

# TRIBUTE TO A/PROF LOONG SI CHIN



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Photos by A/Prof Loong's family

*This eulogy was first delivered on 19 May 2022 at A/Prof Loong Si Chin's wake.*

So much has been said, by so many, on the life of this remarkable man that I am unsure what else I can add.

Dr Loong Si Chin was the proverbial giant that his small frame belied. A giant doctor, a giant teacher and, we know, a giant of a husband and father. To paraphrase, "Perhaps never in the field of Singapore medicine was so much owed by so many to one individual".

He told me once that he disliked travelling overseas for academic meetings and to teach, because he would often feel lonely in the airport lounges and hotels without the company of his dear wife.

Dr Loong, you need not have worried! Your neurology "gospels" have been carried far and wide by your disciples to a large body of neurologists in many corners of the world, and to the benefit of a multitude of patients.

You do not have to take my word, Dr Loong. You now have a better vantage point! From your heavenly perch and

global view, you can see for yourself; doctors in far-flung hospitals using jargon and bedside clinical innovations that you have invented. Doctors in regions far removed – from Malaysia to Myanmar, Kenya to the Philippines, the US to Vietnam, India to UK, Laos to Pakistan, to name just a few.

You can also witness the employment of your "magical" tweaks to clinical methods, for example the proper elucidation and interpretation of pyramidal signs such as Babinski, superficial abdominal, and jaw reflexes.

You may hear these doctors using your humorous mnemonic that simplifies the brain anatomy of the III cranial nerve: "The superior master learns from an inferior pupil."

And you will be pleased to know that seniors in these hospitals, influenced by your teachings, admonish medical students when they mistakenly twirl the wrist while eliciting cog-wheel rigidity of Parkinsonism, or wrongly ask patients to invert their feet when testing for foot drop.

Teaching was indeed Dr Loong's life-passion. In his last weeks, he told his palliative physician that his last wish was to return to teaching, "even if it is for half day".

Maybe because I lost my father when I was very young, it was natural for me to adopt Dr Loong as my professional "father"; and as in all healthy paternal relationships, we often used to disagree and enjoyed the challenge of an academic joust.

In only one instance did it become a little awkward, when I lost my cool and started arguing with him impertinently in front of a visiting faculty; and invariably it had to be over a clinical finding! Thanks to the timely counsel of my good colleague, Dr Lin, I quickly realised my folly and apologised to Dr Loong, albeit only after the meeting.

I sincerely hope you have forgiven me for this trespass, Dr Loong. But you must agree, one fight in a 30-year relationship is not too bad.

Of course, we had many good times. Because he knew of my love for food, he often shared his delicious but compact lunch with me. We both loved audiophile music reproductions, and we spent many hours enjoying the technical and artistic merits of good recordings.

However, the poignancy of our close personal and professional relationship was laid bare by the cruel circumstances of his recent illness.

On the day after he was first diagnosed to have cancer, he rang and requested politely for me to come to his hospital room at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (at that time I was posted to National Centre for Infectious Diseases).



He then did two things that blew me away.

1. He handed me a handwritten paper declaring his end-of-life care statement; for me to keep and help his medical team implement at the appropriate time. It stated his wish for a dignified exit if his condition worsened.
2. He then took out his laptop and transferred all his beloved teaching files, many gigabytes of them, from his laptop to mine.

Dr Loong, I came not to say goodbye, but to celebrate your life that will indeed live on in eternity. I shall therefore end with your last words to me. In an attempt to encourage my nascent work in under-resourced regions, you decided to read me your favourite prose, which I believe was introduced to you, at a very joyous occasion, by your beloved granddaughter.

It is by the novelist and human rights activist Arundhati Roy.

*"The only dream worth having is to dream that you will live while you are alive, and die only when you are dead. To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget." ♦*

#### Legend

1. A/Prof Loong Si Chin and Mrs Loong, life partners for 60 years
2. Inspiring generations of doctors

*"He who studies medicine without books  
Sails an uncharted sea  
But he who studies medicine without patients  
Does not go to sea at all" - William Osler*

## Captain

*In this regard Dr Loong, is CAPTAIN.  
Not of an average boat;  
A ship charting rough uncharted waters.  
Drawing maps that guide ships.  
Counsels on hidden reefs, submerged ice;  
Dangers real and legendary.  
And in a deadly storm,  
As all hands are on deck,  
Courage to  
Pilot through a difficult harbour;  
To find a solaced pier  
Comes from Captain.*

*Yet his charts are also filled with  
Mapped destinations of  
Pristine sunny beaches,  
Life-filled reefs,  
Bountiful fruit;  
For the tired deck-hands to relish  
And  
Love the sea*

*Hormat Pemimpin!*

Uma

