

*MENTORS
WHO*



On the path to becoming a physician, many would have encountered mentors who have influenced their journey in one way or another. Here, we invite three established professors to write about the teachers who have inspired them when they too were new to the profession.

Two Mentors in the Practice of Clinical Medicine

I have had the benefit of many mentors who together shaped my professional life as a clinician. Two of these stand out as giants: Prof Sir Gordon Arthur Ransome and his disciple, Prof Seah Cheng Siang.



PROF SIR GORDON ARTHUR RANSOME

I first met Prof Ransome (1910 – 1978) in 1969 when he taught us clinical bedside medicine during his professorial bedside teaching rounds. I was then a medical student. What impressed me was his meticulous approach to diagnosis – working from cardinal symptoms and differential diagnoses to clinical examinations and working diagnoses. As he spoke

no local dialect, we helped in the interpretation of the patient's story to him and carried his responses and further questions to the patient. One of us also carried his bag of tools, which contained many stethoscopes and other bedside equipment. After my housemanship year, I was fortunate to be posted to Medical Unit I at Singapore General Hospital (SGH). He was head of the department and I had many more opportunities to learn clinical bedside skills from him. He was certainly a master physician. Several of his students (eg, A/Prof Ng Beng Yeong, Prof Cheah Jin Seng, Prof Chew Chin Hin and the late Prof Chan Heng Leong) have written commentaries of him in the *Annals of Medicine*. Prof Ransome is remembered by his students in the Gordon Arthur Ransome Oration of the Academy of Medicine. The first Oration was given by his disciple, Prof Seah Cheng Siang, in 1971.



BY A/PROF GOH LEE GAN

A/Prof Goh Lee Gan is a Fellow of the College of Family Physicians Singapore; Royal Australian College of General Practitioners; Royal College of General Practitioners, UK; Academy of Family Physicians, Malaysia; and World Organisation of Family Doctors (Wonca). He is a past President of Wonca Asia Pacific Region, and a past President of SMA.



PROF SEAH CHENG SIANG

Prof Seah Cheng Siang (1922 – 1990) is another mentor who left an indelible mark in me as what is expected of a master physician. In 1977, shortly after I passed my Master of Medicine (Internal Medicine) examinations, I was posted

to his department in Medical Unit III. I noted that he often put the patient's chief complaint verbatim in quotes in his clinical notes. From that starting point, he approached the patient's medical problem very much like how his mentor Prof Ransome did. *Very interesting, I thought.*

Although I do not usually write down what the patient says verbatim, the importance of looking for the cardinal symptom in the patient's story became a habitual practice for me. During my first day in his department, the ward sister warned me that he was super meticulous, so my clinical notes and presentation notes had better be up to standard. That was good advice and I tried hard to meet that standard. This

was the beginning of my life-long habit of striving to be meticulous and clear in whatever is said and written. Although I did master this skill of clarity of thought, I never did fully master the art of writing legibly. Like his mentor, Prof Ransome, Prof Seah is also remembered by his students and colleagues in the Academy of Medicine's Seah Cheng Siang Memorial Lecture. Prof Chew Chin Hin gave the inaugural memorial lecture in 1991.

The Two Teachers Who Shaped My Career



PROF C RAJASOORYA

When I was a medical student, I was chided twice in front of my clinical group – once was for being unprepared during medicine tutorials and another for subpar case write-ups. One consultant even sentenced me to check blood pressure for every patient in the ward before ward round for one week. I think post-traumatic stress disorder must be the reason I aspired to become an orthopaedic surgeon. While studying for FRCS Part I after my housemanship, I thought that I should at least learn to read ECGs and interpret renal panels, and thus applied for a medicine posting in the Department of Medicine, Alexandra Hospital. There, I met my fellow medical officer (MO), Dr C Rajasoorya (now fondly known as Prof Raja).

Raja was a model colleague. His humour took the pain out of our 40-bed ward rounds. He showed me not only the logic and science of internal medicine, but also the soft side, the human side of its practice. I discovered that internal medicine is not just for nerds.

Before the end of my six months in Alexandra Hospital, I signed up for internal medicine traineeship. Raja felt

that since he was wholly responsible for the loss of a talented surgeon, he had the duty to make sure that I passed my medicine exam. We started regular bedside tutorials, which continued even after I left Alexandra Hospital. Believe it or not, Raja would take a taxi down to Singapore General Hospital (SGH) twice a week after work to grill me in preparation for my MRCP exam.

