



Healing Hearts, Touching Minds

Review by Dr Suresh Nair

Preface

Sometime in late December 2020, I received a video invitation card from Dr VP Nair (VP) to attend his book launch. I felt humbled that he had “hand-picked” me to be one of his 50 guests for the launch as he was a man known to hundreds. At the launch, I congratulated VP and suggested that he get the book reviewed for *SMA News*, to which he replied: “Fantastic, good idea! It will be even more fantastic if you wrote the review.” I couldn’t rain on his optimism, yet looking around the hall, I saw more competent writers waiting in line for VP’s autographed book. Suddenly, I felt that he had in his characteristic manner humbled me a second time and I should not refuse him; I had to do it.

Why? Simply because VP is a giant of a man who is not just a doctor but a person of sterling qualities, and who carries with him the charm of disarming anyone with his smile, laughter and genuineness. Here is a man, doctor, friend, mentor and “uncle” who goes the extra mile for all and sundry, and often much more than that, especially for people like me with whom there is a connectedness based on care, respect and affection. So, in my earnest quest to do justice to VP’s publishing endeavour, I researched on how to write a book review and gathered a few friends to guide me through the process. I know that no effort will honour VP adequately for his heart of gold. Instead of daunting me, it made my effort at writing the review more earnest, exciting and interesting. I adhered to uphold his commitment to always aim high and learn from the journey. After writing the book review, I felt trebly blessed by

VP – firstly, for his friendship of over 30 years; secondly, being invited for the book launch; and thirdly, for being the chosen one to write his book review. Indeed, humbled but supremely honoured because of who VP is and will always be – to his family, friends, patients, and the grassroots, Malayalee, global Indian and global Rotary communities, and to me personally – a man of distinction.

Please indulge me in reading my first book review as I ponder writing a biography of VP – the man who overcame struggles on many fronts but always rose above the din with his bright, broad smile and pure heart of gold.

Book Review

The Singapore medical fraternity’s contribution to the written word is noteworthy. While Prof Chao Tzee Cheng’s

Murder Is My Business (published in 1990) served as a forerunner, recent editions include Dr Lee Wei Ling’s *A Hakka Woman’s Singapore* and Dr Charles Toh’s *Heart to Heart*. On 15 January 2021, another medical luminary joined the book club – VP – with the launch of his book *Healing Hearts, Touching Minds – The Journey of an Interventional Cardiologist (HHTM)*.

HHTM is perhaps unique in its multi-dimensional effort, weaving into a single canvas the ambitious and determined doctor’s socio-cultural background, education, practice of medicine and in particular cardiology, and a bunch of thoughts that ranged from the Tiananmen incident to a woman President for Singapore. It is even cheekily contradictory as VP argues a case of women empowerment and yet sallies up to the belles of beauty



Dr VP Nair with Minister Dr Tan See Leng during the book launch

pageants (Miss World no less), the bane of contemporary women's rights leaders. Such is the extent of VP's book that the subtitle, *The Journey of an Interventional Cardiologist*, succinctly summarises what to expect for anyone who picks up the book. As a family friend, colleague and a mentee of VP, I must add that this is not unexpected from the man who combines flamboyance and simplicity, and pragmatism and eclecticism with seamless ease. Aptly, his son, Dr Dinesh Nair, described his father at the book launch as "somewhat of a maverick" and *HHTM* is an unquestionable testimony of that.

In the book, VP makes it abundantly evident that his is not a rags-to-riches story, but one of uncompromised determination and family support. He attributes his advancement through the ages to his family, both immediate and extended. VP acknowledges his wife, Dr Sathy Nair, for her support and devotion to his aspirations, and her fortitude in bringing up their sons Dinesh and Rajesh, who were five and one years old respectively when he first left for his postgraduate degrees in the UK. VP's latent desire to acquire more qualifications, greater expertise and more experience was never quenched, and he continued incessantly on his lifelong learning journey. This book details his many postgraduate qualifications and stints across the globe where his amassed experience and expertise has assisted VP and his patients, and has also helped brand Singapore as a medical hub in interventional cardiology.

A Bachelor of Science (Chemistry) graduate, VP was all set to pursue a teaching career. Interestingly, his early academic interest was overtaken by an inner passion to pursue medicine and so he did, to the benefit of thousands of patients whom he has cared for and tended to over the span of his practice. That said, the good doctor has also devoted time to teaching medical and health subjects.

The medical summation of *HHTM* is not trained to teach, but to inspire. It sets out various medical procedures and protocols that were available in the earlier years of interventional cardiology and how it has found its contemporary status in medical practice.

Another unique feature of this book, perhaps unparalleled in any form of autobiographical or biographical works, is the number of forewords, acknowledgements and endorsements. I won't let the cat out of the bag as to who said what, but it is worth the effort for anyone reading it to bell the cat as to how they would interpret this aspect of the book. I have put it down to VP's defining qualities.

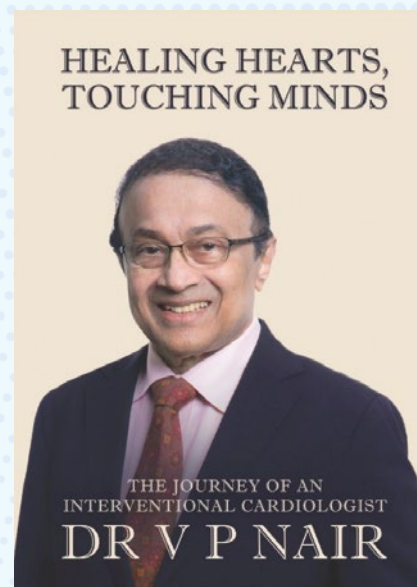
Like many of his generation, VP grew up in colonial and independent Singapore and admired Singapore's founding Prime Minister (PM), the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew. VP remembers PM Lee's words that left an indelible mark on him: "If you want to reach your goals and dreams, you cannot do it **without discipline.**" Adding to the wisdom of the saying is VP's extension of it: "Motivation gets you going but discipline keeps you growing".

In my submission, *HHTM* is a book to be read. Maybe not from cover to cover, but as VP's good friend from their St Andrew's School days and Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large, Mr Gopinath Pillai observed, it is a book best read in "bite-sizes".

The voluminous *HHTM* emerged from VP's downtime due to the restrictions of COVID-19 in 2020 and might I add, what a way to spend it in pursuit of documenting his legacy to his family, profession and the wider medical and Singapore communities. Most nobly, all proceeds from the sale of *HHTM* is donated to The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund – a worthy cause by a generous heart.

Book launch

HHTM was launched on 15 January 2021 at the Singapore Recreation Club (SRC) by Dr Tan See Leng, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Manpower, Second Minister for Trade and Industry and Member of Parliament for Marine Parade GRC. Typical of our COVID-19 times, the book launch was witnessed by 50 guests who were present at SRC and many more globally – especially Singapore, Bangkok, Stockholm, Perth, Seoul, Florida, Moscow and London – who joined online. ♦



Title: *Healing Hearts, Touching Minds: The Journey of an Interventional Cardiologist, Dr VP Nair*

Author: Dr VP Nair

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Available at: Kinokuniya Book Store, Takashimaya, Level 4 D 24-03 Medicine

SMA Members can visit Nair Cardiac & Medical Centre, 3 Mount Elizabeth #16-08, Singapore 228510 for an autographed copy. All proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund which is a recognised charity. For more information, please call Ann at 9691 2718 or Kana at 6235 9226, or email naircardiac@yahoo.com.sg.

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