

34th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine/Combined Medical and Dental Scientific Meeting—3 to 6 August 2000

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The Singapore–Malaysia Congress of Medicine is now well into its 34th year. The meeting has certainly grown in strength irrespective of the presence or absence of background political hiccoughs. Nonetheless, the profusion of medical meetings both in the region and internationally has brought with it problems of competition for participants as well as for funding from the industry.

Furthermore the number of attendees at these meetings has been diminished in recent years by the accelerated growth of many subspecialist groups. In the past, meetings of a general nature attracted the most participants as the crowd could be drawn from a very wide variety of disciplines. Presently, general meetings hold no attraction to the specialist. The renal physician sees no merit in attending a neurology symposium and the respiratory physician does not want to attend a colorectal surgery session.

“General interest topics” is a two edged sword seeking to draw crowds but often finds only minimal interests as the specialist deems these too superficial to be spending time on.

The proliferation of annual scientific meetings conducted by each hospital and tertiary medical and dental institution in this country has also taken its toll on the overall attendance and funding of the larger combined general meetings. Drug and instrument companies after all can only have so much money in the coffers to support these events. And people only have so much time in their lives to present papers or to listen to lectures.

However, when the then Chairman of SGH, Dr Tan Ser Kiat and Master of the AMS, Dr Chee Yam Cheng and the Dean NUS, Dr Tan Chorh Chuan approached me to think about organizing the one mega-event which will make obsolete, other medical events of the various hospitals and national events for 2000, I jumped in without too much anxiety. I felt sure of one thing. Doctors have always known how to work and play together. In theatre, one man operates; another helps him to display the tissues, yet another assists them. At the same time, a swab nurse hands the instruments, another circulates to ensure that whatever is not on the operating table is there when needed. But that is not all; another team sits at the head of table ensuring that the patient is sleeping painlessly. Yet other teams of people work in reception and recovery to ensure the smooth running of the whole operation. Big combined meetings will work in medicine as that is our trained nature to work together. It is only the lawyer, the accountant, the politician that work against one another but that is their training background.

I was confident therefore that this will be so. We are trained as doctors in teamwork; each doing their best. The chief surgeon may get the limelight but really he does nothing in reality except what the team is able to do together. The organizing committee comprising doctors, dentists, nurses and support staff from the Academy worked hard together.

The 34th Singapore – Malaysia Congress of Medicine/Combined Medicine and Dental Scientific Meeting was like that. It may seem difficult enough to run a meeting getting members of the Malaysian Academy and the Singapore Academy together. But getting doctors and nurses of thirteen hospitals and institutions as well as ten chapters of specialists from the Academy of Medicine, Singapore together may not seem easy but it was enjoyable. Our overseas guest speakers came from Australia, Canada, Holland, Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Korea, and the United States of America. Presidents of nine colleges or academies were present as well. The theme “*Medicine without boundaries*”

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was therefore fulfilled. Further more, doctors from one hospital got to attend the plenary and hospital lectures of another hospital. In less auspicious years, this would not have been possible even if one desired to do so. It was amazing to watch the camaraderie that can be so if we remember the roots of medicine.

The comprehensive special lectures, multi-disciplinary symposia and specialist sessions served both the needs of the generalists and specialists. Additionally, the one-day nursing program, three public forum and talks by doctors on “Doctors outside medicine” catered to non-medical persons and the public.

Even the medical equipment and pharmaceutical exhibitors were in attendance in force and all felt their money well spent. Here was their only chance in so many years to get doctors and nurses from all our hospitals and institutions in one place and to paddle their wares effectively.

Much may have been observed and dissected out of the meeting since then. Some good, some bad. All said and done; the aim was achieved, the meeting was held. It was a good meeting. And the organising committee wishes to thank all who participated in this historic “Mother-of-all-Meetings!” In this issue, we present the highlights of the meeting for perpetuity in printed form. Please do read and digest them at your leisure. Enjoy!