many talents. He has been a physician, an administrator, a teacher, and a medical historian but above all, he is a humble, warm and humorous human being. I have no doubt that he is worthy of the award of SMA Honorary Membership. ■