

Citation for Dr Tan Kok Soo

*Dr Wong delivered this citation at the
SMA Annual Dinner on 14 May 2011.*

By Dr Wong Chiang Yin



Dr Wong (left) and Dr Tan at the SMA Annual Dinner

Dr Tan Kok Soo graduated with MBBS from the University of Sydney in 1967. He started his GP practice shortly after. Many older residents of the Jurong and Clementi areas will know that The Jurong Dispensary is really quite an establishment, and many of Dr Tan's patients span three generations.

In addition to his work as a well-loved GP in the community, Dr Tan will be best remembered for his immense contributions to the medical profession. Dr Tan has been a pillar of strength in no less than three medical professional bodies.

In the late 80s and early 90s, he was active in the now dissolved Association for Private Medical Practitioners of Singapore (APMPS). He held various posts in APMPS from 1987 to 1992, including Council Member, Honorary Treasurer, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Editor and 2nd Vice President.

From 1991 to 1999, Dr Tan devoted his energies to SMA. He became a Council Member in 1991 and became 2nd Vice President in the following year. In 1993, he became President of SMA and served three terms until 1996, only the second person to do so. One can safely say that

Dr Tan's rise in SMA, from Council Member in 1991 to President in 1993, was nothing short of meteoric, and reflected his standing and influence within the SMA Council at that time.

Dr Tan is given the Honorary Membership for his great contributions to SMA, in particular for grooming a younger generation of leaders in the Association as well as his tireless work towards the betterment of fellow doctors' moral compass and ethical conditions in Singapore.

Dr Tan's terms as SMA President will be remembered for many things. One was the rejuvenation of the Medical Association of Southeast Asian Nations (MASEAN). MASEAN had been very quiet for a long time until Dr Tan and his Council took the initiative to reorganise and re-energise it, and housed the secretariat of the MASEAN in Singapore. SMA remains the MASEAN secretariat to this day.

Perhaps an even bigger contribution is that under Dr Tan's leadership and vision, young doctors were engaged in a robust and comprehensive way by SMA. Dr Tan invited young doctors to join the SMA Council, previously the domain of mostly much older doctors. The SMA Medical Officers (MO) Committee was formed in 1994 with then Council Member Dr Wong Tien Yin as Chairman. Dr Wong remains in the current Council. I was also a founding member of that committee. In 1995, I joined the SMA Council and in the following year, we were joined by Dr Goh Jin Hian, Dr Tan Sze Wee and Dr Yue Wai Mun. Dr Tan believed in youth and renewal. He and the other senior Council Members at that time provided us with lots of inspiration, wisdom and guidance.

The SMA MO Committee began to highlight the issues that were of concern to young doctors. These included working hours, traineeships and call allowances. For those of us here tonight who do not know conditions then, here's a quick recap – it was not uncommon to perform eight to ten calls a month. There were no call allowances for housemen, and MOs were paid \$40 for each of the first four calls, followed by \$100 per call from the fifth call onwards. Finally the

Ministry of Health (MOH) heeded the voices from the ground and SMA, by paying housemen for the calls and drastically increasing the call allowances for MOs. I might hasten to add that none of the five of

us benefited from these better call allowances because we had already moved on in our careers by then. But these improvements would not have been possible had Dr Tan not made the concerns of young doctors an important area of SMA's work when he was President.

After stepping down as SMA President, Dr Tan became an elected member of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) in 1998 and remains so today, having only just won another re-election last month. He chairs quite a few SMC committees. He has also been appointed to numerous MOH committees and taskforces, including the Committee on Traditional Medicine, Select Committee on Verification of Healthcare Subsidies, Committee for Self-Regulation in Aesthetic Medicines and the Family Physician Accreditation Committee and the Committee on the Liberalisation of Advertising Code of the Medical Profession and Industry.

Guests, ladies and gentlemen, the SMA Honorary Membership is the highest award given by SMA to doctors and non-doctors. It has been given to national leaders who have led the country with distinction, as well as doctors who have been role models and leaders of the medical profession. Several doctors have been given the Honorary Membership in recognition for their work as great teachers, others for their work in research or health administration. Dr Tan does not belong to these categories but a slightly different mould. The SMA Council unanimously nominated Dr Tan, frankly, not for his academic heft or administrative standing as a doctor. He is being recognised for something a little more abstract, but no less pervasive or important. Dr Tan is given the Honorary Membership for his great contributions to SMA, in particular for grooming a younger generation of leaders in the Association as well as his tireless work towards the betterment of fellow doctors' moral compass and ethical conditions in Singapore.

Thank you. **SMA**