

CITATION FOR A/PROF YEOH KHAY GUAN

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On behalf of SMA, I would like to thank you for your support and welcome you to the SMA Lecture 2018. The SMA Lectureship is awarded to eminent and distinguished persons who have made significant contributions to medicine and the community. With the programme we have lined up today, I am confident that you will not regret your decision to spend your Saturday afternoon with us.

This afternoon, the SMA will be presenting the SMA Lectureship to A/Prof Yeoh Khay Guan, a highly respected leader and appreciated colleague in the profession. While we often invite to the podium luminaries that are outside the profession, the pleasure and pride tends to be augmented when the SMA Lecturer is one of us. It is therefore a true honour for me when I was nominated by Prof Yeoh to deliver his citation today.

A/Prof Yeoh Khay Guan, or Khay Guan since we are among friends and colleagues, hails from Anglo-Chinese School, where he often claims to have had a mediocre academic record. But true to his school motto, "The best is yet to be", his CV just got more and more interesting as I prepared this citation. Khay Guan graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1987, and went on to obtain his Master of Medicine (Internal

Medicine) in 1992, where he was awarded the Seah Cheng Siang Gold Medal for being the most outstanding candidate that scored the highest marks in the clinical section of the examination. He was appointed a lecturer in 1993 and senior lecturer in 1997, in the Department of Medicine of the then NUS Faculty of Medicine, which is now the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine), where he completed his specialty training in gastroenterology. From 1996 to 1997, he was awarded the China Medical Board Fellowship for Post-graduate Studies at the Digestive Disease Center, Medical University of South Carolina. Upon returning to NUS in 1998, he was appointed assistant professor; by the year 2000, he was promoted to associate professor in NUS Medicine; and three years later, he was made senior consultant in the Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at the National University Hospital. In 2003, he was admitted as a Fellow by the Glasgow Royal College of Physicians and in 2005 by the London Royal College of Physicians.

Deanship

In November 2011, Khay Guan succeeded Prof John Wong as dean of NUS Medicine, after serving as vice dean since 2002. In the past

seven years, he built upon the strong foundations laid down by his predecessors and achieved deep, steady progress in the medical school through a style of governance that emphasises stability and sensibility. Internally, he reorganised the basic science departments into a medical science cluster that is more integrated and synergistic through sharing of resources and talents. To boost NUS Medicine's ability to attract and retain talents, Prof Yeoh augmented the clinician-scholar and clinician-scientist tracks. Recognising that education is a team effort beyond the boundaries of the Kent Ridge campus, and as a team player himself, Khay Guan ensured that all healthcare institutions and clinical faculty contributing to the undergraduate teaching of NUS Medicine's students receive due recognition for the part they play. He conducted regular engagement sessions with clinician-educators and teachers in the hospitals and solicited feedback to strengthen the collaborations. His designated successor as dean, A/Prof Chong Yap Seng, shared that Khay Guan's logical and common-sense way of thinking through issues, decision-making and implementation has helped the school to make tremendous advancement, especially in remapping the undergraduate

medical curriculum and improving its pedagogy. In his quiet and effective way, Khay Guan has taken NUS Medicine to a higher level of strength and consolidated the school's position as one of the top medical schools in Asia.

External

The dedication and influence of Prof Yeoh's leadership extends, however, far beyond the boundaries of NUS Medicine and National University Health System (NUHS). He has served, and is still serving, in many committees, task forces, working groups, panels and boards. At NUS, in addition to his deanship, Prof Yeoh also serves on the Health Innovation Programme Steering Committee and the Translational Laboratory in Genetic Medicine Steering Committee. He is also a member of the Governing Board for the Singapore Institute for Neurotechnology. At the Ministry of Health (MOH), he chaired the MOH Review Committee for Residency Training, which brought about important adjustments to the resident training programme. He is currently a member of the MOH Specialists Accreditation Board, National Postgraduate Year 1 Assessment Committee and the MOH Medical Licensing Examination Steering Committee. He has been an appointed member of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) since 2011, where he also serves as vice-chairman of SMC's Complaints Panel. Since 2009, Prof Yeoh has also been the chairman of the Health Promotion Board's Steering Committee on the National Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme. At A*STAR, he is currently a member of the Industry Alignment Fund-Pre-Positioning Programme, National Medical Research Council (NMRC) Infrastructure Review Panel for RIE2020, NMRC Clinician Scientist Award Panel and NMRC Singapore Translational Research Investigator Award Panel.

