

SMA Lecture 2008

“Preparing for the Next Epidemic: 5 Years After SARS ... Lessons Learnt”

The SMA Lecture was instituted in 1963 and the themes are centred on medical ethics and related topics. SMA Lecturers are appointed by invitation from the SMA Council and the Lectureship is awarded in the main to eminent and distinguished persons who have made significant contributions to Medicine and the community.

This year’s SMA Lecture “Preparing for the Next Epidemic: 5 Years After SARS... Lessons Learnt” was delivered by Prof Zhong Nanshan, President of the Chinese Medical Association, on 10 May 2008 at the Suntec Convention Centre. The event was graced by Guest-of-Honour Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Prof Zhong spoke on the increasing alert of an avian flu epidemic since 2002, drawing in particular upon the three events of SARS in China from 2003 to 2004. Epidemics of SARS and avian

flu have posed huge threats to social stability, economic prosperity and human health in China. However, what we have experienced during the SARS outbreaks can provide important lessons in protecting people against a resurgence, as well as potential attacks of highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses.

Despite arguments concerning the transmission route of coronavirus (Janies D, Cladistics. 2008; 23:1-20), it is believed that the mutated coronavirus was transmitted via marketed civets to human. Therefore, restricting control of wildlife marketing is imperative and also important in controlling an avian flu pandemic.

Early detection of the index patient has been the key to initiate preventive measures against spreading of SARS and avian flu. Since 2004, a monitoring system has been set up for patients with pneumonia in cities. An earlier screening of



Prof Zhong Nanshan and Dr Vivian Balakrishnan

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nasopharyngeal inflammation was developed using thermographic techniques, which may be more useful to identify individuals with early common flu or even avian flu during common cold seasons.

China has also enforced her legislation on surveillance, report and pre-warning system for infective diseases, mandating periodical release of epidemics and preparedness for

possible public health emergencies since 2003. Vaccination appears to be the best prophylaxis for SARS-CoV or avian flu infection. China is on the way of developing effective vaccine to this approach.

For the full text of the SMA Lecture 2008, please refer to the July 2008 issue of the *Singapore Medical Journal*. Also see facing page for the citation of Prof Zhong Nanshan. ■



Emcees Dr Raymond Chua and Dr Bertha Woon





Dr Wong Chiang Yin presents Prof Zhong Nanshan with the SMA Lecture Medallion.

Citation for Prof Zhong Nanshan, SMA Lecturer 2008

The citation was delivered by Dr Wong Chiang Yin, SMA President, at the SMA Lecture on 10 May 2008 at the Suntec Convention Centre.

Good afternoon, Guest-of-Honour, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, colleagues, guests and members of the public, this afternoon I am honoured to have the opportunity to give the citation to a distinguished person who has made significant contributions to Medicine and the community. The SMA is proud to present the prestigious SMA Lectureship to the President of the Chinese Medical Association (CMA), Prof Zhong Nanshan this year.

I am almost tempted to deliver this citation in Cantonese, recalling that the first time I had the good fortune to meet him was three years ago in Beijing at the 90th anniversary of the CMA. We were given a Mandarin-English interpreter but both of us ended up conversing in Cantonese – a heartwarming experience that is so rare in Singapore nowadays.

Some of you may find him familiar as he has been featured in the documentary on the first Secretary and second President of CMA, Penang Legend Dr Wu Lien-The, shown on Channel News Asia just last month. Prof Zhong is widely known in China as one of the heroes in the battle against SARS in 2003. Today, at the

fifth anniversary of the SARS outbreak in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Canada, it is indeed right and relevant to have an authority in respiratory diseases to speak to us on lessons learnt from SARS and the influenza pandemic that is looming over our heads.

Prof Zhong was born in 1936 in China in Nanjing to parents who were also doctors. He is actually of Hokkien descent and his ancestors hail from the beautiful island of Gulangyu off Xiamen. He has been living in Guangzhou for the last few decades. Prof Zhong is currently a Professor of Internal Medicine at the Guangzhou Medical College and Director of Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Diseases. He has been President of the CMA since 2005. He was appointed an Academician at the Department of Medicine of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, the highest accolade a member of the scientific community is able to receive in China.

Since 1989, he has been the Director of Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Diseases and from 1992 to 2002, he is also the President of the Guangzhou Medical College. Prof Zhong was a Member of the World Health Organisation Advisory Panel on Smoking and Health from 1985 to 1990 and since 2000, he is also the

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Medical Advisor on the WHO Advisory Panel on Chronic Respiratory Disease.

From 2001 to 2007, he was the President of the Chinese Thoracic Association. Since 2005, Prof Zhong is also a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland and an Honorary Fellow of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine. He received an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Medicine, Edinburgh in 2007. Prof Zhong has completed work on more than 20 national or provincial research issues, and he has been awarded numerous times for his achievements by the State. These awards include in 2003, the May 1 Labour Prize, National Award for Outstanding

Healthcare Worker in Anti-SARS Campaign, and the Chinese Doctor Prize. In 2005, he was also awarded the title of Nationwide Distinguished Worker.

He is the Editor-in-Chief of five journals and has written or co-authored nine medical books. He has published more than 70 papers in core journals worldwide including those in *Lancet*, *Thorax*, *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* in the last ten years.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please put your hands together to welcome Prof Zhong Nanshan, President of the CMA to give us this year's SMA Lecture on "Preparing for the Next Flu Epidemic: Five Years after SARS... Lessons Learnt". ■