

In Memoriam: Dr MJ Supramaniam

Dr James MJ Supramaniam passed away on 11 December 2008, aged 87.

Dr Supramaniam studied at Anglo-Chinese School. He enrolled in the Singapore Medical College just before the Second World War but his medical education was interrupted for 4 years. In the Japanese shelling of 14 February 1942 which claimed the lives of 10 medical students, he sustained an injury to his calf. On resumption of medical school, he became a keen track-and-field athlete.

He graduated on 1 March 1951 and began his medical career at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH). At the time, TTSH was a chest hospital. Dr Supramaniam said, “William Osler said, “If you knew syphilis, you knew Medicine.” In my time, I feel that, “If you know tuberculosis, you know Medicine.”

Dr Supramaniam was promoted quickly and he was part of the process of post-war Malayanisation of the public hospitals in Singapore and Malaya. Suitably qualified local doctors were groomed to leadership positions to replace the expatriate doctors. “Dr Wong Hin Sun and Dr Yeoh Seang Aun were first, followed by Dr Supramaniam and Dr William Chan, and then Dr Sivakami Devi, Dr Chew Chin Hin, Dr Poh Soo Chuan and Dr Ng Yook Kim”.

Dr Supramaniam became the Medical Superintendent (MS) of TTSH, a post he held from 1968 to 1979.

He started the process with his colleagues to develop TTSH into a general hospital from a predominantly chest hospital. He had a hand in the growth of Neurosurgery, Cardiothoracic Surgery, Emergency Medicine, Rehabilitation Medicine, the Artificial Limb Centre, Medical and Surgical Intensive Care Units, Paediatrics, ENT and Ophthalmology in TTSH. Incidentally, he was also the first chairman of the Civil Aviation Medical Board (CAMB).

He also became the Deputy Director of Medical Services in charge of hospitals (DDMS (Hospitals)) in 1976. He was a Fellow of the Academy of Medicine, Royal Colleges of Physicians of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Dr Supramaniam retired from government service in 1981 and went into private practice, first with Dr Khoo Oon Teik in



Dr Supramaniam is standing at the left in the back row. In the front row from the left are Dr Geraldine Cummins, Dr Wong Hin Sun, an unidentified nurse, Dr Hume Fine Jackson, and Sister Norris; the other two gentlemen in the back row are Dr Gan Kok Liang and Dr Tan Joo Liang. This photograph, from Dr Supramaniam's personal collection, was taken in the early to mid 1950's in front of the Refill Room (for creating pneumoperitoneum) of the Rotary Clinic in Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

the Hope Clinic, then on his own in Agape Clinic and again in Hope Clinic. Dr Supramaniam retired from medical practice in 1990. He recalled his very last patient, “He was a ship captain who flew in from Guam. He was suffering from status asthmaticus and needed ventilatory support in the ICU. I managed the case together with the Anaesthetist.” The patient survived this ordeal and returned to Guam.

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