

# Citation of Dr T Thirumoorthy

By A/Prof Chin Jing Jih

**G**ood afternoon Dr Chong Yeh Woei, President of the Singapore Medical Association, Professor Ong Yong Yau, President of the Singapore Medical Council, distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues and friends:

This afternoon, the Singapore Medical Association (SMA) will be presenting the prestigious SMA Lectureship to a physician and teacher whom many of us have long admired. But before we invite the

SMA Lecturer to share with us his wisdom and scholarship on a topic that is challenging yet relevant, I am honoured to be given the task of telling you a little more about the many things he has done for the profession and for SMA.

Dr T Thirumoorthy graduated in 1972 from the University of Malaya (UM) as the Best All Round Graduating Student. His leadership qualities were already apparent during his student days, when he held positions such as President of UM's Medical Society, and Chairman of UM's Student Council.

After graduation, he continued his training as a doctor with the Malaysian Armed Forces, before obtaining his MRCP in 1976 and Diploma in Venereology in 1978. After spending more than two years of his professional life in UK, he decided to come to Singapore, and his first job was Registrar in Dermatology and Venereology at the then-Middle Road Hospital. He was appointed Consultant dermatologist and venereologist in 1985 before finally leaving the National Skin Centre for private practice in 1990. During this



# CITATION



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period, he was also a Consultant to the Ministry of Health for its STD/AIDS programme and a Clinical Teacher in the NUS Faculty of Medicine.

Dr Thiru has been a member of the Academy of Medicine since 1981, and has served in the Chapter of Physicians as a committee member from 1987 to 1989. He has been a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians London since 1989 and College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow since 1990. He has been a member of the Ministry of Health National Medical Ethics Committee (NMEC) since 2005, and an elected member of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) from 2005 to 2008.

Since this is the SMA Lecture, allow me to devote a special segment of this citation to Dr Thiru's contribution to SMA. He has been a member of the Ethics Committee since 1988, and served on the SMA Council from 1997 to 1999, during which he chaired the Ethics Policy and Review Committee. He was the Organising Chairman of the SMA Annual Ethics Convention from 1997

to 2002, and played a pivotal role in establishing the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (SMA-CMEP) in 2000. He served as the Director of the Centre from 2000 to 2003, and continues to serve as a Board Member till today. In 2004, he was conferred the SMA Merit Award, for his outstanding leadership and contributions in the area of medical ethics and professionalism.

Most people with a biographical account such as this would have leaned back with a contented smile and shifted their gears down.

Well, not our dear Dr Thirumoorthy, and I believe we should all be grateful for this.

In 2004, with a perseverance and optimism that I can only admire, he mooted the idea of a mandatory ethics exposure for trainees. The CMEP made a representation to the Ministry of Health, and lo and behold, we actually managed to convince the Ministry of Health, leading to the Ministry of Health-Singapore Medical Association Course on Medical Ethics, Professionalism and Health Law for the

Advanced Specialist trainees. For those who are not informed, this is a mandatory two-and-a half-day course for all advanced specialist trainees and M.Med Family Medicine trainees. To date, we have completed 18 runs of this course, and Dr Thiru has been a key faculty both in curriculum and content development, and in the teaching of the course since its inception.

Between 2001 and 2008, he untiringly delivered countless lectures at national, regional and international meetings on medical litigation, professionalism in healthcare leadership, ethical issues in HIV infection, aesthetic spa medicine, and consumer-driven medicine. Among these was the Chan Heng Leong Memorial Lecture of the Dermatologic Society of Singapore in 2008 on Ethical Dilemmas and Challenges in Aesthetic Medicine.

One of Dr Thiru's most instructive and exemplary professional qualities has to be his positive attitude of self-renewal and continuous learning. While teaching medical ethics, he continued to upgrade himself and

completed a Master of Arts degree in Healthcare Ethics and Law from the University of Manchester in 2007. After completing his studies, he switched back to an educator's role and was appointed Associate Professor at the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, Singapore, where he teaches subjects on professionalism, communication skills, inter-personal skills, medical ethics and healthcare law. To be honest, his can-do spirit of his, besides being a source of inspiration to me, is also a powerful trigger of perspiration, as I struggle to keep pace with him.

Like all his projects, he took his role as a medical educator very seriously. He frequently shared his new insights in medical pedagogy, and emphasised that as teachers of medical students and trainees, we must avoid being presumptuous about professional competencies. Rather, we must always ensure that there is provision of appropriate and relevant training that will equip them with the right competencies before holding them accountable and resorting to punitive measures for errors or misconducts. He has also taught me that medical leadership is more than merely

attending meetings and nodding our heads in simple harmonic motion. Medical leadership, as he demonstrates so well, is to have a vision of what needs to be said and done for the good of the profession, the knowledge of how to do it, and then going out to do it systematically and passionately.

Positive role models that epitomises the many desirable professional virtues do not come by easily these days. It has therefore been my privilege and good fortune to have a "guru" such as Dr Thiru. One of the values that he frequently emphasises is that of compassion, where he is a consistent advocate for the less privileged and vulnerable patients. Those who have interacted, worked with or been taught by him will tell you that his humility, both as a person and as a scholar, is a reminder that there is still much to give and much to learn, regardless of our seniority. A good illustration of this is his insistence that colleagues and SMA staff should refrain from addressing him by his academic title of Associate Professor, but just "Dr Thirumoorthy", or simply "Dr Thiru".

It is not my intention today for this citation to steal the limelight from our SMA Lecture. If you have this

impression, I apologise unreservedly. But I hope that you will realise that I am not to be faulted, because our speaker today is truly a personification of the many virtues that has made medicine the respected and trusted profession it is today. Just yesterday afternoon, Dr Thiru sent me a text message to remind me to keep his citation simple. When I replied that I would have to try my best to restrain myself because I have been waiting for this belated lecture of his, his reply came as, "Keep some for the eulogy." So I will reluctantly save the remaining 75% of this citation for another day.

But please allow me to emphasise that the we have elected to confer on Dr Thirumoorthy the SMA Lectureship, not only because of his significant contributions to the profession and community, but also because we know that he is a good and innovative teacher, who is not afraid of exploring and discussing controversial topics. And the standing room turnout today is a definitive testament of his abilities. However, if you are here today out of mere curiosity at the topic, I assure you that you will not be disappointed. It leaves me then to invite you to put your hands together and welcome the SMA Lecturer for the year, Associate Professor T Thirumoorthy, to deliver his lecture on "Entrepreneurship in Medicine – resolving conflicts of interest in for-profit medical enterprise". **SMA**



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