

Celebration of an Icon in Family Medicine Dr Lee Suan Yew

by Dr Grace Chiang, Honorary Editor, College of Family Physicians Singapore

The College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) and the Chapter of Family Medicine, Academy of Medicine Singapore (AMS) were honoured to co-host a very special celebration for the retirement of Dr Lee Suan Yew at the age of 89 and after 60 years as a practising family physician in January 2023. The event was an opportunity to celebrate Dr Lee's achievements and commitment to the family medicine community.



A/Prof Tan Boon Yeow (Chairman of Chapter of Family Medicine, AMS) and A/Prof Tan Tze Lee (President, CPFS) presenting Dr Lee Suan Yew with a commemorative plaque.

Dr Lee studied medicine at the University of Cambridge, graduating in 1961. He returned to Singapore to complete his housemanship before returning to the UK in 1963 to complete his post-graduate education and training at the prestigious Hammersmiths Hospital and Queen's Square London. 1966 was a particularly notable year for Dr Lee as he achieved several milestones such as successfully attaining the membership of the Royal College of Physicians Glasgow, getting married, and returning to Singapore to undergo specialist training in internal medicine with a special interest in neurology at Singapore General Hospital.

In 1968, he found his true calling in family medicine after being invited by Dr Phay Seng Whatt, then Chairman of the Public Service Commission, to join his practice. Dr Lee took over Dr Phay's practice after joining his practice with his partner, Dr Chua Sui Leng, before setting up his own

practice at Balestier Plaza in 1984, where he has practised until his retirement on 1 January 2023.

Dr Lee is a family physician who believes that one should not make one's practice into a trade. A family physician must have passion in medicine and practise good medicine for the benefit of one's patients. A family physician must use both one's heart and one's brain. He abides by this tenet from Sir William Osler, "The practice of medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling, not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head."

Dr Lee fondly recalls one memorable anecdote where his practice as a family physician intersected with his other role as a Justice of Peace. A patient whom he had cared for since she was a child presented to him with fever and thrombocytopenia two weeks before he was due to solemnise her wedding. He transferred her to the hospital for treatment of dengue where she recovered, and a week later he successfully officiated her wedding. She has since given birth to her first child. Dr Lee has just solemnised his latest wedding in February 2023 and will continue to be a Solemniser until his appointment by the Registry of Marriages concludes in June 2023.

Dr Lee is a passionate advocate for the profession of family medicine and has made significant contributions to the advancement of family medicine during his progressive leadership as the president of CPFS from 1985 to 1988. During his leadership, he oversaw the recognition of family medicine as a distinct academic discipline in medicine; the setting up of the Department of Community, Occupational and Family Medicine; the move of the College to its present premises at the College of Medicine Building; and the institution of the Post-graduate Medical Library, which was jointly set-up with AMS (this was subsequently closed to make room for the Ministry of Health). Dr Lee also spearheaded the start of the College's art collection with the vision of promoting the culture of art and science within the College, especially as a showcase for foreign dignitaries whom the College hosted. He gathered \$1,000 each from the then Council's ten members and with this amount curated a varied collection ranging from paintings by Chen Wen Hsi to ancient pottery from the Tang dynasty.

Dr Lee was also instrumental in the initiation of formal postgraduate training in family medicine when the steering committee on family medicine training was formed by the



A/Prof Tan Boon Yeow (Chairman of Chapter of Family Medicine, AMS), A/Prof Tan Tze Lee (President, CPFS), Dr Lee Suan Yew, and A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, and Dr Alfred Loh (past presidents of CPFS).



CFPS council members, Chapter members, Dr Lee Suan Yew, and past presidents of CPFS.

Dr Lee is a passionate advocate for the profession of family medicine and has made significant contributions to the advancement of family medicine during his progressive leadership as the president of CPFS from 1985 to 1988.

MOH in 1988, which led to the subsequent development of advanced training programmes. Dr Lee also played an integral part of the setup of the Chapter of Family Medicine, AMS when he and A/Profs Goh Lee Gan and Cheong Pak Yean met with the then Master of AMS to discuss the start of the Chapter. His dreams for the future of family medicine are for family medicine to be accredited as a specialty.

Dr Lee is looking forward to his retirement and he sees it as an opening of a whole new chapter. His immediate plans include tidying up his clinic while his future plans include catching up on his reading (he is an avid reader who especially enjoys biographies), gardening, wine appreciation, and golfing. He is a spritely golfer who plays nine-hole golf once a week.

CPFS and the Chapter of FM, AMS wishes Dr Lee Suan Yew all the very best in his new phase of life and well-earned retirement.