

# Gearing Up for the Next Big Battle

By Denise Yuen



MASEAN representatives working hand in hand for regional health

**Back row, L to R** Prof Oetama Marsis, President, Indonesian Medical Association; A/Prof Prasert Sarnvivad, President, Medical Association of Thailand; Dr NKS Tharmaseelan, President, Malaysian Medical Association; Prof Pham Manh Hung, President, Vietnam Medical Association; Dr Leo O Olarte, President, Philippine Medical Association; and Dr Pg Md Bahrin Pg Hj Aliuddin, President, Brunei Medical Association

**Front row, L to R** Dr Daniel Lee, Deputy Secretary-General, MASEAN; Dr Lee Yik Voon, Secretary-General, MASEAN; Dr Wong Tien Hua, Chairman, MASEAN and 1st Vice President, Singapore Medical Association; Prof Saranatra Waikakul, Vice Chairman, MASEAN and President Elect, Medical Association of Thailand; Dr Khamphay Rasmy, President, Lao Medical Association; and Prof Rai Mra, President, Myanmar Medical Association

## Day 1 (9 May 2014)

“The Medical Association of South East Asian Nations (MASEAN) aims to establish a cooperative association in order to pool talents and resources, to formulate programmes for studies and research, as well as to improve the services in healthcare delivery to the people of our nations. I hope that through sessions like this, we can achieve all of the abovementioned goals and educate our doctors in our respective countries, especially in the area of pandemic preparedness and response. This will not only benefit our individual communities, but the region as a whole,” Dr Amy Khor said in a speech during the opening ceremony of the

16th MASEAN Conference: Pandemic Preparedness and Response in Southeast Asian Nations. Dr Khor, Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower, was Guest of Honour at the ceremony, held at Regent Hotel Singapore. She also expressed certainty that the conference would be a step towards developing a regional framework to deal with future pandemic situations.

In his inaugural address as the new MASEAN Chairman, Dr Wong Tien Hua commented that each pandemic was different and thus required different strategies to tackle, but physicians would always serve as the first point of contact, so it was important for each national medical association (NMA)



Members of the MASEAN Council with the Guest of Honour at the opening ceremony

**L to R** Dr Wong Tien Hua, Chairman; Dr Tran Huu Thang, Immediate Past Vice Chairman; Dr Jose Asa Sabili, Immediate Past Chairman; Dr Amy Khor; Dr Lee Yik Voon, Secretary-General; Prof Saranatra Waikakul, Vice Chairman; and Dr Daniel Lee, Deputy Secretary-General

to work closely with authorities to develop and implement response protocols. He also noted that international cooperation was especially important as disease outbreaks were no longer confined within national borders and usually struck with very little warning and spread very quickly. Additionally, effective communication among NMAs could strengthen information exchange as well.

Dr Wong, who is also the 1st Vice President of SMA, had earlier succeeded Dr Jose Asa Sabili of the Philippine Medical Association (PMA). After receiving the customary MASEAN gold medallion from Dr Sabili, Dr Wong thanked his predecessor for his leadership and dedication for the past two years.

The highlight of the opening ceremony was the 3rd Dr MK Rajakumar Memorial Oration, delivered by Dr T Thirumoorthy, Executive Director of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics & Professionalism. Titled "Teaching and Learning about Medical Professionalism in a Competency-Based Medical Education – Going beyond the Curriculum", he spoke at length about the importance of including medical professionalism in medical education, and the ideal ways to teach and learn it. He opined that faculty development is key in trainee doctors' journey of professional development, which is a transformative process. (See page 26 for a summary of his oration.)

Dr Koh Kar Chai, Honorary Deputy Secretary of the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA), commented that Dr Thirumoorthy's lecture had "hit the nail on the head".

The Dr MK Rajakumar Memorial Oration was named after the founding Chairman of MASEAN. Dr Rajakumar was a humble yet dedicated physician from Malaysia, who

devoted his career and life to solving the health and social needs of the often forgotten and neglected members of the lower socio-economic classes. To honour his legacy, the MASEAN Council agreed in 2009 to establish this eponymous oration, which would be delivered at each biennial MASEAN Conference.

