

# The First Graduates in 1910

JS Cheah,<sup>1</sup>MD, FRACP, FRCPE, TM Ho,<sup>2</sup>MBBS, FAFPM, BY Ng,<sup>3</sup>MBBS, FAMS, M Med (Psy)

## Abstract

The Medical School in Singapore was founded on 3 July 1905 and named the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School. There were 23 students in the first enrolment; 16 students attended the full course, while 7 attended a 2-year course for hospital assistants. The pioneer group of 7 that graduated in May 1910 (the Magnificent Seven) consisted of Drs Chen Su Lan, Edwin Williborod deCruz, and John Gnanapragasam from Singapore; Drs Willie Carnegie and Mark W Chill from Penang; Dr SR Krishnan from Seremban and Dr John Scott Lee from Ipoh. In December 1910, a further 6 students graduated. Of this first batch of 13 graduates in 1910, we describe the careers of 6; no records exist of the remaining 7.

Ann Acad Med Singapore 2005;34:19C-24C

**Key words:** Chen Su Lan, Graduates, Medical education, Medical School, Medical students, National University of Singapore

## Introduction

The Medical School in Singapore was founded on 3 July 1905; it was named the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School. It was the forerunner of the Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS). This year (2005), the Faculty of Medicine (NUS) and the NUS celebrate their centenaries.<sup>1-3</sup>

There were 23 students in the first enrolment – 9 Chinese, 6 Eurasians, 5 Tamils, 1 Malay, 1 Ceylonese, and 1 European. Sixteen students attended the full course, while 7 attended a 2-year course for hospital assistants. Each student was given a scholarship of \$15 per month, with a yearly increment of \$1 per month for the next 4 years. They were lent free textbooks. Teaching was done by government doctors, 2 army surgeons, and 5 private practitioners (Drs Lim Boon Keng, Murray-Robertson, David Galloway, Fowlie and Black).

Dr Gerald Dudley Freer was the first Principal of the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School. He was an ex-colonial Surgeon Resident of Penang and one of the first two house surgeons appointed to the General Hospital in 1890. He taught Anatomy. He was

Principal from 1905 to 1909.<sup>1</sup> His position as Principal of the Medical School is shown in a letter sent to him in 1908 from England (Fig. 1). Dr GD Freer reported on the state of the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 1. A letter addressed to Dr GD Freer in 1908.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Medicine  
National University of Singapore, Singapore

<sup>2</sup> Private Practice  
Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup> Department of Behavioral Medicine  
Singapore General Hospital, Singapore

Address for Correspondence: Professor Cheah Jin Seng, Department of Medicine, 5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, National University of Singapore, Singapore 119074.

