

## FOUNDING OF THE COLLEGE

Dr Wong Heck Sing

The early founders of the College headed by Dr Wong Heck Sing, Chairman of the Pro-tem Committee for the formation of the Singapore College of General Practitioners, wrote a letter to Lord Hunt, then President of the Royal College of General Practitioners, to help Singapore to form its College of General Practitioners. Dr Wong was told to seek help from the Australian College. Accordingly, Dr Wong went to Sydney Australia, where the Australian College's headquarters was situated, to seek help. There he met a Dr Richard Geeves, a general practitioner who had just sat for the MRACGP examinations. Dr Geeves introduced Dr Wong to the members of the Council of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners where he met the President, Dr Harvard Merrington and his Council. Dr Wong subsequently met the Founder President of the Australian College, Dr William O Connally.

The assistance given by the Australian College proved invaluable. They told us what pitfalls to avoid. For instance, they advised Dr Wong not to grant automatic diplomate memberships to founding members unless they had passed the diplomate examinations to prevent complications and favouritism. They learnt this from other countries which practised this form of membership. Besides the advice, the Australian College also helped in the setting up of questions for our diplomate membership examinations. Not only that, they sent two of their Australian College examiners to help the Singapore College in its College diplomate examinations. They also offered to recognize our

diplomate examination as equivalent to their College membership examination, and to grant automatic MRACGP to all our successful candidates. As a result of these academic links, the Singapore Medical Council with the help of Dr Ho Guan Lim accepted the MCGP as an additional qualification.

All in all, the Singapore College owed a great debt to their Australian counterpart. The Singapore College would not have made such progress without the help so generously given by the Australian College.

The College had its roots in the Society of General Practice in the 1960s. Later the Society changed its name to the Society of Private Practice to include specialists in private practice. Among the pioneers of the Society of General Practice were Dr O C Leow, the late Dr William Heng, the late Dr C G Foo, the late Colin Marcus and later, the late Dr G Haridas.

In a talk to the Singapore Medical Association about the meetings Dr Wong had with the Australian College, the Association nominated Dr Wong Heck Sing to study the formation of the Singapore College of General Practitioners along the lines of the UK College or the Australian College. At a subsequent meeting of the Council of the Society of Private Practice, the Society's Council nominated Dr Wong Heck Sing as Chairman of the Pro-tem Committee for the formation of the College of General Practitioners, Singapore. The committee members were Drs C K Foo as Hon. Secretary, Chen Chi Nan, O C Leow, E K Koh, Colin Marcus and Chee Phui Hung as members. The committee studied various constitutions of existing Colleges and adopted a constitution to suit our needs.

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(1973-1977; 1983-5)

#### **INVITATION TO DR B.R. SREENIVASAN**

As the Singapore College was a newly formed body, nobody had heard of it, let alone know about it. Council decided to invite a well-known doctor to be the College first President. The name on everybody's mind was Dr B R Sreenivasan, the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya in Singapore. The Council through its Pro-tem Chairman, immediately wrote to Dr Sreenivasan, and he accepted the Presidency without hesitation. Dr Sreenivasan served the College well. Unfortunately ill health prevented Dr Sreenivasan serving longer than two terms.

#### **JOINT COLLEGES CONFERENCE**

Following the formation of the Singapore College it was proposed that a Joint Colleges Conference be held in Singapore. Malaysia had not formed its College of General Practitioners yet, but it too wanted to be involved in the Conference. Finally the Conference was called "the First Joint Colleges

Conference of the Australian College of General Practitioners, the Malaysian College and the Singapore College". The Conference was to be organized by the Singapore College and held in Singapore in 1975. The Conference was meant to be opened by Dr Sreenivasan but he was too unwell to do it. The Conference was a success due in no small measure to the fact that the Australian College sent a large contingent of over 200 members to the meeting.

The Second Joint Colleges Conference, organized by the Australian College was held in Sydney. Only the Singapore College participated in the Conference. They sent a delegation of about 40 delegates to the meeting. Malaysia did not send any. They had internal problems about their College formation and foreign currency restrictions. These Joint Conferences exposed the Singapore College to overseas conferences and enabled it to play a significant role in subsequent Wonca meetings.