



A Century of Healthcare Transformation
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

A Century of Healthcare Transformation

Compiled and Edited by
Raymond Goh



ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
Since 1923

PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

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Raymond Goh



The King Edward VII College of Medicine and the Faculties of Medicine,
Universities of Malaya & Singapore and the National University of Singapore

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This commemorative publication is produced in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Alumni Association.

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DEDICATION

We celebrate our founders and forebears,
of whom we are fortunate inheritors, and we are grateful
for their toil, effort, convictions, and their foresight that education
and universal healthcare must be the cornerstones
of our future success.

“It is only right that those responsible, and those preparing to carry on
the good work, should pause and look back with satisfaction on the
great achievements made though the toil and effort of the last 50 years
— not with feelings of complacency but rather like
a great cricketer, who, resting for a moment after reaching his first fifty runs,
sets himself to carry on and achieve his century, and
afterwards more than a century.”

Sir Malcolm MacDonald

Chancellor, University of Malaya

Fifty Years of Medical Education in Malaya, 1905-1955

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FOREWORD



A Century of Healthcare Transformation
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

The first medical school in Singapore was established in 1905. Its graduates went on to form the Graduate Association of the Straits Settlement and Federated Malay States Government Medical School in Singapore which is the forerunner of the present Alumni Association. The Alumni Association was formed in 1923 and will celebrate its centenary in 2023.

It is undoubtedly the oldest professional alumni in Singapore, if not South East Asia. A centenary is an occasion for us to reflect on how far we have come over the 100 years and where we are going to move forward in the future.

Since its inception in 1923, the Alumni has weathered a world war, racial and labour disturbances, merger with Malaysia and independence as a sovereign nation. Her members originally drawn from the King Edward VII College of Medicine, University of Malaya in Singapore and University of Singapore now includes medical, dental and pharmacy graduates from the National University of Singapore, NUS Duke Medical School and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine. Those who have graduated from recognized overseas universities and working in Singapore also qualify to be members.

We have maintained close ties with our alumni, many of whom have relocated to Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Our ties with our Malaysian alumni are especially close. Younger alumni may not be aware that the Alumni Association has two branches in Malaysia, namely the Northern and Central branches. The Alumni Association in Singapore is the Southern branch.

Healthcare in Singapore has made significant progress

in the past 100 years. In this centennial edition, we trace how the practice of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy has evolved from the British colonial era to independence in 1965 and then to the 21st century. Significantly, the provision of healthcare has moved from 3rd World to 1st World within the last 50 years post independence. This would not have been possible without the economic progress in our country made possible by a stable government that is committed to improving the health, quality of life and longevity of its citizens.

The Alumni is proud that our members in both private and public sectors, have contributed to this progress in their capacities as leaders, administrators, teachers, mentors, and practitioners in their respective specialities. Many of those in the public sector have received awards from the Government of Singapore in recognition of their outstanding service and contribution to healthcare in Singapore. Those from earlier generations sacrificed significant financial reward by remaining in the public sector where they play important roles in teaching, training and nurturing the doctors, dentists and pharmacists who are now at the forefront of their specialities. This centennial edition is dedicated to all these outstanding individuals, many of whom are no longer with us.

For this centennial anniversary celebrations, the Alumni has raised \$1 million in the form of bursaries to support medical, dental and pharmacy undergraduates in NUS. We hope that this financial support will help them in some way to achieve their professional aspirations. More importantly, we hope it would instil in them the spirit of paying forward in whatever spheres of influence they may have in their fu-

ture careers, to always provide the best professional care to their patients, and to deliver it with empathy and humility.

During the pandemic years of 2020 to 2021 where restrictions were made on public gatherings, the Alumni has made a concerted effort to connect and engage our members. We have organized bimonthly Continuing Education talks delivered virtually by our own members as well as non members from the medical, dental and pharmacy professions.

We have also incorporated lifestyle talks into the monthly schedules. These talks range from birdwatching, where to get the best hawker food in Singapore and tips on travelling in Japan. With restrictions on gatherings lifted, these talks are now held in the Alumni Auditorium. We will continue to find exciting ways to engage our members and to reach out to those in our professions who may not be aware of the Alumni Association.

