

Leader of the Profession

*Citation of SMA Honorary Member Dr Lee Suan Yew,
delivered by Dr T Thirumoorthy*

It is indeed with delight that I read the citation for SMA Honorary Membership of Dr Lee Suan Yew, an esteemed member of our profession.

I have the pleasure to have known Dr Lee Suan Yew professionally for more than 25 years. Dr Lee has an avid interest in dermatology and is a frequent face at dermatology CME events, dating back to the days of the old Middle Road Hospital.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of co-managing many of his patients with dermatologic problems. The referral was always preceded by a collegial phone call. His patients arrived with a complete and relevant history written in a neat and legible handwritten letter.

I have also learnt from his patients that they have benefitted from his competent and empathetic medical care; that they hold him in high confidence and trust and that he is truly a family physician having looked after several members and even generations of the same family.

Dr Lee received his early education at the renowned Anglo Chinese School. In his usual characteristic loyalty, he has returned to serve his alma mater as member and later as Chairman of the Board of Management of ACS (Independent) from 1988 to 1995. He is still remembered in the school today through the Lee Suan Yew Speaker of the Year Award – a major annual event and much coveted trophy in the school.

Dr Lee schooled in medicine at the University of Cambridge, graduating in 1961. As a student, he showed his leadership fervour while serving as President, Cambridge Malayan Association, from 1956 to 1957 and as Chairman, Malayan Forum, London, from 1959 to 1960. He went on to train in Internal Medicine at the Singapore General Hospital,



Postgraduate School Hammersmith and at Queen's Square London. He successfully achieved the membership of the Royal College Physicians Glasgow in 1966. During this time, I come to believe, he discovered his true calling to family medicine.

Dr Lee Suan Yew served several years as

Examiner for both the Diplomate College of Family Physicians and the Masters of Family Medicine, NUS. His greater contribution to family medicine was during his leadership as the President of the College of Family Physicians, Singapore from 1985 to 1988. During his stewardship; the College moved to its present College premises; family medicine was accepted as an academic discipline in the NUS MBBS undergraduate curriculum, and his efforts culminated in the setting up of the Department of Community, Occupational and Family Medicine on 13 February 1987.

His able leadership was instrumental in getting the University Senate to realise the importance of creating the Master of Medicine Family Medicine. The first graduands emerged in 1993 and to date more than 240 family physicians have successfully trained and achieved the academic degree of M. Med. Family Medicine.

Dr Lee Suan Yew served as Member of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) from 1993 to 2000 and he was appointed as President of SMC in October 2000. In his term as President, the profession saw significant steps towards promoting medical professionalism, as when Continuing Medical Education was made compulsory for the entire profession and the launching of the revised *SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines*. During his tenure, he expressed strong support for the Singapore Medical Association (SMA), especially in the work of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and

◀ Page 15 – SMA Annual Dinner

Professionalism of which I had the privilege of being the Director then. In the true spirit of collegiality and judicious philosophy of inclusiveness, he invited the SMA to participate in the revision of the SMC Ethical Code and the SMC retreat.

Just as Dr Lee thought he would have some rest, our generous Minister has appointed him to the Chairmanship of the Ministry of Health National Medical Ethics Committee. We look forward to his prudent and progressive leadership of this important area of medical practice.

Honoured guests and friends, the time allocated does not allow me to describe the several positions that Dr Lee has served and led in his commitment to the welfare of our community. He has served as a Justice of Peace since 1998. In recognition of his contribution to public service, the President and Government of Singapore honoured him with the *Bintang Bakti Masharakat* (or the Public Service Star) in 1991 and 2002.

To appreciate and understand the thoughts and philosophy of this undisputed leader in our medical profession, I would recommend reading his lectures entitled “Judicious Approach to Medicine” at the SMA Lecture 2003 and “Dare to Dream” at the 15th Sreenivasan Oration in 1995. I quote from the Oration in 1995 on the topic of ethics and compassion in medicine:

“Our profession is not far from the order of priesthood. We have a strict entry, a rigorous training, an ethical code of practice, conduct and confidentiality. The only difference is that priests lay up treasures in heaven while doctors are reputed to lay treasures on earth first and in heaven as an option.” Unquote.

Dr Wong Chiang Yin, honourable Minister, honoured guests and members of the Singapore Medical Association, I present to you in Dr Lee Suan Yew, a lifetime of dedication as a trusted, caring and conscientious family physician and a prudent, perseverant and progressive leader in the medical profession, a person most worthy of being a recipient of the SMA Honorary Membership. ■