



MEDICAL DIPLOMACY:

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE



The SMA Lecture was instituted in 1963, with the objective of educating the healthcare professionals on medical ethics and related topics. This year, we are honoured to have Prof Tommy Koh as the SMA Lecturer. Prof Koh will be speaking on Medicine and Diplomacy.

Prof Koh is currently Ambassador-At-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Rector of Tembusu College; Governor of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy; Chairman of the International Advisory Panel of the Asia Research Institute; Special Adviser of the Institute of Policy Studies and Chairman of the Centre for International Law, National University of Singapore. He is also Chairman of the SymAsia Foundation of Credit Suisse and Co-Chairman of the China-Singapore Forum, the India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue and the Japan-Singapore Symposium.

In anticipation of the upcoming Lecture, *SMA News* conducted an email interview with **Prof Tommy Koh (TK)**.

Prof Koh, you were the Guest-of-Honour and keynote speaker at the first International Conference on Humanitarian Medical Missions. What motivated you to accept that invitation? What was your key message?

TK: We live in a very troubled world. It is full of conflict, war, suffering, hostility, mistrust and fear. Each of us has a moral duty to do what we can to promote peace and understanding, to replace fear with hope and to help those who are in pain. I salute the doctors, dentists, nurses, therapists and allied workers who go abroad on humanitarian medical missions. They are

helping to make this a better world. Singapore may be a small country and we are often misperceived as a selfish nation. The truth is that our medical volunteers, hospitals, universities, as well as the Singapore International Foundation, Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), Singapore Red Cross Society and Mercy Relief have unselfishly contributed enormously to our neighbours and friends in the region. Through their deeds, they have replaced suffering and despair with relief and hope, taught the trainers and left a positive legacy. Most important of all, they have taught us to believe that we truly live in one world and belong to one human family.

In what ways has Singapore contributed to the mission and work of World Health Organization (WHO)? What can our doctors do to help?

TK: Singapore has played an active and very positive role in the WHO. First, the late Dr Balaji Sadasivan had served as the Chairman of the Executive Board of WHO. Second, LTC (Dr) Vernon Lee, currently Head of the SAF Biodefence Centre, had worked with WHO, both at its headquarters in Geneva and in the field. From 2007 to 2008, he was a medical epidemiologist in WHO's office in Indonesia, working on avian influenza response and pandemic preparedness. From 2010 to 2012, he worked with WHO in Geneva, leading global health collaborations and pandemic preparedness. Third, Dr David Ho served for two years with the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva, from 2012 to 2014. David's primary duty was to represent Singapore at WHO. He did so well that the 37 member states of the Western Pacific Region at WHO elected him as their regional coordinator and to represent their interests.

What lessons have you learned from your long career as a Singapore diplomat?

TK: The first lesson is that, historically, the world has been unkind to small countries. The founding of the UN in 1945 has

to some extent, made the world a safer place for small countries. The second lesson is that small countries must unite in order to make their voices heard and for their interests to be taken into account. This is why Singapore founded the Forum of Small States and the Global Governance Group. The third lesson is that, for small countries, the law is both a shield and a sword. We want to strengthen the rule of law and to weaken the rule that "might is right". This is why Singapore has worked so hard to promote international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes through the international legal process. The fourth lesson is that we have to be relevant and useful to other countries, especially the major powers. The fifth and final lesson is that Singapore has to strengthen both its hard and soft power. Medical diplomacy is a form of soft power. ♦

Intrigued by what Prof Tommy Koh has to share on Medicine and Diplomacy? Register for SMA Lecture 2015 to gain more insights on the topic.

Date :

7 November 2015

Venue :

One Farrer Hotel & Spa, Ballroom 2

Time :

1 pm to 5.30 pm

To register for the lecture, visit <http://www.sma.org.sg/academy>. Awarding of CME points is still pending approval from Singapore Medical Council.