

A Lifelong Commitment to the Community

Citation for SMA Honorary Member Dr Oon Chiew Seng, delivered by Dr Chee Phui Hung

Oon Chiew Seng was born in Penang in 1916. After a stint as a nurse, she decided that she could serve the sick in a more meaningful manner as a doctor. She went back to school and obtained a Senior Cambridge certificate, enough to get her into the College of Medicine in 1941. I was in my Second Year then. Exercising my privilege as a senior, I ragged her as a "freshie". She took it all in her stride with equanimity and resignation.

Our tranquil existence was shattered when the Japanese bombed Singapore in December 1941. She evacuated to India and managed to carry on with her medical studies. After the war, the College reopened in 1946 and I was back to the Second Year, and lo and behold, she leap-frogged to the Fourth Year! The "freshie" had overtaken the senior gentleman. After graduating in 1948, she was posted to KK Hospital. Then, she proceeded to the UK, obtained her MRCOG in 1955, and returned to KK. She left for private practice in 1959 and retired in 1991.

Whether in KK or in private sector, Dr Oon has performed her professional duties with passion and compassion. Many of us present here have been taught and talked to by her – a teacher who does not suffer fools gladly and tells you so frankly. Moreover, many of you have been delivered by her. My son Winston was.

In spite of her busy practice, she never fails to answer any call by the government and her profession.

She was Chairman of the committee to study the conditions of nursing services in 1963, and President of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O & G) Society in 1967 and a few times after that. She was President of the Alumni Association in 1969, Member of the Singapore Family Planning and Population Board in 1971, and Member of the Post-graduate Examination Committee for the MRCOG. She was appointed Head of the Secretariat of the International Federation of O & G in 1991. She was also Chairman of the Building Fund of the Sree Narayanan Mission Home for the Aged and Sick. In 1995, she initiated the groundwork to build a nursing home for dementia



Dr Oon Chiew Seng receives the SMA Honorary Membership award from Health Minister Mr Khaw Boon Wan.

patients after doing her fact-finding tour of visiting dementia homes in Australia. The result was the Apex Harmony Lodge, which was a home for dementia patients, and up to today, she has been actively involved in the management and operation of the Lodge.

For a lifetime of dedicated service, she has been awarded the Honorary FRCOG and Honorary Fellow of the Asia Oceania Federation of O & G, Honorary Member and Gold Medallist of the Alumni Association, and the PBM by the Government of Singapore.

However, it is not all work and no play. At one point in her life, she was keen on horse-racing. As usual, she does not do anything by half. She became a horse owner and some of her horses have won her prestigious trophies such as the Prime Minister's Gold Cup 1970 in Kuala Lumpur. She also plays a no-mean game of mahjong. Perhaps because of this, she has remained nimble in mind and sharp in tongue. She also has an antique collection of ceramics.

She has travelled widely. With the opening of China, she has toured the country far and wide, even braving the silk route when conditions were primitive. And even to this day, she goes for brisk walks, weather permitting; an exercise programme and a lifestyle the Minister of Health will surely approve and encourage Singaporeans to follow.

Dr Oon has shown all of us how to live a life that is full and rewarding. At an age when many spend their golden years in deserved and graceful retirement, she has continued to serve the community – a role model that all of us should emulate. Alas, as lesser mortals, we fall by the wayside.

Traditionally, it is the prerogative of the President of the Singapore Medical Association to present the award of Honorary Membership. But with his permission, I now call on the Guest of Honour, the Minister of Health to come on stage to do this presentation of the Honorary Membership to Dr Oon Chiew Seng – long overdue and unanimously approved. ■