

Citation for Dr Balaji Sadasivan

By Prof K. Satku, Director of Medical Services,
Ministry of Health

AS A MEDICAL DOCTOR

Dr Balaji Sadasivan was born in Singapore, and educated at Siglap Secondary School, Raffles Institution and National Junior College.

He earned his medical degree from the University of Singapore in 1979 and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1984.

He then trained in neurosurgery at the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, followed by a Fellowship at Harvard University with clinical appointments at the Brigham Hospital and the Boston Children's Hospital.

I am told his US mentors tried to persuade him to continue his career in the States – but fortunately for us, Dr Balaji chose to return. He remains the only board-certified neurosurgeon in Singapore.

As a consultant in the neurosurgery department in Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Dr Balaji re-organised the care of stroke patients, computerised the neurosurgical ICU, introduced stereotactic brachytherapy for brain tumours, and chaired the planning committee for the National Neuroscience Institute. Dr Balaji authored more than 50 scientific publications and chapters in books on

neurosurgery.

He left for private practice in 1994, where he set up Singapore's first stereotactic radio-surgical treatment system using a linear accelerator. He even collaborated with Siemens, a medical device company, to develop and build image-guided surgical systems, setting up a company in the process.

In his neurosurgical practice, he often dealt with complex ethical and medico-legal issues and this stimulated him to study law. He obtained an LLB with Honours from the University of London in 1999. His understanding of law must have served him well as a politician in legal and ethical issues such as amendments to the Broadcasting Act and Electronic



► DMS Satku delivering the citation for SMS Balaji Sadasivan



◄ SMS Balaji Sadasivan being conferred Honorary Membership by Dr Chong Yeh Woei.

Transactions Act, and in the drafting and promulgation of The Human Cloning and Other Prohibited Practices Act.

AS A POLITICIAN AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

When he was asked to enter politics, Dr Balaji gave up a successful neurosurgical practice, closed his entrepreneurial business and sacrificed family and leisure time to dedicate himself to public service.

He was elected Member of Parliament for Ang Mo Kio GRC and appointed Minister of State in November 2001. He was promoted to Senior Minister of State in August 2004. His postings have seen him providing leadership at the Ministries of Health, Environment, Transport and the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. Dr Balaji is currently Senior Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One can surely appreciate Dr Balaji's influence on a wide range of our national policies.

Dr Balaji is equally tireless at the grassroots level. He is Exco President of SINDA, President of the Singapore Indian Education Trust, and serves on several other committees including the National Steering Committee on Racial and Religious Harmony.

Dr Balaji was appointed Chairman of the National AIDS Policy Committee when he was at the Ministry of Health. When he left the Ministry in May 2006, he was asked by Minister Khaw to continue in this appointment.

A TIRELESS CHAMPION FOR HIV/AIDS RELATED ISSUES

Dr Balaji has been a strong proponent of HIV education in schools and workplaces. He also championed various initiatives to encourage early and regular HIV testing, the most notable of which was the implementation of universal antenatal testing.

Never someone to shy away from difficult and sensitive issues, Dr Balaji moved on to address HIV-related stigma and discrimination in society and the workplace. His fearlessness and dedication to HIV/AIDS issues can only be admired. Indeed, Dr Roy Chan, President of Action for AIDS and Director of the National Skin Centre, had this to say about Dr Balaji: "He has shown great personal concern for HIV-infected individuals and affected communities; and AIDS workers in Singapore are fortunate to have someone like Dr Balaji to champion their cause."

Dr Balaji's work in HIV/AIDS will certainly bring about much needed transformations in the way our society views HIV/AIDS and will serve us well for posterity.

LEADERSHIP IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

In May 2007, Dr Balaji was elected to the post of Chairman of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Executive Board, Singapore's first election to the Board in its 40 years of membership with WHO.

In his term as Chairman, Dr Balaji steered the Executive Board through considerable technical and administrative agenda, providing leadership to WHO on issues related to global health development, pandemic preparedness, non-communicable diseases, as well as climate change.

The Director-General of WHO, Dr Margaret Chan, was full of praise, attributing the successful outcome of the 61st World Health Assembly to the excellent work done by Dr Balaji and his board members.

On a more personal note, Dr Balaji is married to Dr Ma Swan Hoo, whom he met in medical school. She is a doctor in general practice and they have two children, Anita and Dharma.

In medical school, Dr Balaji was a talented debater with acting skills to match, winning his class the Dean's shield. His classmates speak fondly of him as someone who was always fun to be with.

I got to know Dr Balaji better when I entered the Ministry. As a fellow doctor he was encouraging and helped to ease me into my work. My discussions with him were always stimulating and my colleagues and I enjoyed the mental sparring with him. Sometimes we disagreed. In the heat of a discussion, he would use his talent for humour to lighten it. One could not but appreciate both the courage of his convictions as well as the graciousness of his intellect. Dr Balaji's sole objective was always to get to the truth and to discover the best ways forward for the Ministry.

Today, we are very honoured that the Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, has agreed to accept the Honorary Membership of our Association.

President of the 51st Singapore Medical Association Council and Members of the Singapore Medical Association, it is now my pleasure to present to you, for the Singapore Medical Association Honorary Membership, a pioneering medical specialist, a prolific academic, a distinguished and courageous politician, a dedicated community leader, a gracious intellectual, a modest and jovial colleague and friend to all, Dr Balaji Sadasivan. **SMA**