

Professor Lee Yong Kiat (8 October 1928 – 22 April 2013)

Friends and Relatives,

We are gathered here today not just to pay tribute to Professor Lee Yong Kiat but to remember and give thanks for his full and fruitful life of service and immense contributions to his family, friends and fellowmen.

Yong Kiat was born on 8 October 1928 in Singapore during the colonial days when times were not always smooth sailing, followed by 3 years of hardship and tragedy during the Japanese Occupation in the 1940s. Many of us will remember that as the eldest son of the family, he bore the brunt of fending for his mother and siblings. He was a family man and we remember him later as a most loving husband, father and grandfather, always doting on his children and later, grandchildren. Some of us will recall he was constantly encouraging his children in swimming competitions, and he was invariably present during their training sessions. He was also the chauffeur of the family, and later when able, to the grandchildren.

Always a brilliant scholar, he was the Seow Poh Leng Medalist at the Anglo Chinese School for being the top boy in all subjects in the 1947 Cambridge Examination, securing a scholarship for Medicine in the then King Edward VII College of Medicine. He qualified for MBBS in 1954 with distinction in Medicine.

Yong Kiat had been a faithful and steadfast family friend for over 50 years. We shared many, many years of serving together as physicians and administrators in the Government Medical Service, teaching in our Medical School, and serving on the Singapore Medical Council, and in the Academy of Medicine.

Much has been written and said of Yong Kiat's achievements, the many honours received and contributions as a "Physician, Teacher and Medical Historian", the title of a citation given by Professor Fock Kwong Ming, delivered in 2004 when Yong Kiat was conferred the Honorary Membership of the Singapore Medical Association. Professor Fock, one of his disciples who later became his chief assistant, his successor and his physician, recorded, "he taught medical and dental undergraduates, as well as postgraduates for decades, and was made Clinical Professor of Medicine. Prof Lee was a popular teacher, and many generations of dental and medical students, as well

as trainees, remember him vividly. He made his bedside tutorials fun, interesting and beneficial to the students and trainees in his own unique way".

He was the professor in charge of teaching Medicine to several generations of dental undergrads of over two decades at the Toa Payoh Hospital, and had invited me year after year to be the external examiner in Medicine. I can attest that he has always been a fair and even generous examiner while maintaining the high standard of the faculty. In the words of Professor Fock, he was always a "kind and non-threatening examiner" and also to postgraduates for the Master of Medicine Degree.

In the early 1960s, Prof Lee served as Medical Superintendent of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) and later Kandang Kerbau Hospital (KKH). It is worthy to record that he was the first medical doctor after the war to obtain a Law Degree from London in 1962. While he was administrating KKH, he obtained the MD of our University. His thesis was entitled "Non-medical aspects of Induced Abortion in Singapore".

A few days ago, I re-read some of the masterly writings Yong Kiat had prepared for the centenary of our medical school in 2005. One especially struck me as I don't think that there ever will be another of such detailed historical account on "The Founding of The Medical School in Singapore in 1905". Allow me to quote a paragraph from the Governor, Sir John Anderson's address: "the study of Medicine was not intended to enable them to earn a living. It was also a passport to membership of a great and noble profession... They were not only to cure diseases but also to prevent them, and to educate their less fortunate compatriots in health matters" and to the students he declared "you will go forth well equipped... in the spirit of the profession". With these words, the Medical School was launched.

As a physician, he served at Singapore General Hospital (SGH), TTSH, KKH and Toa Payoh Hospital (TPH) and later in retirement years at Changi General Hospital (CGH) (the successor of TPH). In the Oslerian tradition, learning from Professors Ransome, Monteiro and Gwee Ah Leng, he in-turn tutored and taught numerous generations of students and trainees.

This eulogy was delivered on 25 April 2013 at Mandai Crematorium

His patients ranged from the lowly poor to several Presidents, Prime Ministers and their Parliament colleagues, but regardless of rank, meticulous care of patients was always of first importance to all.

In the many months of illness, we take comfort that Yong Kiat received immense support and love not just from the family and friends but in the Hippocratic tradition, his patients and the best care with love and compassion from the healthcare team at CGH and his supervising physicians, Professors Fock Kwong Ming and Teo Eng Kiong. And we are all ever thankful.

Let me conclude, Mrs Lee (Chye Neo) and family with a verse from Brock's poem.

*Beyond the sunset, O glad reunion
With our dear loved ones, who've gone before;
In that fair homeland, we'll know no parting
Beyond the sunset, forever more!
And I close with the words of a hymn writer of old (S.
Fillimore Bennett)
In the Sweet By and By,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

Chin Hin Chew

Past Master, Academy of Medicine
