

# Address by the President of the Congress and Master, Academy of Medicine of Malaysia at the Opening Ceremony of the 39th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine

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- Your Excellency, Mr Khaw Boon Wan, Minister for Health and Mrs Khaw
  - Professor K Satku, Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health
  - Professor Low Cheng Hock, Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore
  - Professor John Wong, Dean, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore
  - Presidents and Representatives of Overseas Sister Colleges
  - Council members of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore
  - Council members of the Academy of Medicine, Malaysia
  - Invited speakers, distinguished guests, Fellow Academicians, ladies and gentlemen
- Good Evening!

As the President of the Congress, it is my honour and pleasant duty, on behalf of the Council of the Academy of Medicine of Singapore and the Council of the Academy of Medicine of Malaysia, to warmly welcome you to this 39th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine.

We are honoured and privileged to have the gracious presence of His Excellency, Mr Khaw Boon Wan, Minister for Health, Singapore. Thank you, Your Excellency, for taking your precious time to be here with us at the opening ceremony. We are also honoured and pleased to have with us the Presidents and representatives of sister Colleges from different parts of the world. I would like to specially welcome and thank them for being here with us in this Congress.

For over four decades, Academy of Medicine of Singapore and Academy of Medicine of Malaysia, the two sister Academies, have maintained and nurtured close links. We have continued the tradition of holding these annual Congresses on alternate years, with the exception of this 39th Congress. For two consecutive years, 2004 and 2005, Academy of Medicine of Singapore has played host, and for good reason. This year is special, as it marks the 100 years' of medical education in both countries.

It is interesting to note that the Straits Legislative Council in Singapore passed the enabling legislation to establish

the Medical School in June 1905 (Ordinance No. XV of 1905). The School started to function in July, and was officially opened by Sir John Anderson, the then Governor of the Straits Settlements, on 28 September 1905. It was named "The Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School", and had 23 students in its first intake. In 1912, the name was changed to "King Edward VII School of Medicine". It was only in 1920 that it became "King Edward VII College of Medicine".

This was indeed the beginning of medical education for both countries. We have since evolved into two independent countries, and University of Malaya in Singapore has evolved into University of Malaya and University of Singapore, now National University of Singapore. Both universities have their respective Faculty of Medicine. The Academy of Medicine of Singapore and Academy of Medicine of Malaysia are delighted to be part of this medical centennial celebration.

Just four years before, we celebrated the centenary of another pivotal medical institution: the Institute for Medical Research. It was in 1901 that the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) was founded in Kuala Lumpur. Interestingly, the original name was Pathological Institute. It was renamed Institute for Medical Research in the following year. It remained today at the site of the original IMR, and the name of the Institute remained as Institute for Medical Research. The Medical School and the Institute for Medical Research were the two important institutions in the evolution and development of modern medical and health services in both countries.

At that time, to quote the late Desmond Tate and Prof Khoo Kay Kim in their manuscript on *History of Medicine – The Foundation Years*: "...the general conditions of health were abysmally low, and the existing medical and health services hopelessly inadequate". At that time, our forefathers were fighting the main five scourges: cholera, smallpox, beri-beri, plague and malaria.

We have since come a long way. There has been tremendous progress in improving the health status of our people, as reflected in the improvements of various health indicators in both countries. Obviously, the advances in science and technology were the basis for this progress. More importantly, both countries have been blessed with

far-sighted leadership who had worked hard to improve the lot of the people, be it at the political, Ministry of Health or at the professional level.

Indeed, we have come a long way since 100 years ago. The disease pattern has changed, the demography has changed, the socio-economic status has changed: we now have cancers, diabetes, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, degenerative diseases, motor vehicle accidents, new and re-emerging infections as our main scourges. We also have to contend with ever-increasing public expectations, and ever-escalating health care cost. It is now our turn to carry the baton, to continue to build on what we already have, and tackle the present scourges. The two Academies will continue to play their roles in medical education and training, in promoting professionalism, as well as in maintaining and enhancing the standards of health care in our respective countries.

The organising committee of this Congress, headed by

Assoc Prof Tan Kok Chai, ably assisted by Assoc Prof Chia Sin Eng and Assoc Prof Quak Seng Hock, has worked hard over the last year to put together an enriching and stimulating scientific programme. Among the highlights are named lectures to be delivered by very eminent and distinguished speakers—Prof Lim Pin, Emeritus Prof K Shanmugaratnam, Prof Sir David Weatherall, Prof Roger Williams. We sincerely thank the organising committee for what promises to be an exciting and memorable meeting.

I understand that we have alumni from different vintages who have organised their respective re-unions at this centennial celebration. This is indeed an auspicious occasion. Besides enriching ourselves intellectually and professionally, many of us look forward to meeting friends and colleagues from both sides of the causeway and from abroad. May I wish you an enjoyable and rewarding Congress!

Thank you.