

CITATION ON DR KWA SOON BEE, SMA HONORARY MEMBER

When Dr Cheong Pak Yean invited me to write and read the citation of Dr Kwa Soon Bee for the conferment of SMA's Honorary Membership, I knew this would be a very difficult task, considering Dr Kwa's numerous achievements and outstanding contributions to the Profession, given the time constraints. However, I'm deeply privileged to be asked to perform this honour and I hope that Dr Kwa will forgive me for leaving out some of his lesser known achievements as time do not allow me to do so.

Born in 1930, Dr Kwa received his early education at the Anglo-Chinese School in Singapore. He proceeded to the King Edward VII College of Medicine at the University of Malaya in Singapore, where he graduated in 1955 with a Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery with distinctions in Social Medicine & Public Health. He was awarded the Brunel-Hawes Gold medal and the Lim Boon Keng Medal for Medicine in the final Professions Examinations.

He then started his Internal Medicine training and proceeded to the UK on a Singapore Government departmental scholarship and obtained the membership of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Glasgow and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1962, specialising in Haematology. It is of significance to note that Dr Kwa was the first Singapore doctor to be fully trained in clinical and laboratory haematology. On his return to Singapore in 1963, he was appointed Medical Officer in charge of the Blood Transfusion Service, reorganising and developing the entire haematology service in Singapore. He was subsequently appointed Consultant in 1964 and Senior Consultant in 1971.

He was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Glasgow in 1971 and 1974 respectively.

His administrative career began in 1968 when he was appointed as Medical Superintendent of KKWH and was responsible for re-organising the hospital as well as implementing the National Family Planning Policies and programmes. In 1972, he was appointed Medical Superintendent of Singapore General Hospital in addition to his duties as Director of the Blood Transfusion Service. He was appointed Chairman of the SGH Planning Committee, responsible for planning, building and commissioning of the new SGH.

1984 saw Dr Kwa assuming the post of Permanent Secretary (Health)/Director of Medical Services. In his new capacity he was responsible for re-development of the public hospitals, being appointed as Chairman of the Hospital Re-Development Steering Committee. This saw the planning and building of the new Woodbridge Hospital & IMH, the National Blood Centre, National Skin Centre, Singapore National Eye Centre, Singapore Heart Centre, National Dental Centre, Institute of Health, Institute of Science & Forensic Medicine, New Changi Hospital, Kandang Kerbau Women & Children's Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital as well as many new generations of government polyclinics and health centres. He also played a major role in the establishment of the National University Hospital. Many of these are already completed, commissioned and operating successfully, bearing testimony to his farsightedness, vision and skills as administrator, professional and planner.

Dr Kwa also played major role in the development of Medical Specialisation in Singapore, a fact not known to many. He implemented the recommendations of the Committee on Medical Specialisation in the 1970s as well as pushed for the development of subspecialisation in various hospitals, resulting in the establishment of specialty centres like skin, heart, eye, mental health, dental and cancer. Also not known to many except his close associates, Dr Kwa has been largely responsible for the development of hospital and health management expertise. He systematically and meticulously identified, talent-scouted and trained staff for this important aspect of the Health Service. Currently, all the CEOs and Senior management staff of hospitals and centres can be said to have been nurtured by him. Not well known are also his role in pushing for developments in the Nursing and Ancillary Health Professionals like nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers, etc.

He also played a significant role in the SAF Medical Services. Commissioned as a Captain, in a voluntary capacity, in the SAF, he rose rapidly to the rank of Colonel and played a major role in establishing the Field Hospitals (now known as the Combat Support Hospital) and the Medical Support Group.

Dr Kwa is currently a Director of the Jurong Bird Park and the Singapore Zoological Gardens and has been their Chairman since 1980. He is also Director of a number of private and public companies in the hospitality & health care sectors. In addition, he serves as a member of the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board and the Singapore Turf Club Management Committee.

In recognition for his services and contributions, Dr Kwa was given many prestigious awards, both local and international. He was awarded the Public Administration Gold Medal in 1969 for his contributions to the National Blood Transfusion Service and the Meritorious Service Medal in 1993 by the President of the Singapore for outstanding service to the nation. He was conferred the Honorary Membership of the Alumni Association of the King Edward VII College of Medicine and the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1986, and the NKF

Distinguished Award in 1992. The Government of the Peoples' Republic of China conferred the China Friendship Award on him in 1994 for the role in the development of training programmes for doctors and nurses for the PRC. In 1996, the Academy of Medicine conferred upon him an Honorary Fellowship for his outstanding contributions to the Medical Profession. He was also made an Emeritus Consultant of the Singapore General Hospital in 1996.

In his 12 years at the helm as PS (Health)/DMS at the Ministry of Health, Dr Kwa has provided outstanding leadership and sterling service to the Nation and the Profession. He has to make important and difficult, sometimes unpopular decisions which ultimately benefit most. The Profession, particularly the younger ones, owes much to his wisdom and vision. It is by no means an accident that we have one of the finest health services in the world.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I present Dr Kwa Soon Bee for the conferment of the Singapore Medical Association's Honorary Membership.

C/PROF TAN SER KIAT
Master, Academy of Medicine and
Past Council Member, SMA