We hope our readers will enjoy reading this centennial edition as much as we have in putting it together



PROFESSOR LOW BOON YONG

Chairman
Centenary Celebration Organising Committee

PREFACE

When I reflect on how I came to participate in the creation of this centennial edition of the Alumni Association, three close encounters come to mind that inextricably drew me to this role.

My first encounter was when I had just graduated from the NUS Department of Pharmacy in 1989 and had to complete my pre-registration training at the then Drug Administration Division at Tan Teck Guan building. I remembered I saw engraved plaques etched with names of notable donors on the walls. While I noticed them, at that juncture, I had little realization of the significant contributions they made.

Fast forward to over a decade later, my second encounter was an unexpected revelation. As my brother Charles and I were researching the old burial ground in Silat around 2014, we accidentally rediscovered the remnants of a boundary wall of a former female lunatic asylum which once housed our medical school. The sight was enlightening yet inspiring, reminding us of the past that moulded our present and the future to come.

In late 2015, my third encounter was during the Choa Chu Kang Cemetery Exhumation Project for Tengah Redevelopment. It was here that I rediscovered the final resting place of Tan Jiak Kim who advocated for the founding of the Medical School, which was among the relocated graves from his family plot in Alexandra to Choa Chu Kang Cemetery. I felt it was my duty to alert his descendants to take care of his remains before the bull dozer came.

So, when Professor Low Boon Yong proposed that I become the editor of this centennial book, I accepted without hesitation. I've walked through the corridors where the school's legacy began, seen its humble foundation and connected with the essence of its pioneer. Therefore, capturing this essence into the pages of this edition felt like a culmination of my journey as an Alumni with this oldest institution in our region.

Now, let's reflect on the contrast and transformation in healthcare between when the Medical School first opened and today. In 1905, the averting of deaths was the primary challenge. Today, we have a robust medical and research community that is universally recognized for its contributions. The crude death rate has now dropped dramatically from 50 to around 6 per 1000 residents, and the life expectancy at birth is a promising 83 years. However, the challenges that remain are challenging, and formidable.

At the start of the century, our physicians addressed social ills like opium addiction in addition to diseases like beri beri, smallpox, malaria, and tuberculosis. These days, we are still fighting comparable battles against diseases like cancer, chronic heart and renal disease, ever evolving infectious diseases and substance dependence from synthetic drugs even though the death rate is much lower and we have a higher life expectancy

At this juncture, I like to re-emphasize that the origins of the current National University of Singapore which can be traced back to the Medical School The Medical School, then known as King Edward VII College of Medicine merged with Raffles College (Arts and Sciences, started in 1928) to form the University of Malaya in 1949, which subsequently spilt into University of Singapore and University of Malaysia (In KL) in 1962.

This year, National University of Singapore has climbed to the peak of success, standing as the top university in Asia, and ranked 8th in the world according to the most recent QS World University Rankings.

This has been a century of transformation of healthcare industry. Besides the medical, dental, pharmacy graduates, our Alumni Association has now opened its doors to nurses and the allied professions.

The next phase of transformation would be the transition from treatment to prevention. The transformation

from a treatment-centric approach to a preventive focus is a significant shift in our healthcare delivery system.

Even when the Medical School opened in 1905, the then Governor Sir John Anderson hoped for medical advancements to lead to "improved conditions of life and an increasingly healthy population" by not only curing diseases but preventing them as far as possible.

Over the century, this vision has slowly shifted from a distant dream to a visible and tangible goal.

Today, the emphasis has shifted from merely responding to illnesses to proactively managing health, promoting healthier lifestyles and preventing the onset of chronic diseases. We have realized the importance of equipping individuals to take proactive steps to manage their own health.

Looking ahead, we can see the beginnings of the next transformation in our approach to healthcare education. First is the launch of Healthier SG in July this year by our Ministry of Health to empower people to take charge of their health and prevent chronic diseases. Next is the new interdisciplinary curriculum being implemented from August 2023 for Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy and Nursing students in our University. This new Common Curriculum for Healthcare Professional Education has been carefully crafted to ensure that the learning outcomes are aligned with the future vision of healthcare with focus on preventive healthcare and facilitating ageing in place through the use of technology and analytics.

