

IN MEMORY OF

Dr Ong Beng Hock



**Text by Dr T Thirumoorthy, Life member,
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SGH Dermatology, with contributions from Dr Tan Suat Hoon,
on behalf of National Skin Centre**

Dr Ong Beng Hock was a senior consultant pathologist at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) and devoted almost his entire career to dermatopathology. He was the first pathologist who developed an interest in dermatopathology in Singapore. He was a Life member of the Dermatological Society of Singapore and SMA.

Dr Ong was born in Ipoh, Perak, in Malaysia and had his early education in Anderson School Ipoh. He started his undergraduate medical training at the then University of Malaya in Singapore in 1952. He spent his postgraduate training in general pathology at the Hammersmith Hospital, London and Royal Infirmary, Leeds and dermatopathology training at the St John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin, London from 1967 to 1969.

His continuous and unending devotion to dermatopathology since 1969 set the foundation and trail for the development of dermatopathology and interest among both pathologists and dermatologists in Singapore.

I came to know Dr Ong when I joined the Middle Road Hospital (MRH) in 1979, by which time he had established himself as an eminent dermatopathologist in Singapore and possibly in the region. Dr Ong's effort, together with that of Dr Jimmy Sng and their close friendship with the late Dr VS Rajan, was instrumental in setting up a satellite pathology department in MRH in 1976, the precursor to the National Skin Centre (NSC). Most dermatologists may take for granted the existence of a pathology laboratory at MRH and NSC – this was not the norm for other specialties in that era – and the privilege of processing the biopsy specimens in-house and making it available for the dermatologist for full and immediate access.

Dr Ong's generosity also made easy access to skin biopsy specimens, reports and photomicrographs for research, publications and presentations.

Dr Ong was not only present at MRH and NSC on a regular basis; he was fully supportive of having a trainee and even a specialist dermatologist sitting with him at the multi-head microscope to learn the ropes of dermatopathology.

For many years, he was the only dermatopathologist ready to be present at all the hospital's Clinico-Pathological Conferences (CPCs) and clinical meetings of the DSS to give his opinion of the histopathology. In the old MRH days, DSS meetings

started around 6.30 pm and ended around 9.30 pm.

Under his guidance and advisory leadership, the Histology Laboratory in the NSC continued to provide high-quality dermatopathology services and consultation. Even after his retirement, he continued in active service as a visiting consultant to both SGH and NSC.

Throughout his career spanning more than 40 years in histopathology, his passion and devotion to teaching dermatopathology had been exemplary. His opinions were highly valued both at the regular reporting sessions and at CPCs. All of us who had the privilege of learning dermatopathology from him knew him as a perfect gentleman, even in the way he pointed us to the right diagnoses.

In his unassuming ways, he had never failed to impart his vast experience

or provide his invaluable input to the technical and professional aspects in the running of the Histology Laboratory at NSC.

When I had the privilege of setting up the dermatology unit at SGH in 2002, both Dr Ong and the then head of pathology, Dr Gilbert Chang, welcomed us dermatologists with utmost friendliness and sincerity for regular CPCs, and opened all the facilities of the pathology department for our access. This generous offer of collegiality and friendship continues to this day, with an excellent working relationship between the Departments of Pathology and Dermatology in SGH, all for the benefit of our patients and promoting the art and science of dermatopathology.

He encouraged and helped train several pathologists and dermatologists in dermatopathology and as the younger dermato-

pathologists left the public sector, Dr Ong remained steadfast in his commitment to public service till the very end.

Dr Ong to me was a dedicated doctor who epitomised the professional virtues of service, humility, conscientiousness and generosity. He did not enrich himself in monetary wealth in his medical career. Instead, he enriched the knowledge and skills of many of us dermatologists – enabling us to help serve our patients better. I openly declare myself as one of the beneficiaries of Dr Ong's generosity in sharing his knowledge and experience. He always gave a clear and honest opinion, and freely embraced differences of opinion and willingness to change his opinion.

On 26 June 2016, the dermatology fraternity lost an irreplaceable colleague. ♦

