

# SMA LECTURE



## 2015

PROFILE

TEXT BY

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*Editorial Executive*

What do a plate of chicken rice, writer Joseph Conrad and the Russian Kremlins have to do with SMA Lecture 2015? Apparently, they all contributed to spice up Professor Tommy Koh's lecture on Medicine and Diplomacy, held on 7 November 2015 at One Farrer Hotel & Spa.

The afternoon's programme commenced with the welcome address delivered by Dr Wong Tien Hua, President of SMA, to an audience of close to 100 doctors and healthcare professionals. In his speech, Dr Wong introduced the exhibition, *Humanity in Medicine – A Look at the Past and Forward to the Future*, put up by Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine at the hotel foyer, before sharing his take on the importance of participation in humanitarian missions. Following the welcome address, Prof Cheah Jin Seng, Emeritus Consultant Endocrinologist from National University Hospital and a long-time friend of Prof Tommy Koh, delivered the citation for Prof Koh (see page 7).

Prof Tommy Koh started his lecture with a humorous story of how he came to be the SMA Lecturer, after accepting an invitation to a "free" lunch of chicken rice. This drew laughter from the audience, who quickly warmed up to our lecturer, attesting to his exceptional diplomatic skills. In his lecture, Prof Koh shared several personal

anecdotes, including his close encounter with the Russian Kremlins and how the plaque to honour the Polish writer Joseph Conrad came to be installed at Fullerton Hotel, to illustrate the five main thrusts of his lecture. He concluded by reiterating the important role that doctors play in promoting Singapore's good relations with our ASEAN neighbours and the world. (For the full text of Prof Tommy Koh's lecture, please refer to page 9.)

Following the lecture, a panel consisting of Prof Tommy Koh, Dr Benjamin Seet, Executive Director of the Biomedical Research Council, A\*STAR, Dr Vivien Lim, a Specialist in Endocrinology from Gleneagles Medical Centre, and moderator Dr Toh Han Chong, took to the stage for a Q&A session.

During the panel discussion, many thought-provoking and interesting questions were raised, to which the



*Legend*

1. Dr Wong Tien Hua delivering his welcome address
2. Dr Toh Han Chong, emcee and moderator for the afternoon
3. The Humanity in Medicine – A Look at the Past and Forward to the Future exhibition
4. Group photo of SMA Council members with Prof Cheah and Prof Koh
5. Dr Tan Lai Yong offering his opinion during a query
6. The panellists for the afternoon's discussion
7. Dr Geh Min raising a query during the panel discussion
8. Participants listening attentively during the lecture



panellists discussed with enthusiasm and candour. One concern raised was the management of diversity in local healthcare and the allocation of places for foreigners in our medical schools, to promote cross-cultural relations. In Prof Koh's opinion, it is beneficial to maintain diversity in our healthcare environment. However, he also admits that it is challenging to maintain an optimal ratio of local and foreign students in institutions of higher learning amid growing pressure from Singaporean parents.

On the trade-offs and risks associated with participating in overseas humanitarian missions, Dr Benjamin Seet shared that,

although some have viewed his decision to join the public service as career suicide, he has no regrets, for he has had the opportunity to see the world and pursue his desire to serve on medical missions with the SAF Medical Corp. He opined that the few years one gives up is insignificant in light of the longevity (60 to 70 years) of one's medical career, to which Dr Vivien Lim wholeheartedly agrees. Dr Lim further shared that she has been fortunate to have supportive colleagues who held the fort in Singapore while she was on her numerous overseas mission trips. Both Dr Seet and Dr Lim also assured the audience that they had never been exposed to dangerous situations

during their overseas missions, as the organisations they served with place high priority on the safety of their volunteers and medical teams.

By 5 pm, the panel discussion drew to a close with a final comment from Prof Tommy Koh on the potential of Singaporeans as a whole to do good and to triumph over evil, not only in our society, but also in our world.

The SMA Council thank Prof Tommy Koh, Prof Cheah Jin Seng, our panellists and participants for making SMA Lecture 2015 a successful and enriching one. ♦