Research

But Khay Guan may even be better known for his inspiring achievement as a world-class researcher. Even in his early years of doctoring as a gastroenterology trainee, his potential in converting clinical curiosities into

systemic enquiries and finally to translatable knowledge was already starting to show, hinting strongly at his future success as a clinician-scientist. During that period, I believe he showed much research interest on chilli and its effect on the stomach. Yes, the red hot chilli that we use to spice up our meals. But Prof Yeoh did not stop with just being curious. Instead, he studied the effects of chilli and discovered that contrary to common belief, chilli and capsaicin are actually protective to the gastric mucosa, which was a great relief to the many Singaporeans who love spicy food. He proceeded to publish several papers and make quite a number of scientific presentations on the topic, culminating in the prestigious Young Clinician Award at the 10th World Congress of Gastroenterology in 1994.

The rest, as they say, is history. Prof Yeoh went on to author or co-author over 170 peer-reviewed papers over a span of 15 years, particularly on gastric cancer – an amazing feat, considering the time and energy that he has to distribute among his other responsibilities in leadership, education and clinical service. In 2013, he was lead principal investigator of the Singapore Gastric Cancer Consortium, a national flagship research group, which aims to redefine the management and improve the outcomes of gastric cancer in Singapore through early diagnosis, a project supported by a Translational and Clinical Research Flagship Programme grant from NMRC amounting to \$24,999,999.60. Through his work with Prof Yoshiaki Ito and other multicentre collaborators, Prof Yeoh made many important research findings and produced numerous publications impacting the diagnosis and management of gastric cancer. In early 2018, he and his colleagues published a landmark paper in the journal *Cancer Cells*, which used DNA sequencing to identify patients with intestinal metaplasia that are associated with subsequent dysplasia or gastric cancer, separating them from patients that exhibit normal-like epigenomic patterns, who were associated with regression. The

translation of bench research findings to impactful clinical application is a testament to Khay Guan's talent, perseverance and resilience in leading a project through the entire research continuum, and sets a standard to emulate for clinician-scientists in Singapore.

But Khay Guan saw his role in the academia to be more than just being a successful and well-published researcher. He is able to see the systemic issues and needs, and made it his calling to change the research mindset and culture across all levels of seniority in NUS Medicine and in Singapore. For example, one of his notable initiatives was to set up the Medical Grand Challenge in NUS Medicine, a medical students-led innovation programme that encourages them to identify unmet healthcare needs and work collaboratively with students from other faculties, like engineering, to explore creative solutions that will address these challenges. He has also worked hard to source for research funding to support research excellence at the medical school, and led by example with his own research efforts in gastric cancer.

In 2013, Prof Yeoh was deservedly awarded the National Outstanding Clinician Scientist Award, one of the key National Medical Excellence Awards by the MOH. All of these achievements, ladies and gentlemen, were attained while serving as the dean of Singapore's largest and oldest medical school.

In 2016, he was conferred the Public Administration Medal (Silver) in recognition of his multifaceted contributions to healthcare and the medical profession in Singapore.

NUHS

Some of you may be aware that Khay Guan will be stepping down soon as the dean of NUS Medicine, but he is definitely not retiring from healthcare and his journey will continue. He will be continuing, in a full-time capacity, his role as Deputy Chief Executive of the NUHS – a responsibility that he has held concurrently with all his other appointments since January 2014. This



will be the next chapter in his illustrious career as he strives to develop NUHS as both a regional healthcare cluster and an academic medical centre. Yet again, living up to his school motto "The best is yet to be".

