



## Guest of Honour's Speech

By President Tony Tan Keng Yam

*The following speech was delivered by Singapore President, Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, at the SMA Annual Dinner on 16 May 2015 at Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel. The dinner report can be found on page 8. The speech by SMA President Dr Wong Tien Hua and the citation for the President are found on pages 12 and 14, respectively.*

**DR WONG TIEN HUA**, President of the Singapore Medical Association (SMA), members of the Association, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

I am pleased to be here this evening and greatly honoured to be conferred the SMA Honorary Membership. As our nation celebrates its Golden Jubilee this year, I would like to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts, as your new member, on the important role the Association has played and what it can do, moving forward, to further advance the interests of both the medical profession and the public at large.

Since 1959, SMA has represented the majority of medical practitioners in both the public and private healthcare sectors. The Association has supported healthcare professionals through the years by sharing up-to-date advisories and healthcare advancements, conducting courses and providing resources for training of medical students.

Singapore is undergoing a demographic transition at a rapid pace. In the year 2000, the number of Singapore residents aged 65 years and above stood at just over 230,000. In 2014, the number had surpassed 430,000, with the year-on-year growth

rate reaching close to 7%.

A greying society is proof of the sustained peace and stability of our nation, as well as the contributions made by the medical profession to improve the health and well-being of our people. Older persons have much to offer. Their experiences and knowledge are a rich resource that would help us in finding workable solutions to new and emerging challenges that confront us. Employers are encouraged to recognise the latent potential of older workers to nurture and guide younger colleagues.

However, an older population brings its own challenges. On the medical front, cancer, chronic disease and



**Back row (from left)** Dr Bertha Woon, Dr Noorul Fatha As'art, Dr Ng Chee Kwan, Dr Wong Chiang Yin, A/Prof Tan Sze Wee, Dr Tan Tze Lee, Dr Chong Yeh Woei, Dr Anantham Devanand, A/Prof Nigel Tan Choon Kiat and Dr Tan Yia Swam  
**Middle row (from left)** Dr Daniel Lee Hsien Chieh, A/Prof Chin Jing Jih, Dr Low Lip Ping, Dr Khoo Chong Yew, Dr Toh Choon Lai, Dr Tammy Chan Teng Mui, Dr Benny Loo Kai Guo and Dr Lee Yik Voon  
**Front row (from left)** Prof Abu Rauff, Prof Foo Keong Tatt, Prof Aline Wong, Adj Prof Chew Chin Hin, Dr Wong Tien Hua, President Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, Minister of State for Health Dr Lam Pin Min, Dr Lee Suan Yew, Prof Tan Cheng Lim, Prof Low Cheng Hock and Dr Tan Kok Soo

dementia have become more prevalent. We are adding capacity to manage the health needs of older patients, who take longer to recover and who are at a higher risk of medical complications. To help Singaporeans age healthily, the Government is exploring preventive strategies to improve population health.

It is now timely to reassess the role of the Association in the face of this demographic change. We need to increase emphasis on primary and family care and renew support for the field of geriatric medicine. This is the right direction to go. Families represent the basic building blocks of our society, and primary care a foundational piece of any healthcare system. The stronger ties between primary care providers and the patients they serve will produce better outcomes and allow for more sustainable healthcare spending. Where patient needs are complex, we should provide greater support in the community so that patients can cut down on trips to the tertiary hospital.

Over the past ten years, we have expanded our capacity to train more doctors who can help meet the demands of an ageing population. Young graduates from the National

University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School are entering the workforce. The third medical school, the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, will see its first batches of students enter the profession over the coming years. At the same time, many senior doctors who are able and keen have chosen to serve well past the age of retirement. This mix of the young with the more experienced bodes well for the future, in the training and modelling for the young by the seniors in the science and art of holistic medicine.

This emergence of role models is critical. It impacts how medicine is taught and practised in wards, clinics and the community. I would also encourage the Association to engage members and create opportunities for mentoring at all levels of professional development. And to all the professionals here, I urge you to lead by example and be the change you want to see.

Two years ago I spoke at an event organised by St Joseph's Institution (SJI), my alma mater. Speaking to the students of SJI and its alumni, I outlined

the concept of social reserves and how they accrued each time a Singaporean cared for his or her fellow man. The medical community has a special position in the safeguarding of social reserves. On the one hand, every clinical encounter is an opportunity to generate social capital. Even in situations where patient needs are complex or seemingly insurmountable, it is the empathy and goodwill which makes the difference. On the other hand, by conserving health and well-being, the medical fraternity protects this social capital against disease and disability.

It is therefore very appropriate that the Association is launching its new slogan, "For Doctors, For Patients." Read together with the Association's motto, "Jasa Utama" (Service before Self), the new slogan refocuses the medical profession on its role in society and its shared responsibility in meeting the challenges facing our nation as we move forward.

Once again, I thank SMA for conferring on me its Honorary Membership. I wish you all the best in your noble task of helping to look after the health needs of our nation. ■