More than 30 delegates from nine NMAs were in attendance. A sumptuous welcome dinner was held for them after the opening ceremony, during which they were also treated to a rousing performance by musical group Urban Drum Crew. It was certainly a night of collegiality as the country representatives mingled, renewing old friendships and creating new ones.

### **Day 2 (10 May 2014)**

The next day was the conference proper, chaired by the MASEAN Secretary-General, Dr Lee Yik Voon. Dr Lee is also the Assistant Honorary Treasurer of SMA.

The focus of the event was the scientific symposium, Pandemic Preparedness and Response in Southeast Asian Nations, where each NMA spoke about the pandemic preparedness measures that its country had undertaken.

The Medical Association of Thailand spoke about its national disease surveillance system, Thai One Health Network, which concentrates on the prevention, control, preparedness and response with regard to various emerging infectious diseases, through the cooperation of various stakeholders in their country.

The Vietnam Medical Association discussed its country's Global Health Security Demonstration Project, which aimed to enhance the capacity of the health system for the



surveillance, early detection, coordination and response with regard to disease outbreaks, in order to meet the requirements of the International Health Regulations (IHR). To achieve these goals, the Vietnam government has established an Emergency Operation Centre, enhanced capacity of the public health laboratory system to meet the core capacities in the implementation of IHR, and applied the use of IT in disease surveillance and response to public health events.

All NMAs also presented country reports, which highlighted the important issues that each of them faced. The Indonesian Medical Association (IMA) mentioned that its country implemented a national health insurance programme in January this year, which guarantees all citizens with healthcare by 2019. IMA had therefore made several recommendations to their government to ensure the programme's success. Meanwhile, PMA had provided disaster relief to the victims of calamities that had struck its nation, like the Bohol island earthquake in 2013 and Typhoon Haiyan in the Visayan islands last year. They had also given financial assistance to PMA physicians who were themselves victims of these disasters.

The conference closed with a business meeting, where the minutes of last year's 15th MASEAN Mid-Term Meeting (held in Vietnam) and the position statement conceived during that session were both confirmed. The position statement declared that young members of the profession should be engaged and mentored by member NMAs to strengthen the future of the profession. Dr Lee noted that MMA had already begun to engage young doctors to this end.

The presentations elicited lively discussions among the delegates. Showing this writer a notepad full of handwritten notes, Dr Ramzi Amin, Deputy Secretary of the Brunei Medical Association (BMA), said that the different NMAs had done great things for their countries. "We hope to adapt them for our NMA and develop it further," he concluded.



**Clockwise from top left**  
**Dr T Thirumoorthy (left), the Dr MK Rajakumar Memorial Orator, receiving a token of appreciation from MMA President Dr NKS Tharmaseelan**  
**The conference in full swing**  
**A fun day out at Gardens by the Bay**

BMA joined MASEAN in 2008 and is the organisation's newest member.

Dr Steve Hambleton, President of the Australian Medical Association (AMA), an observer at the conference, commented that he found the presentations good. He added that while Australia already had a pandemic preparedness agency, it would be useful for AMA to "maintain contact with the MASEAN countries and learn from them".

The overseas delegates were then invited to attend the SMA Annual Dinner (see page 6), which was held in the same hotel later that evening. They capped off their trip to Singapore with a visit to Gardens by the Bay on the last day.

The next MASEAN Mid-Term Meeting will be held in Brunei next year, while the subsequent MASEAN Conference will be held in Thailand in 2016. ■

### **MASEAN Member Associations**

Brunei Medical Association, Cambodian Medical Association, Indonesian Medical Association, Lao Medical Association, Malaysian Medical Association, Myanmar Medical Association, Philippine Medical Association, Singapore Medical Association, Medical Association of Thailand and Vietnam Medical Association.