

Address by Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore at the 2006 Induction Ceremony and Dinner on Friday, 28 April 2006

Dr Tony Tan and Mrs Tan

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

May I on behalf of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore welcome you to the Academy of Medicine's 2006 Induction Ceremony. First and foremost, we are deeply grateful to Dr Tony Tan for consenting to be our Guest of Honour this evening. We are also particularly honoured that Dr Tan has humbly consented to accept the honorary fellowship of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore. Dr Tan has had a most distinguished and fruitful career. He is a man of great vision. He is not just a politician – He is a statesman par excellence. We are very honoured and proud that he will join our medical family at the Academy.

We are also happy to note the presence of many distinguished guests in the audience. Ms Yong Ying-I, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health (MOH) may we welcome you to the health community and thank you for honouring us with your presence.

Prof Satku, our DMS, needs no introduction. He is in some ways our Mentor Master and his advice is always invaluable. We are also very grateful to Prof Shih Choon Fong, President, National University of Singapore, for making time to be with us this evening. We also welcome the various heads of organisations and institutions among us this evening. Thank you all for sharing this evening with us. Your presence certainly will encourage us to work harder for the medical fraternity to bring better healthcare to our people.

May I also take this opportunity also to thank my fellow Council members and the Academy staff for their dedication in these challenging times.

This evening, 94 new candidates will be graduating and inducted as fellows of the Academy. Henceforth they will be designated as specialists and entitled to practise independently as specialists in our country. May I welcome them to the fraternity.

Having gone through a long journey of training and exams, you are now able to stand on your own feet as specialists. You have earned the title and the privilege. But let us remind ourselves that with this title come heavy responsibilities.

Knowledge and intelligence can make you a specialist, but it is professionalism, ethical practice and the milk of

human kindness and compassion that will transform you into a healer (Years of cold clinical practice may harden your heart and numb your soul, let us never forget to lubricate it with the milk of compassion and love for a fellow human being in pain – Not all diseases can be treated but all patients can be given care).

You are all becoming a specialist in difficult and trying time. Medicine today is facing many challenges; some of these are

1. Specialisation is good and essential, but do not so overspecialised that you treat only the right hip and not the left. Never mistake the disease for the human being as a whole.
2. Technology is evolving so rapidly. When I graduated, there was no ultrasound or CT scan, laparoscopy or flexible endoscopies. Today, not only do we have all these, we are now at the dawn of ever higher technology, telemedicine and robotic surgery. Technological advances are necessary, are good. But let us not be its slave but be its master and use it wisely, efficiently and cost-effectively (The temptation to practise defensive medicine is not easy to overcome.) This brings us to the third challenge.
3. Healthcare cost is rising. We need to practise efficient medicine, evidence-based medicine so that healthcare can be cost-effective, efficient, faster, better and if possible cheaper. Mean testing and cost budgeting are tools that may help us to find ways to improve our healthcare system satisfactorily, but must be used wisely.
4. Research is also becoming more and more important. If we want to move to world class medicine, we need a core of clinical scientists from amongst you. From you, we hope we will find some leaders.
5. CME and CPD. CME is now compulsory to all doctors in Singapore. We must look at CME and CPD as a tool to keep ourselves abreast of development. We have a duty to our patients to ensure the best possible care is given to them. We are still evolving. The challenge to us is to fine-tune a system that is achievable, realistic and effective. We need to regulate ourselves before others police us.
6. The final challenge I like to stress is the need for professionalism and ethical practice. This is an area that is hard to define, difficult to teach and a challenge to monitor (we owe it to our patients to be ethical and

professional). Is medicine today a profession or is it a business? I think it must not be just a profession but also a vocation, a vocation practising in a changing business world.

We need to move with the times, but medical industrialisation, economic metamorphosis and global transformation of medical care must not blind us to the basic need for providing the best possible healthcare to our patients as a total holistic care that is efficient, cost-effective and compassionate.

My dear young new fellows of the Academy, the future of our country's healthcare system is in your hands. We ask of you to be efficient doctors and we know you are, we expect you to be responsible and dedicated, as we know

you can be, and most of all, the demand on you to be totally committed and ethical in all your practice, and we hope you will be.

On your shoulders rest the hope of building a medical profession that is greater than the past and in tune with the visions of the future. On your shoulders rest the hope of building a healthcare system that is cost-effective, responsive and efficient.

Together with the MOH and our sister organisations, we will serve our patients better so that we will not only add years to life but also add life to the years added.

On this note, I thank you once again for joining us and have a pleasant evening.