Email: mdccjs@nus.edu.sg

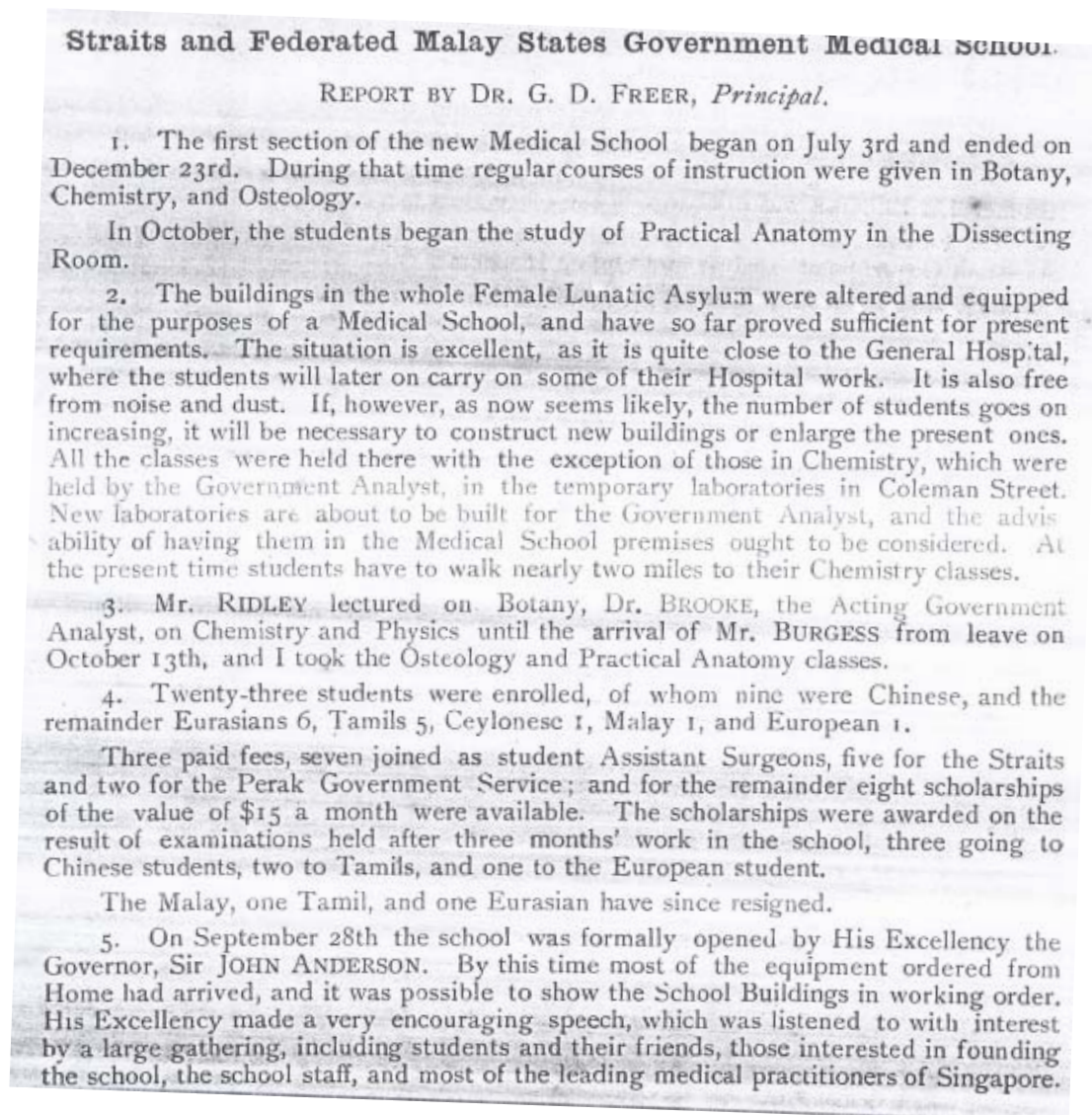


Fig. 2. A report of the Medical School in 1905.<sup>4</sup>

### The First Graduates

When the Medical School started in 1905 it was a 5-year course and the students graduated with an LMS Diploma (Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery). Dr RD Keith, the second principal from 1909 to 1918, reported on the Medical School in 1910 (Fig. 3).<sup>5</sup>

In May 1910, 7 students obtained the LMS Diploma, and in December 1910, a further 6 students graduated (Fig. 4).<sup>5</sup> The pioneer group of 7 that graduated in May 1910 (the Magnificent Seven)<sup>6</sup> consisted of Drs Chen Su Lan, Edwin Williborod deCruz, and John Gnanapragasam from Singapore; Drs Willie Carnegie and Mark W Chill from Penang; Dr SR Krishnan from Seremban and Dr John Scott Lee from Ipoh.

Of the 13 graduates in 1910, little information on their careers could be found despite an extensive search of the

archives in Singapore and Malaysia. The most has been written on Dr Chen Su Lan.<sup>7</sup> There is scanty data on Drs WF Carnegie, Edwin Williborod deCruz, J Gnanapragasam, JS Lee and Too (Teo) Chin Teong. Therefore, of the 13 graduates in 1910, we have been able to trace some information on the careers of only 6.

