

Address by the Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore at the 2003 Annual Induction Ceremony

K Satku,¹*FAMS*

Our Guest of Honour, His Excellency President SR Nathan, President, Republic of Singapore and Patron of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore and Mrs Nathan

Mr Khaw Boon Wan, Acting Minister for Health and Mrs Khaw

Mr Moses Lee, Permanent Secretary for Health

Dr Lee Seng Gee, Chairman Lee Foundation and Mrs Lee

Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, Director of Medical Services

Dr Lee Suan Yew, President of the Singapore Medical Council

Dr Yip Wing Kong, President of the Singapore Dental Council

Professor John Wong, Dean, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore

Professor Keson Tan, Dean, Faculty of Dentistry, National University of Singapore

Professor Tan Ser Kiat, Chief Executive Officer, Singapore Health Services

Professor Lee Eng Hin, Director, Division of Graduate Medical Studies, National University of Singapore

Professor Cheong Pak Yean, President, College of Family Physicians

Distinguished Guests, Fellow Academicians, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening and thank you all for being present.

On behalf of the Council and Fellows of our Academy of Medicine, I welcome and thank President Nathan for gracing this occasion as our Guest of Honour this evening, and for kindly consenting to accept conferment of our Honorary Fellowship.

Thank You, President Nathan.

I would also like to thank Minister Khaw Boon Wan for agreeing to be our special guest this evening.

Thank You, Minister.

This evening, we will be inducting 108 new Fellows to the Academy. I would like to extend a warm welcome to them. During this calendar year, we received more than 200 applications from specialists to join the Academy. This brings the membership in the Academy to approximately 1950 and the proportion of Medical Specialists in Singapore who are now Fellows of the Academy to approximately eighty percent. As Master, it is heartening to see such an overwhelming response and support from our specialist fraternity.

Many professional organisations thrive on numbers, but we

can only excel when we commit ourselves to making a difference for our profession.

The healthcare scene is faced with unprecedented challenges – new diseases, rising expectations of our patients with limited resources and increasing regional competition, just to mention a few.

We need to enhance our capabilities and manage these challenges. Central to this is the entity of professionalism. The core values for our profession have been defined and they include:

- Competence and continuing professional development
- Compassion
- Ability to teach and train
- Communication
- Ethics
- Health advocacy, and
- Self-regulation.

Until the last thirty years or so, this issue of Professionalism had remained largely in the domain of sociologists.

When I was a medical student and later a postgraduate student here in Singapore, my colleagues and I were taught the psychomotor skills and cognitive knowledge necessary for our clinical practice. Communication skills, ethics, ability to teach and train, health advocacy and self-regulation were not in the main stream curriculum. We were expected to imbibe these skills from our role models and, I must add, we had the good fortune to have a number of them, amongst them Professor Wong Hock Boon. However, I dare not say it was good enough. In reflection, I feel I would have done better as a clinician and as an educator today if in addition to the exposure to these role models, the core values of our profession had been actively taught and inculcated.

In recent years, on occasions, the medical profession has been challenged severely. Events such as the Bristol case come to mind. Segments of the profession had failed to self regulate and had failed in its duty of care to the society. In the UK, mandatory reforms are being formulated and will be implemented. For instance, from April 2005 each doctor licensed to practice would need to show proof that his practice encompasses the core values mentioned earlier to have his licence revalidated. Instruments to measure this are currently being constructed. Taking the cue from the international scene,

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here in Singapore too, there is now a need for re-certification of our license to practice. We are required to acquire adequate CME points. I would strongly urge all Fellows of our Academy to also comprehend and adopt our professional core values and demonstrate them in their daily clinical practice. Our profession and our standing will be enhanced and valued even more if each one of us voluntarily takes these measures seriously.

The Academy Council has unanimously agreed to make professionalism its priority and will endeavour to promote these values amongst our Fellows.

Further, the theme of the Academy's Combined Congress next year will be *Continuing Professional Development and Professionalism – The Next Lap*.

Shortly, we will be launching a pilot quality initiative for our Fellows in an effort to increase their awareness of these core values. Questionnaires will be available on the Academy's website for our Fellows to do self appraisal, and also to be appraised by their patients and colleagues.

New programmes will be launched regularly on our website and Fellows will be informed electronically so that they could view and participate in them in a timely fashion.

Incidentally, the website will also make known our Fellows specialty and subspecialty interests, and achievements, to our colleagues regionally and internationally – a small step but one that we hope will increase our regional competitiveness.

It has not been easy for the 12 elected Councillors and 10 Chapter Chairpersons to manage the needs of our profession in general and our specialists in particular while holding full time jobs elsewhere. The need to serve more than 1900 members from 41 different specialties has placed the Academy's current structure under strain. We need more of our specialists to come on board to take ownership of the various programmes. The Past Masters and the Council have decided that the Academy needs to be restructured to better serve the specialists and the profession. The proposed new structure will have the Academy as the parent body and the larger Chapters will be reconstituted to form Colleges. The Colleges will have the autonomy and flexibility to respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of

the specialty or group of specialties they serve. They will also be able to interact with like bodies internationally, an interaction that will augur well for our specialists here in Singapore.

Earlier this year, the constitution was amended to provide for this change. A constitution for the Colleges is presently being drawn up.

The Colleges will work with all related professional bodies, in particular they will invite participation and representation from Specialty Societies so that we can work together to better serve the needs of our specialists, and not compete needlessly and duplicate efforts.

The Colleges will be expected to establish standards for training, and standards for practice and care within their specialty. Our next initiative is to get specialists from each specialty group to define outcome indicators for acceptable standards of care for common conditions within their specialty. These standards would be measured against international standards. If we are able to demonstrate through these indicators that our patients consistently receive good care, it will certainly augur well for the profession and also for our aspiration to become an international medical centre. Patients will confidently come to Singapore, assured that they will receive quality care.

These are some of the measures we will be introducing to see us through these challenging times and prepare us for the next leap forward.

I would now like to make special mention of 2 persons, who through their constant support and guidance, have contributed significantly to the developments in the Academy during my tenure. Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, Director of Medical Services and Professor Lee Eng Hin, Director of the Division of Graduate Medical Studies have been most generous with their time, advice and encouragement. On behalf of the Academy, I would like to express to you both our gratitude.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it now remains for me to thank you once again for joining us today.

Have a pleasant evening.