

# In Memory of Dr Teo Seng Hock: A Life of Quiet Leadership and Unwavering Dedication

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Dr Teo Seng Hock passed away peacefully on 30 November 2025. In Singapore's mental health history, Dr Teo stands as a towering figure whose contributions shaped not only an institution, but an entire generation of psychiatrists. His passing marks the end of an era, yet his influence continues to resonate with those he has touched.

## A builder of institutions

Dr Teo shouldered extraordinary responsibilities throughout his career. He served as the longest-tenured medical superintendent of Woodbridge Hospital for 17 years, effectively combining roles that would today require separate positions for CEO, chairman of medical board and various chief officer functions.

His visionary leadership extended beyond daily operations. He played an instrumental role in building the current Institute of Mental Health (IMH), undertaking overseas trips with colleagues and architects to study different psychiatric hospitals. His emphasis was on maximising patient spaces, especially for day care and rehabilitation services. This patient-centred vision reflected his fundamental belief that psychiatric care must prioritise dignity and well-being.

## The master clinician and teacher

Dr Teo's dedication to patient care was legendary. He arrived at the wards very early each morning, already rounding with the ward nursing sister before junior doctors appeared. Colleagues consistently described him as an unwavering source of calm during challenging clinical circumstances.

Doubly qualified with a Diploma in Psychological Medicine and Membership of the Royal College of Physicians (Glasgow), Dr Teo also served as director and chief examiner of the National University of Singapore's postgraduate psychiatry course in the early 1980s, ensuring that training standards met international benchmarks.

Trainees remember him as an astute, meticulous consultant with exceptional clinical acumen. Though soft-spoken and gentle, he commanded respect without raising his voice. He created an atmosphere that put trainees at ease, asking questions designed to clarify understanding rather than intimidate, always focusing on better evaluating and helping patients.

He emphasised that patient records must be comprehensive yet precise for optimal subsequent management. With impeccable handwriting himself, he insisted on legible records with proper punctuation. Trainees fondly recall learning not just psychiatry, but life lessons from him, including diplomacy, humility in success, standing strong through adversity and mastering oneself before guiding others.

## The compassionate administrator

Dr Teo exemplified compassionate leadership. As medical superintendent, he knew staff by name, remembered family details and engaged warmly with everyone regardless of rank.



Opening of the Institute of Mental Health Heritage Garden in 1996 (L to R: Dr Teo Seng Hock, Dr Luisa Lee and Dr Kwa Soon Bee)

Many remember him as a regular presence at the hospital entrance each morning. Yet he maintained firm standards, believing in being resolute when necessary while understanding to those facing genuine difficulties.

He consistently reminded staff that their work centred on dignity, compassion and understanding the person behind the symptoms. Even in administrative matters, he never lost sight of patients, shaping Woodbridge Hospital and IMH's culture throughout his stewardship.

### The enduring legacy

Dr Teo's final years brought multiple health challenges, all of which were overcome to his physicians' amazement, bringing him precious time to spend

with family and friends. His family reflects that his life represented love and triumph – an indomitable will prevailing over hardship, with his legacy living on through hearts touched and deeds inspired.

History will remember Dr Teo for his contributions to psychiatry. But those who knew him will remember the mentor who treated them like family; the calm presence in storms, the teacher who

led by example, and the compassionate clinician administrator who never forgot that behind every patient and staff member were human beings deserving of dignity and respect.

Through the psychiatrists he trained, the systems he built, and the culture of care he fostered, Dr Teo Seng Hock's influence endures and extends far beyond his lifetime. ♦



Dr and Mrs Teo Seng Hock



Group staff photo at Woodbridge Hospital