

Eulogy



*Dr Seng Kwang Meng
1941 – 2008
OGSS President (1984-1986)
Chairman Congress Trust Fund (2004 -2006)*

All too often we witness cruel turns of events in life and no human endeavour seems to be able to defy such heavenly power. That very first day of this April, one such catastrophe took away one of our members— someone so very dear to all of us.

Dr Seng Kwang Meng, had served tirelessly for our Society, the O&G fraternity as well the wellbeing of so many people and organizations in need, from the Singapore Board of Social Services to the many young humble medical students. He was the honorary general secretary (1973/74) and then the President (1984-1987) of OGSS. He served in the Congress Trust Fund (2001-2006) and was its Chairman (2004 - 2006).

I first met KM (as his was always affectionately known to us) when I was a medical student posted to KK Hospital. We were waiting to meet the then head of B unit, Dr Goon Sek Mun, for the first tutorial of the posting. Instead, this dynamic man, well dressed and immaculately groomed (not usually expected in the hectic and busy environment of KK hospital of the 1970s) walked into the room to meet us. He had these curly locks of jack black hair, a pair of engaging eyes and the most comforting smile in the world. He could immediately put you completely at ease and relaxed.

That first encounter also signified another great attribute this man possessed. He was not only the most helpful man many of us have ever met. He was also extremely dependable, committed and capable. That was why even as a registrar in the Department he was often called upon to deputise the head of unit.

I did not have the good fortune of working with him in the institution, as he had left for private practice when I started my career in KK hospital. The next time I met him was at the Society's AGM 1984/85. He was invited by the then Council to be the new President of OGSS. In nominating KM, the late Prof S S Ratnam told the members present: "The Society in general and the Council in particular now need a leader that is dynamic, innovative and committed to take us to the international stage"--- as OGSS was preparing to hold the IFFS World Congress (1987) in Singapore and to bid for hosting the FIGO World Congress (1991). He said that in his mind there was no one other than KM that could fit this description.

Serving as the treasurer and, later, the secretary in his Council, it was an eventful and fulfilling time. That was how we all experienced, at first hand, this man's tremendous generosity and vision.

As it turned out, under KM's guidance, we had a very successful IFFS World Congress and the net income from it was to this date the biggest single contribution to our Society's reserve fund --- The Congress Trust Fund. It also generated great interest and respect for our island city as an efficient and competent centre for large medical conferences. This went a long way in the subsequent successful bidding and hosting of the 1991 FIGO World Congress.

As President of OGSS, his leadership and vision were absolutely influential. I could recall his first address to the Council as its President in 1984. He outlined the Society's role as a professional body to all our members, as a social and health organization to the public and as an academic institution to Singapore, the nation.

During his terms, we had regular evening lectures by academics passing by Singapore or on short attachments to the University Department. They were simple gatherings with no lavish dinners, and held at the old KK hospital lecture hall, attracting many members, even those across the causeway in Johore. With the help of the University Department and sponsored by Hitachi, KM organized the very first O&G Ultrasonography Workshop opened to all members to attend. It was conducted by Professor S Campbell, whom many of us now are very familiar.

In the 1980s, the Society and its function were still rather inward looking, so it was visionary for KM to be the first president who wanted OGSS to be relevant to the public at large. I remember occasions whereby emergency Council meetings were called to address public perception of our profession and our practices. One such example was the warning of ill effect of routine obstetric ultrasonography, appearing on the front page of Sunday Times. KM got the Council to hold an emergency press conference to put right the public impression of the proper use and benefit of this modality which we now know is so essential to the good and safe practice of obstetrics. The press article appeared on The Sunday Monitor on 27 January 1985. We are, of course very familiar nowadays with the numerous forums and initiatives that OGSS organizes for the public.

Besides playing a key role in putting Singapore in the world map of O&G and medical congresses by holding the IFFS and FIGO here, KM was the president who started The MASEAN lecture of O&G in 1985. The first lecturer was Professor Khairuddin of Malaysia. This lectureship was rotated among the ASEAN countries. The subsequent Councils have expanded on this relationship and we were particularly close to the Malaysians (with several mutual cooperation agreements and exchanges) and I was told that we are currently doing the same with our sister organization in Indonesia.

Even after he left the Council, he continued to generously share his visions and skill with members of the Society. As early as in 1991, he started a Minimally Invasive Surgery (MIS) group that performed endoscopic surgeries in Mount Alvernia Hospital every Wednesday afternoon and all were welcome to operate together with us. He also got his good friend, Dr Charles Koh, to come with other well known international gynaecological endoscopic surgeons to conduct workshops here, open to all members of OGSS.

For his contribution to promoting MIS in O&G, the AAGL had his name in their list of recognized associate MIS societies and clubs. This Singapore MIS Club, as his grouping was called, had since merged with the MIS sub-section of OGSS to be called GEMS (the Gynaecologic Endoscopists and Minimally Invasive Surgeons of Singapore).

KM continued to serve the Society through his presence in the Congress Trust Fund and together with OGSS stewards like Drs Onn Chew Seng, Charles Ng and PC Wong safeguarding the funds which many members in the past had laboured to accumulate for the Society.

KM's generosity was unmatched. He was always hosting and donating especially to the less fortunate. It was not confined to material generosity. He was always there for someone in need to share his experience, his skill and his time. This was testified by the hundreds who came to say farewell. Everyone had a little story to tell; how he or she was helped by this man. They all agreed that this man was just too wonderful. There was, however, only one lingering disbelief, as everyone muttered: 'why so sudden? and why so premature?'

As for those of us who could manage to see him for the last time at the A&E department on the fateful day, his curly locks were still black but the engaging eye and comforting smile would only live in our memories. As we stood there, we found it was not just unbelievable. It was unthinkable. One could feel this unspeakable sense of sadness and pain.

KM, we miss your phenomenal generosity and vision. But most of all, we will always miss you – a kind person, a steadfast colleague and our dear friend.

Chow Kah Kiong