### Dr Chen Su Lan (1885 to 1972)

Dr Chen Su Lan's life history has been well chronicled;<sup>7,8</sup> a portrait of him is shown in Figure 5. "Physician, anti-opium fighter, philanthropist and social reformer, Dr Chen Su Lan, was one of Singapore Methodism's most distinguished leaders: a legend in his time": this was how Dr Chen was described by his son, Dr Chen Chi Nan.<sup>9</sup> Dr Chen was born in Fuzhou (China) in 1885 and was a third-generation Methodist. He migrated to Singapore when he

**Annual Report of the Straits and Federated Malay States  
Government Medical School for 1910.**

REPORT BY DR. R. D. KEITH, *Principal.*

**A.**

*Full Course for the L. M. S. Diploma.*

1. *Numbers, etc.*—Eighteen new students joined the full course during the year of whom 2 were women. Of the new students 3 were Chinese, 6 Eurasians and 9 Tamils. One joined as a Federated Malay States student Assistant Surgeon with a scholarship, 13 as holders of scholarships and 4 as paying students. Seven had obtained the Senior Cambridge Certificate, 7 the Junior and one had passed partly the Junior Cambridge and partly the Preliminary Examination. Three were admitted as paying students on the understanding that they would pass the Compulsory Preliminary Examination in February, 1911.

At present 72 students are taking the full course of whom 16 pay fees, 16 are student Assistant Surgeons and 42 are holders of scholarships.

2. *Discipline, etc.*—Two students were asked to resign. They had proved quite unsuitable as prospective medical men. Two were allowed to resign. The scholarships of 2 students were forfeited, 2 were suspended and 4 reduced.

On the whole the conduct of the students had been good.

3. *Examinations, etc.*—The examinations have been on a higher plane, generally, than in previous years, and, with the raising of the level of the Preliminary Examination, which the Council has decided to make that of the senior Cambridge Certificate, it is probable that the general standard will improve. It appears to be undoubtedly the case that those who have passed the higher preliminary educational tests prove to be the better students throughout, and at the end of their curriculum. As an example one might point out that the only two students who entered during the first twelve months with a Senior Cambridge Certificate passed first and second in December, 1910, at the end of their five years' course.

Fig. 3. A report of the Medical School in 1910.<sup>5</sup>

The following have completed their course:—

<i>Date.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Remarks.</i>
May, 1910,	Chen Su Lan	... Private.
"	W. F. Carnegy	... Straits Assistant Surgeon.
"	E. W. DeCruz	... " " "
"	J. Ghanapragasam	Private.
"	S. R. Krishnen	... F. M. S. Assistant Surgeon.
"	J. S. Lee	... Private.
"	M. W. Chill	... "
December, 1910.	A. J. Thumboo	... "
"	Too Chin Teong	... "
"	Tan Toon Cheng	... "
"	R. Chelliah	... "
"	S. Danasawmy	... F. M. S. Assistant Surgeon.
"	G. B. Leicester	... Straits Assistant Surgeon.

His Excellency Sir JOHN ANDERSON, G. C. M. G., presented the first diplomas and the prizes in the beginning of June, 1910. In December, 1910, the diplomas were presented by the Hon'ble Dr. W. GILMORE ELLIS, Principal Civil Medical Officer.

Fig. 4. The first graduates in 1910.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 5. Dr Chen Su Lan (1885-1972) [photograph courtesy of Madam C.C. Chen, daughter of Dr Chen].

was a young boy and in 1905 he enrolled at the newly opened Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School. He was one of the first six to graduate in May 1910 with the diploma of LMS (Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery) and he topped the class. After graduation, he was not only busy with his medical practice but served on a number of important committees: the Tan Tock Seng Hospital Management Committee; the Central Midwives Board; and the Council of the King Edward VII College of Medicine (his alma mater). He also founded the Alumni Association of the Medical College and was elected President of the Malayan Branch of the British Medical Association.

Dr Chen Su Lan campaigned vigorously for the abolition of opium-smoking; this irked the Colonial Government as opium was a major source of the Government's revenue.<sup>7,9</sup> Starting the anti-opium drive in 1929, he founded the Anti-Opium Clinic in 1933 (at 137 Kampong Java Road).<sup>10</sup> Many poor opium addicts were treated at this clinic, which had outpatient and inpatient facilities. He campaigned against the evils of opium addiction in Singapore and the other parts of the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca) and Malaya. In Penang, he was joined in the anti-opium drive by Dr Wu Lien-Teh (1879 to 1960);<sup>7</sup> Dr Wu later gained international fame as the plague fighter in China. Dr Chen gave a lecture on "The Opium Problem in British Malaya" in 1934 at the Rotary Conference in Penang (Fig. 6).<sup>11</sup>