Leadership style

I must confess that the last time I presented a citation for the dean of another medical school, he jokingly told me later that he thought he was listening to his eulogy. But I have always believed that while we're here primarily to learn from the SMA Lecture, we can also benefit from the SMA Lecturer's achievements, character and values. Which is why I have not been economical with my words nor have I exercised restraint in my sharing of Prof Yeoh's remarkable journey. Furthermore, in spite of all his achievements, Prof Yeoh remains a humble and unassuming friend and colleague. While I respect his preference to remain low key about his achievements and virtues, I personally feel that the profession today is in need of such an excellent role model. Therefore, it is also my obligation this afternoon to give you a glimpse of Khay Guan's remarkable emotional quotient, which I believe contributed to his many successes and to the positive influence he has had on the medical school and those around him.

I have never personally worked directly for Khay Guan, except for serving as his co-chair in the MOH Residency Review Committee a few years ago. But it was an experience where I learnt much from him about running a productive meeting – good active listening, providing good summary of issues, avoiding micromanagement, offering solutions decisively and achieving better results from nudging an agenda rather than forcing things down people's throats. One of his colleagues shared that in the past seven years of his deanship, he has been very effective while remaining popular with the students as well as the faculty, which is not an easy task. He is both highly respected and warmly regarded by all, but never feared in the negative sense.

As a superior officer and leader, Khay Guan has earned his respect and following not by hierarchy or authority, but by true leadership qualities. Those who have had the privilege of working with and for him are grateful for his unwavering support and backing, and for his readiness to be accountable. He never shirks from responsibility and is ready to acknowledge any mistakes, apologising on behalf of his team – all these done in a quiet and modest way.

One of his staff had this to share:

"Khay Guan is the type of boss people gladly go the extra mile for because he gives trust and space as people work and lets them know that he has got their backs covered. He demands high standards and makes it clear when these are not met. But in the decade that I have worked with and for him, I have never seen him lose his composure or lash out at staff who under-delivered."

And another had this to say:

"Khay Guan will be remembered by the administrative and executive staff as a dean who notices and remembers the colleagues who beaver away in quiet corners of the School."

Khay Guan's collegial and approachable style has facilitated warmer ties and closer collaboration between NUS Medicine and organisations like SMA and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine. His relaxed personality and his honest and open-minded approach have catalysed collaborations with other organisations. This has also been a key factor to his highly successful multicentre, multidisciplinary and collaborative gastric cancer TCR Flagship Programme, which is a refreshing story in today's highly competitive world of biomedical research.

Summary

Prof Yeoh Khay Guan has indeed much to teach us beyond just his Lecture. Allow me to attempt a summary.

As a clinician, Khay Guan has gone beyond a mere healer to a healthcare leader that has and will help many more patients by improving the system of clinical care.

As an educator, he has gone beyond a mere clinical teacher to a leader in medical education who will bring benefit to generations of students by enhancing the system and environment for learning and training.

As a researcher, he has gone beyond a mere prolific clinician-scientist to a research leader who accelerated research at a systemic level, by improving the research culture and infrastructure.

As a leader, he has gone beyond a mere administrator to a visionary and effective yet empathetic leader who would bring about all-round organisational improvement to the medical school and profession.

And above all, his unassuming, humble and approachable personality, and his scientific curiosity, integrity, honesty and compassion, have made him a much loved and respected role model among his medical colleagues, friends, collaborators, students and staff – truly a doctor, scholar, scientist and gentleman.

I would like to end this citation with a quote that is generously shared by one of Khay Guan's colleagues and deputies, A/Prof Lau Tang Ching, vice-dean for Education at NUS Medicine. Echoing the views of many other colleagues at NUS Medicine, Prof Lau shared the following philosophical thoughts on Prof Yeoh:

"He is like water. The excellence of water appears in its benefitting and respecting all things. It is full of compassion and where it flows, lives flourish. It is transparent and exemplifies integrity. With humility, it occupies without striving and does not mind flowing to low places."

While many of us know that Khay Guan's favourite liquid is probably more than mere H₂O, I think Tang Ching's metaphorical use of water here to describe Khay Guan is most apt and elegant.

It gives me great honour and pleasure to invite to the podium, my good friend and fellow doctor, dean of NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, A/Prof Yeoh Khay Guan, to deliver the 2018 SMA Lecture, sharing with us his wisdom on "The Future of Medical Education". ♦

