

Dr Yeoh Seang Aun (13 June 1920 – 21 May 2013)

Dr Yeoh was born in Telok Anson (now Teluk Intan), Perak in 1920. He attended Anglo Chinese School and St Michael's Institution, Ipoh before proceeding to the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore for dental and medical studies before the second World War.



On 13 February 1942, the College had its first casualty when it lost a medical student at TTSH through Japanese shelling. Determined to have a proper burial for this medical student, his fellow students moved his body to the grounds of the College of Medicine. While in preparation for the burial, another ten were killed through relentless shelling with many more injured. Dr Yeoh was one of them. In his own words, “bleeding from (my) chin...told (myself) run for your life...”¹ He graduated with MBBS, after the War in 1951. In the 1950s, tuberculosis was a scourge and Seang Aun found his calling as a chest physician. He proceeded to Britain in 1956 on a scholarship and passed MRCP within 3 months of arrival in Edinburgh. He was elected FRCP in 1969.

A moving eulogy was delivered by his children and grandchildren at the Church of St Ignatius, King's Road before cremation at Mandai on 25 May 2013. We share their sorrow, but are thankful for Dr Yeoh's full life of service to family, friends and fellowmen. I have been a beneficiary and a friend since I first stepped into his office at the Rotary Clinic, TTSH as a medical officer in 1957. He was the first Singaporean Head and Physician of Unit II (now the Department of General Medicine). In appreciation on his role in Tuberculosis Control and Postgraduate Medical Education, I thought I should repeat some words which were said at the first Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) Oration,² delivered on 11 October 1997 and the 5th College of Physicians' Lecture on 5th July 2008.³

“I was exceptionally glad as this was my chance to be trained in Chest Medicine. I was placed in Dr J Grove-White's unit, working closely under Dr Yeoh Seang Aun's

supervision. He had a special role in influencing my career. We had both been in Prof Ransome's medical unit 1. He knew of my special interest in Medicine and Medical Education, and had always been supportive of my plans.” After training and examinations in Scotland and Wales in early 1961, “I found myself again in Seang Aun's unit, now the Head.” With regard to progress in Tuberculosis Control, methods “had greatly improved... Further improvements in delivery of acceptable regimens under routine treatment conditions were necessary. This led to the formation of the TTSH Tuberculosis Research Committee with Seang Aun as Chairman. Other early members were Wong Hin Sun, Andrew Chew, James Supramaniam, W Chan, S Devi and myself. This was elevated to a Ministry of Health Committee when we commenced joint studies with the British Medical Research Council (BMRC) led by Wallace Fox. Other returning chest specialists from United Kingdom (UK) and Australia also joined this group. Our committee presented and published several landmark papers on short course regimens under full supervision with excellent results. These findings are relevant even till today, and World Health Organization (WHO) has now termed the programme as DOT (Directly Observed Treatment). These studies were also published widely in the Lancet, British Medical Journal, Tubercle and American Review of Respiratory Diseases.” The formation of this Research Committee with our fruitful collaboration with the BMRC was in large measure due to the foresight of Dr Yeoh Seang Aun.

“In Singapore, formal postgraduate education became more organised only with the founding of the Academy of Medicine in 1957 and the Committee of Postgraduate Medical Studies in 1961... The Academy's principal objectives were to advance the art and science of Medicine, to maintain and promote the highest standards of professional practice and a high code of ethical conduct. With such a mission...it was only natural for Seang Aun, my chief in 1963 to invite me for membership...” Dr Yeoh had been a senior member of the Academy, and was on council for several years. He played a role in postgraduate medical studies and specialist training in the early years. Regretfully, he declined nomination as the Academy's Master.

Dr Yeoh lived a full and fruitful life of 92 years. He left behind his loving wife, Joo Seang, a long retired doctor, daughter Swee Choo, a gynaecologist, son Teong Keat, a cardiologist and 3 grandchildren. We will miss him and will always remember him as a faithful friend, a compassionate physician, a good and gentle man.

REFERENCES

1. Overcoming the suffering. In: Edmund Lee, editor. *To Sail Unchartered Seas*. Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2005.
2. Chew CH. Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Some Recollections from 1942 to 1997. *Ann Acad Med Singapore* 1998;27:131-9.
3. Chew CH. 5th College of Physicians Lecture – A Physician's Odyssey: Recollections and Reflections. *Ann Acad Med Singapore* 2008;37:968-76.

Chin Hin Chew

Past Master, Academy of Medicine
