



Dr Teoh delivering his citation at the SMA Annual Dinner 2013

Citation for Prof Low Cheng Hock

By Dr Teoh Tiong Ann

The SMA Honorary Membership is the highest honour that the Association bestows. It is conferred to individuals who have contributed greatly, either to Singapore or to the medical profession.

Tonight, I have the privilege and honour of presenting Prof Low Cheng Hock for SMA Honorary Membership.

Prof Low graduated from the then University of Singapore in 1968. He pursued his passion in Surgery and obtained the Master of Medicine in Surgery in 1972, followed by Fellowship, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and Fellowship, Academy of Medicine, Singapore in 1973. Prof Low was conferred a Fellowship (ad hominem) of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh in 1993 for his outstanding contributions in the field of Surgery.

After surgical training, Prof Low started off his surgical career in Changi Hospital in 1978, moving to Singapore General Hospital in 1980 and, after two years, moved on to Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in 1982. In TTSH, Prof Low was Head of one of the two General Surgery departments, subsequently assuming the role of Head of the combined General Surgery department, before becoming Chairman of the Division of Surgery and

eventually, Chairman of the Medical Board. His long and very loyal 31 years of service in TTSH culminated in his appointment as TTSH Emeritus Consultant and Senior Consultant in Surgery, where he still serves now. He was also appointed as TTSH's first Clinician Mentor and is currently President, National Healthcare Group College, and Clinical Professor of Surgery, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

Prof Low sat on the SMA Council from 1997 to 2004 and served as SMA President from 2001 to 2003. He then served as Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore from 2004 to 2006. These underscored the trust and faith that the medical community had in Prof Low, having elected him to helm two important medical bodies in Singapore, which have elected leadership.

Besides his active professional life, Prof Low made time to volunteer for 25 years with the Singapore Armed Forces before retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel and Senior Surgeon in the Combat Support Hospital. He was also very active in the St John Ambulance Brigade and was Chief Commissioner, St John Ambulance Brigade and Advisor, National St John Council. His outstanding service was acknowledged by him being conferred

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the Knight of Grace of the Order of St John by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Prof Low's unstinting public service was also recognised by him being awarded the Public Administration Silver and Gold Awards by the Government of Singapore.

At present, Prof Low continues his public service as a Justice of the Peace, and also acts as a mediator in the Subordinate Courts. In between, he finds time for trips to Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, where he lends his surgical expertise.

Low Cheng Hock belongs to an illustrious group of surgeons who are learned, well trained, and who possess an innate surgical skill beyond what can be learnt. This skill helps their patients, and colleagues, get through the most difficult situations.

Prof Low has been a stalwart in Surgery and surgical education for many years. Even while distinguishing himself as an accomplished surgeon, the young Low Cheng Hock placed a high value on teaching and training of medical students and surgical trainees. To say that Prof Low is passionate about teaching would be an understatement. This passion has made Prof Low the go-to person for medical students. If you ask medical students to nominate the best teacher in Surgery through the years, Prof Low's name would be on their list. Under his leadership, the TTSH Surgery department has been, and will still be, a much desired medical student posting.

Prof Low has taught us so much. Professionally, he has taught us that, though formal training in surgical skills and competence development is important, learning decision making skills is an art that requires experience. The saying goes, "A good surgeon is one who knows HOW to operate. A better surgeon is one who knows WHEN to operate. But the best surgeon is one who knows WHEN NOT to operate." He has stressed that the practice of Medicine and Surgery should "never just be a challenge to our egos". The patient's well-being should be the utmost of our priorities.

He holds dear the motto of our medical school that does not stress the pride in knowledge but the humility in wisdom, and adds that it is not the science of technology but the art of healing that makes good doctors. Prof Low encourages us to constantly learn, not only from our seniors and colleagues, but from the juniors, nurses, students, other healthcare workers and even our patients. He has shared anecdotes where he tells of symptoms and physical signs picked up by medical students that were missed by the treating doctors.

At the core of Low Cheng Hock is a truly caring and compassionate heart. This care and compassion, coupled with his respect for others, is evident to all who have encountered him.

I quote Prof Low: "Let us practice Surgery not only with competence and skill – but also with a caring heart.

The heart of medical education is the education of the heart. Let us never forget the importance of compassion, patience, humility and respect. Let us never forget the pillars of the 'Art of Surgery' and remember at the centre of it all is our patient – the most important factor. Service to the patient is our motto and our will. Knowledge makes one a doctor but compassion makes one a HEALER."

Whenever Prof Low Cheng Hock's name is mentioned, his trademark "Are you all right?" are the words that reverberate immediately in the minds of those who have had the pleasure of knowing him. These words personify the man who is sincerely concerned each time he says them. Whether it is just a friendly greeting, a reassurance for those in doubt or in trouble, or more dramatically, after he has just saved a life by arresting major bleeding in the operating room, they have greeted, comforted, reassured and relieved many of us through the years... He is truly a friend indeed!

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Testament to Low Cheng Hock's years of making solid friendships with all whom he encounters, his birthday has been, and still is, being celebrated as an "unofficial department celebration" for the past 25 years, where the department and alumni get together. In true Low Cheng Hock fashion, he is extremely shy of adulations. When he could not stop the organisation of the annual celebrations, he conceded to attend only after it was agreed that it will be a gathering to celebrate "everybody's birthday", and collegiality and friendship to all.

Tonight, SMA will bestow on Prof Low Cheng Hock its greatest accolade, Honorary Membership. If I know Low Cheng Hock, I am sure that he will dedicate this to all doctors past, doctors present and doctors future.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have the singular honour and privilege to present Prof Low Cheng Hock, master surgeon, master teacher, mentor, officer, gentleman and a friend indeed!

May Low Cheng Hock's legacy hold firm in our values and... yes, Cheng Hock, we are *all* all right! **SMA**