

# Surgeon, Teacher, Researcher & Friend

*Citation of SMA Lecturer 2004 Prof Raj Nambiar, delivered by Prof Low Cheng Hock*



*Prof Low Cheng Hock recounts fond memories of being a surgical trainee under Prof Nambiar.*

## Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege and honour to read this citation of Prof Raj Mohan Nambiar – the 2004 SMA Lecturer.

I have known Prof Nambiar for 30 years. I first knew him when I was a graduate student and he was my surgical teacher. Subsequently, I became his Medical Officer and Junior Registrar. Over the years, I was fortunate to become his colleague, and today I am proud to call him my friend. In many ways, he is my mentor, teacher and counsellor, one whom I, and all of us, can look to for advice at any time.

Raj Mohan Nambiar was born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (I am not telling you his age because he looks unbelievably young). He graduated as a doctor at the young tender age of 22. After working for a couple of years in Madras, he moved to UK to pursue his lifetime love of surgery. He obtained his FRCS fellowship in 1962. The winds of change blew him to the beautiful island of Singapore. In 1964, a new star in our country was born.

He began his brilliant career as a Senior Registrar at SGH and rose to become Head of the old Toa Payoh Hospital in 1973. He was transferred back to head the SGH Surgical Department in 1985. I remembered when he moved to head the unit at TPH – Tan Ser Kiat, Tan HK, Rajendren and I were among his earliest surgical trainees. He inculcated in us the good principles of surgery and the foundation of good patient care. Over the years, he has trained generations of surgeons, many of whom are now HODs and Senior Consultants; but we all still look towards him for consultation and advice now and again.

Today he holds the positions of

1. Chairman, Postgraduate Medical Institute, SGH
2. Clinical Professor of Surgery, NUS

3. Emeritus Consultant, CGH
4. Visiting Consultant to TTSH, CGH and AH
5. Member, Specialists Accreditation Board
6. Senior Member, Singapore Medical Council

He was also a past Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore.

Prof Nambiar has sat on more than 35 advisory and specialist committees over the years and his wisdom is well sought after. His contributions are nation-wide, having served in MOH, SGH, NUS, AH, TPH, TTSH and others. He is a superstar.

He has more than 10 fellowship titles to his credit, having attained fellowships and diplomas in many international colleges.

But let me assure you, he is NOT suffering from multiple diplomatosis.

As a matter of fact, he is very strong, healthy and energetic. Many of us would not challenge him on the running circuit. Better to have him on your side. I have him as my regular partner in table-tennis competitions in our hospital annual games.

Very few people can be a very good clinician and yet a good researcher. Prof Nambiar is not only par excellent in his clinical surgery, he is also a very effective bedside teacher, a distinguished researcher, and a very capable administrator. You can say he is Jack of all trades, and master of all.

He has published and co-authored more than 100 publications and has membership in numerous editorial boards. His interest in surgery is wide and exhaustive. He writes brilliantly from top to bottom (I mean from the oral cavity to the anal canal). He is a true general surgeon of the highest order.

Prof Nambiar is a dedicated teacher and encourages teaching, training and research by example and mentoring. I remember one incident 30 years ago, I was studying for an examination and did not have the heart to write a paper or make a presentation. One day, he asked me to present a case of Ca Colon in a 12-year-old boy at a combined surgical meeting. I was reluctant; however, when the boss tells you, you do it. So, I began my first journey in “research” and I found it extremely interesting. Trying to impress everyone, I brought five journals, carrying them in my hands to the presentation. On the way to the presentation, he came up to me as we were walking in, and said: “Let me help you carry them.” Imagine your boss offering to carry your books. Well, I was naive and trying to be impressive by carrying those books to the lecture hall. I cannot say I presented well, but I certainly learnt a great lesson of humility from Prof Nambiar. Through his

encouragement, I also learnt to do reviews and analyse clinical problems. From his examples, I learnt to encourage the younger ones to continue to strive to improve themselves and to stimulate them to take on new challenges.

Prof Nambiar is well known in the circle of surgery internationally. Two days ago, I was in Hong Kong and sitting at a table was the Secretary of Education from Hong Kong, Prof Arthur Li. His first question to me was: “How is Raj Nambiar, my friend?” Whenever you go to surgical meetings, he is well known.

His name is known in Australia, the UK, America and the Asia-Pacific region. He has also contributed toward the International Union Against Cancer, an organisation that has great influence in cancer care.

For all his excellent contributions and lifetime of dedicated services, he was awarded by the Singapore

Government the Public Service Medal (the Public Administration Medal) and he has also received other distinguished awards from local and overseas institutions, including the Edinburgh College medals more than once.

Finally, this citation would not be complete without mentioning the old saying: “Behind every successful man is a lady.” Raj Nambiar has three ladies – his wife Bharathi and two wonderful daughters, and a talented son. They provide him the strong family support and allow Singapore medicine to have a share of his life. We all thank the family of Nambiar for sharing him with us.

(His wife is an excellent cook – curry and homemade yoghurt, the best in Singapore.)

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to present to you Prof Nambiar – the surgeon, the doctor, the teacher, the researcher, and also a great friend, to deliver the 2004 SMA Lecture on “Professional Development in a Changing World.” ■