



Prof John Wong reading his citation during the SMA Lecture 2014

# Citation for Prof Tan Chorh Chuan

By Prof John Wong

**PRESIDENT AND** Council of SMA, distinguished guests, colleagues' ladies and gentlemen: good afternoon. I am delighted to deliver the citation for this year's SMA Lecturer. The SMA Lecturer is appointed by the SMA Council and awarded to eminent and distinguished persons who have made significant contributions to Medicine and the community. I cannot think of anyone who has made a greater impact on Singapore Medicine over the last 20 years than Prof Tan Chorh Chuan. I daresay that his impact on Singapore and globally in his various capacities, which I will briefly mention, will reverberate for years to come.

I have been privileged to have had a ringside seat watching this most unassuming colleague shape and implement policies that have and will touch all our lives, and those of our children. Prof Tan, or Chorh Chuan since we are in the company of friends, did most of this before he turned 50. One can only imagine what he has in store for us over the next few decades!

Chorh Chuan is an alumnus of St Joseph's Institution, where he was already noted to have exceptional talent. He entered the National University of Singapore (NUS), on a Public Service Commission Merit Scholarship to do Medicine, where he continued to excel. He was a popular and well-liked member of the King Edward Hall community, with all remembering his dancing skills to the soundtrack of *Saturday Night Fever*. It was as a medical student that he started exploring the world, soaking up culture, history, and understanding what it means to be a global citizen that would define him in years to come.

After graduating with the NUS MBBS Class of 1983, Chorh Chuan completed his National Service, and went on to do Internal Medicine in the University Department of Medicine, winning the Gordon Arthur Ransome Gold Medal as the top candidate in the Master of Medicine (Internal Medicine) examination. He specialised in Renal Medicine, won a Commonwealth Medical Fellowship and Wellcome

Fellowship to do his PhD at Oxford on erythropoietin, and was a visiting scholar to Wolfson College.

In 1996 he was awarded the Singapore Youth Award; and in 1997 Prof Lim Pin, then Vice Chancellor of NUS, had the extraordinary foresight to appoint Chorh Chuan as Head, Department of Medicine, and shortly thereafter Dean, Faculty of Medicine. He was also concurrently made Chairman of the Medical Board (CMB), National University Hospital (NUH). Chorh Chuan still remains the youngest Dean and CMB NUS Medicine and NUH have ever had.

In 2000, Chorh Chuan went on to become the Director of Medical Services (DMS), Ministry of Health. Chorh Chuan impressed Singapore and the world for his leadership when we were hit by an unknown deadly illness, which was soon identified as a novel coronavirus bearing the acronym SARS. It was an extraordinary time: developing Singapore's strategy when no game plan existed and dealing with enormous pressure from all sectors of society. Although SARS thrust Chorh Chuan into the public limelight, he was also responsible for several other initiatives, including the establishment of integrated chronic national disease management programmes; the launch of the Early Intervention Psychosis Intervention Programme; the introduction of compulsory continuing medical education programme for all doctors; the establishment of a revised and robust framework for the training and accreditation of all medical specialists; and the development of a framework for clinical quality assurance in public sector hospitals.

For his extraordinary leadership, the Government of Singapore awarded Chorh Chuan the Public Service Star in 2003; and on stepping down as DMS to return to NUS as Provost in 2004, the Public Administration Gold Medal.

In 2008, Chorh Chuan was appointed President of NUS, a position with the most profound influence on Singapore's current and future destiny, given that our young women and men are our only and most precious resource. In the same year, he was appointed as Founding Chief Executive of National University Health System (NUHS), Singapore's first academic health system, linking the NUS Schools of Medicine (which includes Nursing), Dentistry, and Public Health with NUH and its National University Heart Centre, National University Cancer Institute and National University Centre for Oral Health under a unified governance. Then Minister of Health Khaw Boon Wan said that one of the key factors in the creation of NUHS was the confidence the Government had in Chorh Chuan as Founding Chief Executive.

2008 was also the year that he was awarded the National Science and Technology Medal for his leadership of Singapore's Biomedical Sciences Initiative, a role he has played since its inception, as one of Mr Philip Yeo's

original musketeers. The impact of Singapore's Biomedical Sciences Initiative in 14 short years continues to resonate with commentaries in *Nature* and *Science*; enormously talented Singaporeans being nurtured in our universities, hospitals, and research institutes; some of the world's leading scientists moving to Singapore; and a greater understanding of how diseases manifest amongst our multi-ethnic populations. Major translational clinical research programmes are developing innovative strategies to prevent, diagnose early, and intervene effectively in diseases important to Singapore. These in turn have attracted industry; developing our small and medium enterprises, as well as attracting some of the world's leading companies to invest in Singapore.

The last six years have been an explosion of activity by Chorh Chuan. He played a key role in setting up the NUS Global Asia Institute with its NUS Initiative to Improve Health in Asia, the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, and the Yale-NUS College. Besides leading NUS as President and NUHS as Chairman of the Board, and serving as Senior Advisor to the Governing Board of Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, his service to Singapore includes chairing the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Advisory Panel to study possible enhancements to the CPF system; Deputy Chairman, Agency for Science, Technology, and Research; and Board Member of the Monetary Authority of Singapore and Singapore's Economic Development Board.

His international service includes chairing the World Economic Forum's Global University Leaders Forum and sitting on the World Economic Forum's Science Advisory Committee. He was, until 2012, the Chair of the International Alliance of Research Universities. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and London; the American College of Physicians; Royal Australasian College of Physicians; the Polish Academy of Medicine; and the Royal Geographical Society, UK.

Besides the honours mentioned already, he is also the recipient of the Dr John Yu Medal from the George Institute for Global Health, Australia; the Albert Schweitzer Gold Medal from the Polish Academy of Medicine; honorary doctorates from King's College London, Duke University, and Loughborough University; and the Achievement Medal from the Singapore Society of Nephrology.

An accomplished painter, trekker, birdwatcher, conservationist, scuba diver, dedicated husband to Dr Evelyn Lee, filial son and the only doctor in a family of nine siblings – may I have the pleasure of presenting Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, physician extraordinaire, scholar, leader, and living example of what a Singaporean, born and bred here can do, to present the 2014 SMA Lecture. ■