

# WORLD HEALTH CONFERENCE 2018

## 世界健康大会

Text and photos by Dr Daniel Lee

On 29 July 2016, Dr Margaret Chan, then Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), met with Mr Jack Ma, Special Advisor to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and President of the General Association of Zhejiang Entrepreneurs, in Beijing and they proposed the organisation of a conference that will be the global platform to drive the reform of world health, transform cooperation among governments and private enterprises, and promote sustainable and integrated development in health and healthcare. The first World Health Conference (WHC) was held in December 2017.

The second WHC was held from 19 to 21 October 2018 in Hangzhou, China, with the theme "Health and the Human Community". The conference focused on, among other things, the impact of innovative healthcare technologies and globalisation on human health. SMA representatives, Dr Lee Yik Voon and I, attended last year's WHC at the Chinese Medical Association's (CMA) invitation. Dr Lee, President of the SMA, kicked off the closed-door meeting and spoke on the role of medical associations in influencing healthcare legislation and

policy, drawing examples from the work of the SMA in Singapore.

There were numerous presentations by keynote speakers and opinion leaders at the WHC. The plenary speaker, Dr Margaret Chan, who was the Director-General of the WHO from 2006 to 2017, is a medical doctor and alumnus of the National University of Singapore, where she obtained her master's degree in public health. Dr Chan revealed that although the medical field of public health was considered unglamorous at that time, she chose to specialise in the field initially out of love (ie, to be with her now husband) but eventually fell in love with the specialty when she was able to treat health systems through the use of policy, regulatory and financial levers at various levels. Dr Chan delivered her entire speech at the WHC in mandarin, recalling fondly how she was impacted by what Chinese Premier Li Keqiang once said, "我们不能让一个人生病, 全家人倒下" (translated: we must not allow the illness of a single person to result in the breakdown of the entire family) and discussing how doctors must move beyond treating diseases

and patients to building sustainable preventive health systems.

Other notable speakers included Dr Ada Yonath, a 2009 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry and an Israeli crystallographer best known for her pioneering work on the structure of ribosomes. She shared her research into novel antibiotic binding sites on pathogen ribosomes, which could lead the way for the design of next-generation species-specific antibiotics. Dr Yonath also shared that the rampant use of non-biodegradable broad-spectrum antibiotics that find their way into irrigation systems contributes significantly to the global antibiotic resistance phenomenon occurring across species. She further explained the potential of species-specific biodegradable antibiotics targeting novel binding sites on pathogen ribosomes, and called upon the government and industry leaders to double efforts in this area.

Ms Judith Faulkner, Chief Executive Officer and founder of Epic, shared how she started the healthcare software company in 1979 in the basement of an apartment house with US\$70,000 start-up money and just two part-time



assistants. Hospitals that use its software held medical records of about 64% of the patients in the US and 2.5% of patients worldwide in 2015. At the WHC, Ms Faulkner shared that the mission of Epic is “Do Good. Have fun. Make Money (in this order).” Epic remains a privately held company today. As with the adage “culture eats strategy for breakfast”, she emphasised the foundational importance of culture in a successful organisation and gave examples of how personnel introductions in Epic are made without the use of titles, and how colleagues convey “congratulations” to one another rather than “thank you” for jobs well done, where appropriate.

The conference concluded with site visits to the Shulan (Hangzhou) Hospital and Alibaba Group hosted by CMA for delegates of invited medical associations. Shulan (Hangzhou) Hospital is a 1000-bed JCI-accredited tertiary teaching hospital purpose-built about three years ago on a site where a hotel and retail mall used to stand. It specialises in liver and kidney transplant surgeries in China, among other things. At Alibaba Group, we caught a glimpse of the strength of her corporate culture and saw how a relentless focus on human capital and teamwork can be pivotal to an organisation’s continued success.

We thank the CMA for inviting us to the WHC, and will continue to broaden and deepen ties with medical associations worldwide for the benefit of doctors and patients in Singapore. ♦

**Legend**

1. Mr Jack Ma officiates wedding ceremonies for Alibaba Group's employees
2. Dr Daniel Lee and Dr Lee Yik Voon with CMA Vice-President and Secretary-General Dr Rao Keqin (fourth from left) and CMA representatives
3. Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the WHO from 2006 to 2017, speaking at the WHC



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