It is being recognised that disease prevention and health promotion are not only cost-effective but also lead to healthier, happier populations for generations to come.

The words of inventor Thomas A. Edison come to mind here: "The doctor of the future will give no medication but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, diet and in the cause and prevention of disease".

I believe we are at the brink of that future, where prevention and proactive health management take precedence over reactive treatment measures. This perspective of healthcare will infuse every and every one of us, the healthcare professionals, to work together with the people to create a healthier and more sustainable future for our future generations.

As I conclude this editorial note, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who have played a pivotal role in shaping the Alumni Association. To the professors who moulded future leaders, to the students turned alumni who continuously contribute back, and to every individual who leave an indelible imprint on this century-long narrative. The intriguing stories that fill the pages of this edition will continue to inspire generations to dream bigger, learn more, and be catalysts of change.

On a final note, I wish to acknowledge the current Alumni Association Committee Members for their guidance, Jeffrey Goh CH my sub editor for his brilliant work, and Adeline Tong for being an anchor with her invaluable half a century of service to the Alumni Association.

Together, we look forward to writing the next chapter in our Alumni history. Here's to the next 100 years, united in our journey to make a difference.



Raymond Goh Ann Chuan
Editor

“We who are a privileged class who derive our income from the public and who make this country our home owe a debt to the public. The debt must be paid if not in money, at least in service free of charge. Justify our existence by putting into practice our motto: ‘Not to be ministered unto, but to minister.’ We must not disappoint.”

DR CHEN SU LAN

Founding President
The Alumni Association

Source: Malaya Tribune, 4 August 1947, page 5



Photo: Alumni Association Collection

Both Dr E.W. de Cruz (left) and Dr Chen Su Lan realised the importance of a professional body to represent the interests of medical graduates, as well as to serve the needs of society.



ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
Since 1923

Not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

Founded in 1923, the Alumni Association is the oldest professional body of a local institution of higher learning in Singapore. It was established by a group of doctors led by Dr Chen Su Lan, who realised the importance of creating an association for graduates of the local medical college. Initially named the Singapore Medical College Graduates Association, it became known as the Alumni Association of King Edward VII College of Medicine, or simply the Alumni Association, on 27 December 1930.



Photo: Courtesy of SPH Media Limited

FELICITATIONS

MINISTER FOR HEALTH

The Medical Alumni Association has its roots in the first medical school in Singapore, which started in 1905. Over the years, the healthcare scene in Singapore has developed by leaps and bounds. Healthcare professionals are widely respected and have inspired generations of young people. The Alumni Association has served many generations of medical, dental and pharmacy graduates alongside this proud history of the healthcare sector.

This is where members continue to network and develop a stronger sense of belonging to the medical profession. The Association continuously contributes to the development of the next generation by giving out bursaries to students studying medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and nursing, and intends to expand its membership to include new nursing and allied health professionals going forward.

Most importantly, the Alumni Association continues to uphold its motto, “Not to be ministered unto, but to minister”. It articulates the spirit and dedication with which past Alumni members have served society. That is why many went above and beyond the call of duty to serve in voluntary organisations, defend our frontline during the SARS and COVID-19 pandemics, and support national health strategies such as Healthier SG.

My heartiest congratulations to the Medical Alumni Association and its members on its centenary milestone.

MR ONG YE KUNG

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung with staff from Sengkang General Hospital.

百年
樹人
十年
樹木

“If your plan is for ten years, plant trees.

If your plan is for the future generations, educate the people.”

Calligraphy by Clement Huang

— Chinese proverb (Guanzi c 645 BC)

Singapore is a global leader in healthcare. Its journey to the present began in 1905 with the introduction of Western medicine education when the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School was established. *A Century of Healthcare Transformation* chronicles the early struggles of Singapore and Malaya. It delves into the history of the Alumni Association of the medical school and the pioneering graduates who played vital roles in tackling the health challenges confronting the country they served. These individuals exemplified the Alumni Association's motto, “Not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” by their unwavering commitment to fulfilling the community's needs with resilience and dedication. In the process, they shaped the healthcare landscape and ensured the well-being of the people.

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