My good luck did not stop at Alexandra Hospital. I was fortunate to meet Prof Ng Han Seong when I joined the Medical Unit III in SGH. Like Raja, Prof Ng was an inspiring teacher.

For SGH junior doctors at that time, the key event of the week was Prof Ng's tutorial, which was open to everyone from all three medical units. Every Wednesday afternoon, we would all gather in the medical intensive care unit's MO room. Someone would pick a random case and present it to Prof Ng, who seemed to have come prepared with a headful of quizzes and tricks. He giggled as we stumbled through his traps and then guided us from basic skills to the latest literature.

What Prof Ng and Raja demonstrated was the amazing capacity of the human brain to hold so much knowledge in so many fields. You could read your butt out on a topic, only to be stunned by their exposition of the story behind the person after whom the syndrome was named.

Medicine was not the only thing they knew. Outside work, we toured antique exhibitions, talked about classic literature and gossiped over different cuisines. Raja must have been the first institution doctor who wrote software programmes, while Prof Ng excelled in Chinese brush paintings and earned the reputation of being an expert in Chinese red lion porcelain.

Before that era, teachers tried to fit the mould of Prof Gordon Ransome or Prof Seah Cheng Siang, who instilled steely discipline around them. In contrast, Prof Ng and Raja's simple and approachable style removed the fear of learning. To me, they had laid a foundation for the new landscape of medical education.



PROF NG HAN SEONG



BY A/PROF KOO WEN HSIN

A/Prof Koo Wen Hsin has worked in the private and public sectors, as well as in voluntary welfare organisations. He is grateful that there have always been inspiring colleagues who have taught him many things.

Pioneer Psychiatrist

Back in the days when it was definitely not common to express one's interest in psychiatry, Dr Chee Kuan Tsee was one of the very few who had a single-minded interest in the discipline. It is thus of no surprise that the septuagenarian is still working, albeit part-time, at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). Throughout the years, overtures were made by various quarters to entice him to leave IMH, but fortunately for the public sector, he has remained true to IMH till this day. I first met him in the mid-seventies when he was senior registrar to my junior medical officer status. He was already a keen and passionate teacher then.

Dr Chee is a psychiatrist of the respected old school. Not one to take short-cuts, he has instilled in generations of psychiatrists-in-training the unequivocal need for good history-taking. He thinks deeply and profoundly on psychopathology and indeed, on most matters pertaining to the practice of psychiatry.

He is the author of *Guide to Psychiatry*, a book he initiated in the early 80s for the training of doctors and allied health professionals, specifically contextualised to Singapore. Updated in 2015, the book is in its 14th edition. Also, in testimony of his far-ranging interests in psychiatry, he co-authored the book *Mental Disorders and the Law* in 1994.

Till today, he is given the platform of honour at the grand ward round of the General Psychiatry Department to deliver the final words of wisdom on the case presented. It is common for younger colleagues to greet him

affectionately and respectfully as their "laoshi" or teacher. Undoubtedly, he is the go-to senior doctor in IMH that colleagues consult for difficult cases. Dr Alex Su, vice-chairman, medical board (clinical quality) at IMH, who regards him as his teacher and mentor, has this to say: "As one of the most senior and well-respected clinicians, Dr Chee still makes every effort to go to the ground to get to know and teach our new doctors and staff. He always reminds us to go back to the basics of history-taking and to get to know the patient well so that any information gathered will be meaningful towards understanding the patient."

In his career, he is a trailblazer. Dr Chee made history when he was installed as the first president of the Singapore Psychiatric Association in 1980. He had the honour of helming the vast General Psychiatry Department in 1993 when the erstwhile three units were amalgamated into one. In 2005, he was made the very first emeritus consultant of IMH and in 2011, he was one of two psychiatrists who received Singapore Psychiatric Association's inaugural Distinguished Psychiatrist Award. He was also the first psychiatrist to receive the prestigious Lee Foundation-NHG Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.

Dr Chee is a family man who swims regularly and sings in the church choir. He used to play football for the doctors team at the Woodbridge Hospital and often made bread to share with colleagues. He embodies the balanced lifestyle that others strive to achieve. ♦



DR CHEE KUAN TSEE



BY A/PROF WONG KIM ENG

A/Prof Wong Kim Eng is an emeritus consultant at IMH, senior advisor at the National Healthcare Group, and an associate professor at NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. She received her undergraduate medical training at the University of Singapore and her postgraduate psychiatric training at the Institute of Psychiatry, London. She is a former chairman of medical board at IMH.