

From Moment To Moment

Editorial note: We reproduce here an extract from Minister for Health Khaw Boon Wan's speech, on 9 March 2010 in Parliament.

Dr Chee was a legend and was larger than life. Within the healthcare community, he was widely and affectionately referred to as the “A-gong” of the Medical Alumni, who held together the large community of doctors, dentists and pharmacists.



On the first day of Chinese New Year, I received news that Dr Chee Phui Hung had passed away peacefully at home. He was 87. As I wrote in my blog, “I lost a friend, a supporter and a critic” whom I respect. Dr Chee was a legend and was larger than life. Within the healthcare community, he was widely and affectionately referred to as the “A-gong” of the Medical Alumni, who held together the large community of doctors, dentists and pharmacists. He lived life to the fullest, had a successful medical career, brought up three children well, and even dabbled in politics in his early days. I am told that he had even chided a couple of Ministers when he disagreed with some of their policies. In his unique way, he contributed to Singapore.

Despite medical advances, we are still mortals and will die one day. Three weeks before Dr Chee Phui Hung died, I visited him in his house. We had a good chat for the last time. He had been frail but rejected all attempts by his attending doctors to get him hospitalised. He had the money and the medical network to get the most up-to-date sophisticated medical interventions, but he knew that they would be futile. The interventions might extend his biological life by a few weeks, but he knew that the hospitalisation would in fact

reduce his social interactions and quality time with his loved ones. He wanted every hour of his remaining life to be with his family and friends, in the comfort of his home. This is a wise man.

Successful living and successful ageing are personal choices. Dr Chee Phui Hung provided an example. There are many others. Prof Chan Heng Leong, a former Head of Medicine in NUS, is another. A brilliant doctor, a dedicated academic, a good family man. He could have earned more in the private sector but chose a public career to teach and treat the poor. In retirement, he continued to contribute, in the University and at the hospital. When his time was up, he refused further medical interventions and passed away peacefully at home.

The last few days of these wise people are not mournful partings but quiet celebrations of having lived a fulfilling life. Friends and family members drop by to talk about the past and the good times together. Some, I suppose, may even karaoke and sing “最后一夜” by (nightclub mamasan) 金大班: “红灯将灭,酒也醒,此刻该向它告别” (“the lights are dimming, even the drunkards are gradually sobering, now is the time to say goodbye”). I don’t think Members need any translation, as I am told this is a favourite karaoke song of many MPs. 