

Conferment of SMA Honorary Membership

Citation for Dr Yong Nen Khiong Delivered by Dr Tan Yew Ghee

Yong Nen Khiong was born in Singapore in 1927. He is married to Melina. His father was Yong Ngim Djin, a much revered but also much feared senior mathematics teacher in the Anglo Chinese School, and pillar of the Methodist Church in Singapore. N. K., as he is popularly known, naturally went to ACS, and then to the then King Edward VII Medical School, graduating Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, University of Malaya, in 1952.

He trained in surgery under Professor E. C. Mekie in the University Department of Surgery and was admitted to the Fellowship of both the Royal College of Surgeons of England and Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the first Singaporean surgeon to be admitted to both Colleges.

On his return from England, he joined the University as Lecturer in Surgery under the late Professor Yeoh Ghim Seng. In 1962, he was selected for training in the United States in cardiac surgery. He spent a year in Professor Ben Eiseman's Department of Surgery at the University of Kentucky.

When he returned home in 1963, he found that no provision for cardiac surgery had been made, neither by the University nor the Ministry of Health. There was no trained staff for the cardiac team and no cardiac surgical instruments. N.K. was virtually the one-eyed man in the valley of the blind. He was the only one who knew how to operate the heart-lung machine, and the monitoring equipment. Enlisting the help of his colleagues in Surgical Unit A of the General Hospital, he formed a cardiac surgery team.

On 10 January 1965, Singapore's first open-heart operation, repair of an ostium primum defect in a young Chinese female, was successfully performed by N. K. and his surgical team. Open-heart surgery in Singapore was thus born.

In 1965, N. K. Yong was offered the appointment of Foundation Professor of

Surgery in the new Medical Faculty of the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. Despite pressure to remain in Singapore, N. K. finally submitted his resignation from the University of Singapore, and took up the appointment.

N. K. Yong served 10 years as Foundation Professor of Surgery. During his Professorship, he trained another cardiac surgical team and his team performed the first open-heart operation in Malaya in late 1969. In 1976, N. K. Yong resigned his Chair and took up appointment for a year as Director of Postgraduate Studies in the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

In 1977, he returned to Singapore and set up private practice as consultant general and cardiothoracic surgeon. He was also appointed Clinical Teacher in the University of Singapore's Department of Surgery, an appointment he has maintained since then.

His service to the Singapore Medical Association and the profession began in 1979 when he was elected Honorary Treasurer. He served as President of the SMA in 1980, 1982 to 1985, and from 1984 to 1986 he was concurrently President of SMA, President of the Medical Association of South East Asian Nations, and President of the Commonwealth Medical Association. He has also served as Council Member with the Academy of Medicine in Singapore and Malaysia.

Ask N. K. what he achieved for the Association and the profession during his tenure of office and he would say "not much". What he sought from the outset to establish, both within and without the profession, was that the Association had the inescapable duty of voicing the opinion of the profession on all matters pertaining to the delivery of health care in Singapore, and that such opinion would have the objective of preserving the honour of the profession and the protection of patients' best interests.

One final note and in lighter vein. Always restless, he found himself another



Prof Low Cheng Hock and Dr Yong Nen Khiong.



Dr Tan Yew Ghee.

hobby after leaving academia. He became fascinated with wine and adopted it as a hobby, becoming in due course one of Singapore's most widely known wine personalities. He has been the wine columnist of the Business Times since 1988. For his services to French wine, the French Government conferred on him the honour of "Officer of the Merite Agricole" in 1989. He was wine editor of the Wine & Dine magazine and wine consultant to Raffles Hotel.

In 1992, he was elected International Chairman of the Council of Management of the International Wine and Food Society for a 4-year term, the first Asian to lead this highly respected and prestigious 70-year-old Society. He still serves as Honorary Secretary of the Asian Pacific Zone of this Society.

Surgeon, mentor, open-heart pioneer, champion of the medical profession, wine connoisseur and friend.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the recipient of the SMA Honorary Membership 2002, N. K. Yong. ■