

2 SMA Advisory
4 Physician or Politician
5 Clockbuilders and Timekeepers
7 New Health System for the 21 st Century
8 Of Armadillos, Auto-Genocide & AIDS
10 Fishes, Frogs, Flies and Fries

SMA NEWS

Doctors as Politicians *By A/Prof Goh Lee Gan*

Good politicians play crucial roles in nation building. Whether doctors make good politicians or not, has often been asked. There is never a bigger opportunity to answer this question. We have now nine doctors in Parliament and amongst them, three are Ministers of State. This is unprecedented in the history of Singapore.

TWO VIEWS

It has also prompted two articles in this issue of the SMA News. Dr Wong Wee Nam (pg. 4) sees no reason why training in Medicine would not make doctors good Members of Parliament. They can apply the skills of communication and problem solving in dealing with matters of the State. He cautioned however, that it does not mean that all doctors will pass with flying colours as politicians.

Another more sedate viewpoint comes from Dr Wong Chiang Yin (pg. 5). He does not agree that doctors can naturally make good politicians. "Performance under fire is what counts at the end of the day". He feels that doctors still have much to prove that as a profession, doctors can do more than see patients. He cautions that "there is still much to do, little to celebrate and even less to shout about". He also pointed out that, "Democratic government is of the people, by the people and for the people; not of doctors, by doctors and for doctors."

ANOTHER TRUTH

There is truth in what both the writers have expounded. What is perhaps also true but not highlighted, is that doctors past and present, all over the world, have proven that those who have a

vision to lead, serve their people and make the world a better place, have succeeded as politicians.

AN EXAMPLE

One such contemporary example is Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland. Her vision and passion for making the world a better place won her a place as the Prime Minister of Norway for over a decade. She is presently the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Dr Brundtland was born in Oslo, Norway, on April 20, 1939. As a young mother and newly qualified doctor, Gro Harlem Brundtland won a scholarship to the Harvard School of Public Health. She returned to Oslo and the Ministry of Health in 1965 to work on children's health issues including breast-feeding, cancer prevention and other diseases.

In 1974, Dr Brundtland became Norway's Minister of Environment. During the 1970's, she acquired international recognition in environmental circles and a political reputation at home. In 1981, at the age of 41, she was appointed Prime Minister of Norway for the first time. Dr Brundtland was the youngest person and the first woman ever to hold the office of Prime Minister. As Prime Minister from 1986-1989 and

1990-1996, Dr Brundtland was Head of Government for more than eleven years.

Throughout her political career, Dr Brundtland developed a growing concern for issues of global significance. It is therefore not surprising that she was nominated to be the Director-General of WHO. In her acceptance speech in May 1998 for the World Health Assembly, Dr Brundtland said, "What is our key mission? I see WHO's role as being the moral voice and the technical leader in improving the health of the people of the world. Ready and able to give advice on the key issues that can unleash development and alleviate suffering, I see our purpose to be combating disease and ill-health – promoting sustainable and equitable health systems in all countries." As Director-General of WHO, her many skills as doctor, politician, environmentalist, activist and manager have come together.

OUR HEARTS AND THOUGHTS

We congratulate our doctor politicians for taking the bold step forward to hold office to serve the people and participate in nation building. Our hearts and thoughts go with them to work towards more good years for everyone. ■



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42nd SMA AGM

Date: **7 April 2002, Sunday**

Time: **2.00 pm - 5.00 pm**

Venue: **Alumni Auditorium, Level 2 Alumni Medical Centre**

42nd SMA Annual Dinner

This year's Annual Dinner will be held on **27 April 2002, Saturday.**

Do keep a lookout for more details in your monthly mailbags.

Don't miss this chance to meet up with your fellow colleagues, and stand a chance to win **attractive lucky draw prizes!**

The views and opinions expressed in all the articles are those of the authors. These are not the views of the Editorial Board nor the SMA Council unless specifically stated so in writing. The contents of the Newsletter are not to be printed in whole or in part without prior written approval of the Editor.

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