

Citation for PM Lee Hsien Loong

delivered by Dr Chong Yeh Woei

INTRODUCTION

Today, we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Singapore Medical Association. We also celebrate the conferment of the SMA Honorary Membership on our Prime Minister.

Over the years, we have conferred 26 Honorary Memberships to persons who are distinguished in public life or who have rendered meritorious service to the medical profession or to this Association.

We are deeply honoured that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has agreed to accept the SMA Honorary Membership.

Giving a citation for a person as distinguished and well-known as the PM is one of the easiest and most difficult tasks in the world. It is one of the easiest because PM's life is one that is on public record and known by all Singaporeans. It is one of the hardest because given the constraints of time, it is impossible to give a detailed citation that includes all of PM's major milestones and achievements. As such, I would like to first seek the Prime Minister and all of your indulgence if this brief citation does not do justice to the man.

BACKGROUND

Mr Lee Hsien Loong went to the University of Cambridge, on a President's and SAF Scholarship. He also obtained a Masters in Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. He had a meteoric career in the Armed Forces where he rose to the rank of Brigadier General at the age where many doctors would be still undergoing Advanced Specialty Training as registrars.

Mr Lee entered politics and was appointed Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) and the Ministry of Defence in 1984. He was confirmed as full Minister

for Trade and Industry in 1987, and was concurrently Second Minister for Defence.

In 1990, Mr Lee was appointed Deputy Prime Minister. He was then sworn in as Singapore's third Prime Minister on 12 August 2004.

The Prime Minister has always held a close watch on the health matters although he did not hold the Health portfolio.

In 1992, he chaired the Ministerial Committee which published the White Paper "Affordable Health Care" which has served as the blueprint for the government's approach to healthcare for the last 16 years. Many of the recommendations in the White Paper have been implemented and time has shown that the recommendations have been effective in providing quality healthcare for Singaporeans that is affordable and accessible

The government's growing emphasis on healthcare can be seen since Mr Lee became Prime Minister in 2004. From 2005 to 2007, the Government Health Expenditure per Singapore Resident rose from S\$509 to S\$615, which is an increase of about 20%. The main bulk of this expenditure goes towards providing subsidised healthcare to Singaporeans and much needed investments in the future, including the building of more public facilities, recruitment of more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. The SMA appreciates the fact that even as the Government faces budgetary constraints and many ministries faced either budget cuts or stagnant budgets, public spending on healthcare has increased significantly ever since Mr Lee became Prime Minister. But increased spending on health is not the only thing that makes our or any

health system excellent. In the last few years, we have seen many major policy changes especially in healthcare financing which have made life easier for most Singaporeans. These include allowing Medisave to be withdrawn for outpatient treatment of chronic diseases, refinement of Medishield and the implementation of means testing. These new measures by the Ministry of Health would not have been possible without the support and approval of the Prime Minister.

As Chairman of the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council (RIEC), Mr Lee is also a key advocate of Research & Development (R&D) in Singapore. The RIEC has allocated a total of S\$1.55 billion to establish strategic programmes in 3 areas, one of which is Biomedical Sciences.

The rapid development of Biopolis and now the second Medical School is a testament to the government's commitment to medical training and research under Mr Lee's watch.

Singapore Medicine is well-poised to face the challenges before us as we remain committed to the fundamentals of excellence in research, teaching and service which can be evidenced by the healthcare policies that have been implemented in the last few years.

Many see health spending only as a cost, almost as an inevitable evil. With the slew of government healthcare policies implemented in the recent past, we can also see that PM Lee's government also sees healthcare spending as an investment for the future.

The SMA is most confident that the medical profession has in our Prime Minister a statesman who is committed to the cause and values of medicine and in recognition of PM Lee's ongoing efforts to support the medical community, the SMA is proud to confer the Honorary Membership on him on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the SMA and may I add as a happy coincidence, on the 25th anniversary of PM's Lee entry into politics. 