After the Japanese Occupation (1942 to 1945), opium

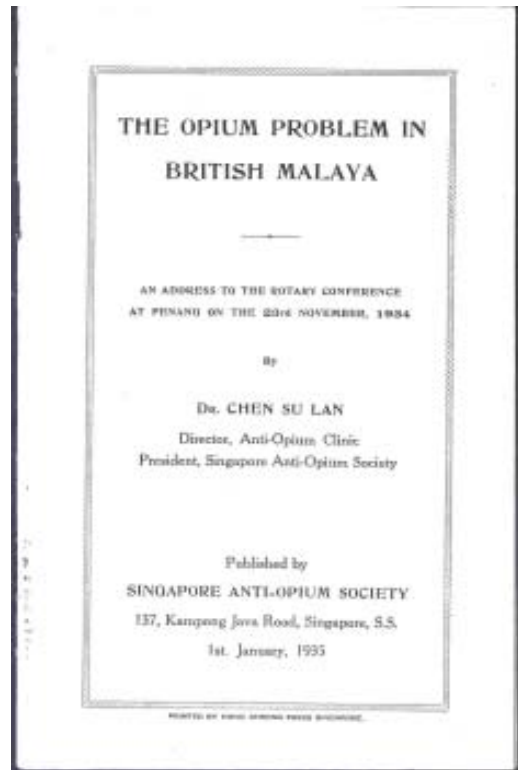


Fig. 6. Dr Chen Su Lan's lecture on "The Opium Problem in British Malaya" at the Rotary Conference in Penang on 23 November 1934.

was finally declared a prohibited drug by the British Military Administration in 1946.

After the Japanese occupation, he served on the Advisory Council of the British Military Administration (BMA). He founded the Chinese YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) in 1945. He founded the Chen Su Lan Trust in 1947, which disbursed funds and land to Christian organisations.<sup>9</sup> The Methodist Children's Home was named after him. He steadfastly served the Lord in the spirit of the quotation he chose as the motto of the Alumni Association: "*Not to be ministered unto, but to minister.*"<sup>9</sup>

He did his alma mater proud and his alma mater reciprocated by conferring on him the Honorary Degree of Letters of Law (LLD) in 1952. He was also an active supporter of the Gan Eng Seng School and the Singapore Chinese Girls' School. Today, the Chen Su Lan Methodist Children's Home in Serangoon Garden Way perpetuates his name. Dr Chen died in 1972, aged 87 years. An obituary (in the local newspaper) wrote a befitting and beautiful epitaph: "*His name will deservedly find a place in Singapore history.*"

#### Dr Edwin W DeCruz (1888 to 1974)

Dr Edwin W deCruz graduated with Dr Chen Su Lan in May 1910 from the Straits and Federated Malay States

Government Medical School. He studied at the St Joseph's Institution, Singapore and was the first applicant to be admitted to the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School;<sup>6</sup> he wrote a short account of his life and times in 1973 for The Alumni Association Newsletter in 1973 (this was reproduced in 2000).<sup>12</sup> He was among the first batch of 7 graduates.

He was a medical officer with the Malayan Medical Service and served in Malacca, Singapore and Penang. In 1973, he wrote that he "spent 4 years in Malacca, 20 years in Singapore and 13 years in Penang serving the Government."<sup>6</sup> He was reported to have single-handedly suppressed the smallpox epidemic in Alor Gajah, Malacca. In Singapore, where he served as senior surgeon, he lectured on clinical medicine and surgery, and among his students were BH Sheares and ES Monteiro. An early attempt to form a graduates' association was made in 1921, with Dr E deCruz as president, but it lasted only a while. In Penang, he was affectionately known as "the poor man's doctor" while he was the Medical Officer of the Government Clinic at Buckingham Street (1935 to 1947) and on recalled duty at the General Hospital, Penang (1947 to 1958). He was made a Justice of Peace in 1948 and served as a visiting judge of the Penang Prisons.<sup>12</sup>

A keen sportsman, he was president of the Penang Recreation Club and the Penang Eurasian Association for more than 10 years. He died in 1974 at the age of 86 years. A photograph of Dr Edwin W deCruz is shown in Figure 7; his philosophy as a doctor was "*If you want to take up medicine, don't do it for gain. Do it for good.*"<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 7. Dr Edwin W deCruz.

