

Citation for Dr Tan Cheng Bock on His Conferment of the SMA Honorary Membership

By Dr Lim Teck Beng



Left to right :
Dr Tan Cheng
Bock & his wife
Cecilia, Prof Low
Cheng Hock

Dr Tan was born in Singapore and in five days' time he will be 61 years old. We would like to take this opportunity to wish him happy birthday. He graduated from the University of Singapore in 1968. He is married to Cecilia, a practising pharmacist and they have two children and a grandchild.

Dr Tan came from a humble background. His father was a Harbour Board employee earning a small salary to support a family of seven. They lived in a two-room quarters. Dr Tan is the second son. Life was a struggle. He often told his close friends that during the worst times, when he was given two eggs, he knew it was his birthday.

On looking back, these were not real disadvantages, in fact they were the ingredients for later successes in life and more importantly I think his early life experiences have contributed to his empathy for the underdogs and the underprivileged.

Career-wise, Dr Tan has distinguished himself in three fields: medical, political and corporate.

FIRST, THE MEDICAL PRACTITIONER

Quite early on, Dr Tan had decided to become a family physician. Whilst his colleagues were trying to use the two weeks of elective posting to study for the final MB examination, he chose to

attach himself to a local GP. That was a good start.

He began private practice by working as an assistant in a clinic in Somopah area and later in Yishun before he set up his own practice in Ama Keng. These were all rural areas in the early seventies. His patients were generally simple rural folks highly suspicious of the hospital system. He used to have to set drips for patients with bad gastroenteritis at home! Being a family physician requires one to go beyond symptoms, signs and medicines. He practised with a heart. His busy clinic, his many patients who have become his lifelong friends and supporters bear testimony to his success as a doctor who cares.

He was not content to just practise medicine. He took interest in the affairs and welfare of the medical profession and its doctors. He is not an armchair critic or observer. He got himself actively involved. He was at various times, Assistant Secretary, and later Chairman of Society of Private Practice, Founder President of Association of Private Practitioner of Singapore, Council Member of the SMA, Chairman of SMA Trust Fund, Member of SMA Ethics Committee and Council Member of College of General Practitioners. He was also a part-time clinical teacher in NUS. The SMA invited Dr Tan to be one of the three doctors to own SMA Private Limited in trust when this was formed in 2000. In his quiet

way, Dr Tan has been a friend of the SMA and the medical profession.

SECOND, THE POLITICIAN

In 1979, in spite of being involved in so many medical activities, Dr Tan found that he had some energy left to join the PAP and became the MP for Ayer Rajah Constituency in 1980. He has since held that post.

Apart from being MP, he was given many portfolios. He was deployed to look after Anson Constituency which was lost to JB Jeyaretnam in 1981. He was also Chairman of Feedback Unit from 1985 - 89. He was Member of PAP Central Executive Committee from 1987 - 96. He was Chairman of GPCs in National Development, Environment, Education and Communication at various times.

However, to the man in the street, Dr Tan is sometimes regarded as the parliamentarian who is actually an opposition member masquerading as a government MP. He has the courage to speak his mind and this has endeared him to many. It is no accident that he has consistently managed to be among the MPs who polled the highest number of votes in the general elections.

We have asked him to share his experiences as a politician and he has obliged by being a speaker at several SMA meetings.

THIRD, THE CORPORATE MAN

The SMA is not the only organisation that wants him. The private corporate sector wants him too. He is Chairman and Director of four well-known companies.

By any yardstick, Dr Tan is a successful man and more importantly, he is one who has given a lot back to society, to his patients, to fellow colleagues and to his profession. He is a trailblazer. The SMA is certainly proud to be associated with him and to have him accept its Honorary Membership. ■