

By Dr Tan Yia Swam, Deputy Editor

MMA 48th AGM and ASM, Kuching, Sarawak



(L-R) Dato' Dr Khoo Kah Lin and his wife Datin Liew Yin Mei, with Dr Bertha Woon and Dr Tan Yia Swam.

The SMA is honoured to have been invited by the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) to their 48th Annual General Meeting and Annual Scientific Meeting, from 29 May to 1 June 2008 in Kuching, Sarawak.

It was my first visit to Kuching, the capital of the East Malaysian state of Sarawak. The AGM/ASM was held in the Damai Puri Resort and Spa, located in Santubong. The organising committee had chosen a lovely place to host the event, with facilities for the on-going meetings and conferences, while the families of the delegates could interact in comfort and partake of the leisure activities available.

The SMA Council sent four delegates—Dr Lee Yik Voon, Dr Tammy Chan, Dr Bertha Woon, and myself. We were most pleased to have this opportunity to meet our Malaysian colleagues, and share with them the common concerns in our respective areas of practice. For some, it was nice to catch up with old friends and acquaintances. For myself, it was indeed an eye-opening experience to have this insight into issues that face a medical association which serves a country much larger than our own.

In particular, MMA faces the problem of not having enough medical officers to take up posts in rural/ district hospitals and clinics, where one could be alone for a 6-month rotation, dealing with medical problems ranging from routine childbirth to trauma in farming accidents. I wonder if any of our locally trained doctors would be able to take on such a task, and the responsibility of looking

after the people with limited resources, being far away from senior or specialist backup and away from the comforts of home. (Even doing a night call seems to be too difficult for some people!).

During our 3-day trip, we attended some of their conferences; the local doctors were very warm and welcoming and advised us on where to visit during our short trip there. They were naturally proud of their local specialties – I mean the cuisine – and we were treated to mouth-watering *kolo mee* and *Sarawak laksa*. More feasting awaited us at their formal dinners – a State Banquet on 29 May and the MMA Annual Banquet on 30 May.

The State Banquet was a grand event, with the Guest-of-Honour being the Chief Minister of Sarawak, Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud and his wife. The MMA lecture was delivered by Prof Datuk Dr Chew Peng Hong, titled “Through The Looking Glass”. Salient points included a “self scrutiny” at our noble profession so steeped in history and traditions and what the future brings. He is a learned and experienced practitioner, with many years of teaching and his reflections were very pertinent to a rapidly developing field; the better understanding of genetic diseases, use of designer drugs and monoclonal antibodies, the use of robots in surgery and the inclusion of complementary medicine into our classical Western practice. He also highlighted the special duties and ethical issues facing doctors who are also politicians and how to best serve in both capacities.

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On the second night, the Annual Banquet was just as grand an event, with the Guest-of-Honour being the State Governor, T. Y. T. Tun Datuk Patinggi Abang Haji Muhammad Salahuddin. Speeches were given both by the Health Minister, Dato' Liow Tiong Lai and the President of Malaysian Medical Association, Dato' Dr Khoo Kah Lin. What impressed us was the friendly and candid conversation between both leaders, as issues of concern were directly addressed by Dr Khoo to Dato' Liow in a public forum. Popular decisions met with loud applause, while other queries were seen to be taken up by the Minister

earnestly, with a promise for near future change and improvement.

The entertainment was fun, with special performances by the local artistes and impromptu items by delegates of the MMA from various states.

In all, we had an enriching experience over the 3 days, filled with meaningful exchanges with our counterparts, and the fringe benefit of enjoying a beautiful beach resort in a charming city. Congratulations to Prof Dr Sim Kui Hian, Organising Chairman, and his committee for a wonderful event and reception. The SMA looks forward to continuing our friendship in the years ahead. ■



Dr Soon Su Yang, Dr Soo Hua Huat and Dr Lee Yik Voon. Both Dr Soon, a gastroenterologist, and Dr Soo, a neurologist, are based in Kuching.



(L-R) Dr Tan Yia Swam, Dr Tammy Chan and Dr Bertha Woon.



Arrival of the various Guests at the Annual Banquet, with T. Y. T. Tun Datuk Patinggi Abang Haji Muhammad Salahuddin, Health Minister Dato' Liow Tiong Lai and Dato' Dr Khoo Kah Lin.



A spicy and tasty bowl of Sarawak laksa.



A delicious bowl of kolo mee.



View of the lovely resort.