### De Wilfred Fairley Carnegie

Dr Carnegie (Fig. 8) was born in Penang on 12 March 1888, the son of Dr JF Carnegie. He was educated at the Penang Free School and joined the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School in 1905 and was among the first graduates in May 1910 to be awarded the LMS (Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery), with first prize in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and second prize for General Excellence. He was in the Government Medical Service for 6½ years; he later became a ship surgeon before setting up private practice. He was a keen cricket and tennis player. For several years, he practised at the Hinnam and Little Dispensary, Victoria Street, Singapore.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 8. Dr Wilfred Fairley Carnegie.

### Dr John Gnanapragasam

Dr John Gnanapragasam, a Ceylonese, graduated in May 1910; there is no further information on him.<sup>14</sup> His portrait is shown in Figure 9.



Fig. 9. Dr John Gnanapragasam.

### Dr John S Lee

Dr John Scott Lee (Fig. 10) was also from the first batch of graduates in May 1910 from the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School. Many of the students in the first batch were keen cricketeers. In 1908, the School was able to field a full side. The first team that represented the School included JS Lee (Captain), EW deCruz, MW Chill, AJ Thumboo and others. Dr JS Lee was a Ceylonese from Ipoh and was made a Justice of the Peace for Kinta in 1931.<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 10. Dr John S Lee.

### Dr Teo Chin Teong

Dr Teo Chin Teong's surname was also spelt "Too" (Fig. 4). He was born in Malacca in 1887. He went to Raffles Institution before enrolling at the newly opened Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School in 1905; he graduated LMS in December 1910. (Of the 6 graduands in December 1910; we could only find information on Dr Teo Chin Teong.) He practiced in Singapore and was Visiting Physician to Kwong Wai Sin Free Hospital (1910 to 1911). He left for China in 1914; later, he served as ship surgeon on the S.S. Hong Mah, etc. From 1916 to 1919, he was medical officer on Christmas Island and later set up a private practice in High Street, Kuala Lumpur. He was a member of the FMS Orion Club and Chui Lok Dramatic Association.<sup>13</sup> Dr Teo (Too) Chin Teong's photograph is shown in Figure 11.



Fig. 11. Dr Teo Chin Teong.

#### REFERENCES

1. Cheah JS. Approaching 100 years of Medical and University Education in Singapore. *Singapore Med J* 2003;44:1-3.
2. Lee YK. *The Medical History of Early Singapore*. Tokyo: South East Asia Medical Centre, 1978.
3. Lee YK, editor. *History of College of Medicine Building, Medical Education and Medical Services in Singapore, 1819 – 1990*. Singapore: Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore, 1992.
4. Freer GD. *Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School Straits Settlement (SS) Report of the Medical Department*, SS Government Printers, 1907.
5. Keith RD. *Annual Report of the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School for 1910*. SS Report of the Medical Department, SS Government Printers, 1910.
6. deCruz EW. Reminiscences. *Alumni Association Newsletter*, 1973. In: Lim KH, editor. *75 Years of Our Alumni*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2000:393-6.
7. Cheah JS. Opium addiction in Penang and Malaya (1786 - 1941). In: Ong HT, editor. *To Heal The Sick*. Penang: The Phoenix Press, 2004:23-7.
8. Song OS. *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1923;367:414-5.
9. Chen CN, Lau E. *Dr Chen Su Lan – Preaching through his practice*. Pamphlet prepared by TRAC Board of Christian Education, May 1997. Publisher unknown
10. *The Anti-Opium Clinic (Interim Report: 8 May to 31 December 1933)*. Singapore: Boon Ong Press, 1933.
11. Chen SL. *The Opium Problem in British Malaya*. Singapore: Hong Cheong Press, 1935.
12. *Historical Personalities of Penang*. Penang, The Phoenix Press, 1986:50.
13. *Who is who in Malaya*, 1925. Publisher unknown.
14. Singam, S Durai Raja. *A Hundred Years of the Ceylonese in Malaysia and Singapore, 1867-1967*. Publisher unknown, 1968(?):228.