



Citation for Dr Poh Soo Chuan

By Prof Sonny Wang

IAM proud to have been associated with Dr Poh Soo Chuan and honoured to be given the opportunity to read this citation.

Dr Poh completed his schooling at Raffles Institution where he represented the school in swimming and chess. He went on to obtain the MBBS (University of Malaya) in 1957, graduating with the bronze medal. He won a distinction at the DTCD exams (Wales) in 1961, and obtained the MRCP (Edinburgh) in 1962. Dr Poh served as Head of Medical Unit 3 of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) from April 1974 to May 1994.

He has been a master clinician, mentor, clinical teacher, researcher and role model for many generations of doctors. His career was marked by academic brilliance and a love for learning.

Well known for his clarity of thought and depth of perception, he was sought after to sit on various committees. He was a member of many national committees, including the office of Deputy Chairman of the Civil Aviation Medical Board and the Advisory Committee on Biomedical Research of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. He was also member of several key Ministry of Health committees: the Medical Clinical Research Committee which he chaired from 1991 to 1993, the Medicines Advisory Committee, the Committee for the Tender Evaluation Board for Drugs, and the Drugs Advisory Committee. He was also a member of the Singapore arm of the TB Research Committee which collaborated with the British Medical Research Council. This collaboration produced the landmark studies that the current chemotherapy regimens for pulmonary tuberculosis are based on.

His research output stemmed from his interest in the life sciences during his university days, when he scored a distinction for biochemistry in his third year at the University of Malaya. He later distinguished himself in Singapore as the foremost in respiratory physiology, and as a pioneer in developing the pulmonary function laboratory of TTSH. He was innovative and resourceful; together with his laboratory assistant, he built from scratch high quality machines for the measurement of diffusing capacity and lung volumes

Over the years, the TTSH Respiratory Function Laboratory has also been responsible for establishing the local reference values for various physiological parameters of lung function. Only a visionary could have initiated and implemented the concept of such a vital aspect of clinical Medicine. His initiatives paved the way for a scientific approach to the practice of Respiratory Medicine in Singapore so that studies utilising such necessary measurements could be conducted.

Dr Poh's research publications and reports number about 100. They were published in highly acclaimed international journals such as *Thorax* and the *American Review of Respiratory Disease* (ARRD). Some notable papers were "Lung manifestations in leptospirosis" published in *Thorax* in November 1970, and "The effects of opium smoking in cigarette smokers" in ARRD in August 1972. His publications reflected his wide-ranging interests and knowledge in Respiratory Medicine. His paper, "Primary diffuse alveolar septal amyloidosis", published in *Thorax* in April 1975, is highly cited and has found its way to renowned reference textbooks. His work bears testimony to the quality of his mind.

“Dr Poh’s trainees will remember him as a superior worthy of much respect as he led them with an even and principled hand.”



Dr Poh Soo Chuan receiving the SMA Honorary Membership from Minister Ng Eng Hen

Under his headship, TTSH's Medical Unit 3 gained a reputation for providing excellent clinical practice and patient care. He always bore in mind the risks, costs and benefits in his clinical approach to the patient. This was a hallmark of the department. He would question whenever investigations were ordered without much thought. His attitude to patients was an example to the younger doctors. He had an even-handed approach to all his patients, class notwithstanding. To him, a patient was a fellow human who needed the expertise of the medical team.

Dr Poh's trainees will remember him as a superior worthy of much respect as he led them with an even and principled hand. He has a quiet and soft-spoken demeanour, beneath which is an intellectual fortitude and firmness of purpose. He was able to command respect without demanding it.

Dr Poh retired in May 1994, and was conferred the status of Emeritus Consultant by TTSH in October the same year. With his extensive experience in clinical practice, teaching and administration, it was appropriate

that he took up the appointment as Director of the Office of Quality Management from June 1994 to 1996 to chart and direct the course of this new establishment. Post-retirement, he continued his clinical practice, and ran two clinic sessions a week.

For his contributions to teaching and research, he was conferred Clinical Associate Professor by the National University of Singapore in 1982. In recognition of his excellence, he was conferred the Lee Foundation-NHG Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005. And for his service to the nation, he was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Gold) in 1982. He was also awarded the DPMB by the Brunei government in 1986.

Although I am the one reading this citation, I am merely representing the many physicians who have trained under him and whom I am sure will echo my sentiments.

In summary, Dr Poh Soo Chuan embodies the qualities of a true physician, whose life was dedicated to public service and the nurturing of young physicians. I congratulate Dr Poh on being conferred the SMA Honorary Membership. ■