

Obituary

Professor Chew Chin Hin (1931 - 2024)



Professor Chew had his early education in Singapore. When World War Two broke out, he was affected by the deaths of medical students at Sepoy Lines, when the areas around SGH was bombed. He determined to study medicine and after O levels in 1948, continued with his medical education at the University of Hong Kong (1949 to 1955). He was wait listed for a place locally. There he met Anna Hui whom he later married when they returned to Singapore after graduation. Their wedding was held at the Bethesda Katong church. Their marriage was very happy, joyful, blissful and productive. Anna passed away on November 6 2024. He cared for her with so much love and grace during the recent years, as her health deteriorated. Professor Chew had been unwell in 2024. Diagnosed with cancer, he was warded at the Tan Tock Seng (TTSH) hospital on the same day November 6th that his dearest wife passed on. He opted for the same ward and bed she had occupied. From the hospital bed, he could clearly see his old home at 15 Akyab road, a black and white bungalow, where the family lived until he retired from the civil service at the Ministry of Health in 1991. The same view took in the plot of vacant land where once the Rotary Clinic of the hospital stood. This was where his patients consulted with him. He passed away to be with his well-beloved wife Anna on 14 December 2024.

His illustrious medical career paralleled that of his father, the late Dr Benjamin Chew who served at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital as Head of the Medical Unit. Chin Hin trained in internal medicine at SGH medical unit I under Sir Professor Gordon Ransome, and Professor TJ Danaraj. His interest was tuberculosis and chest medicine after passing the MRCP exams in Glasgow, and staying on in Edinburgh to complete his training. On his return in 1961, he worked at TTSH and became the foundation Head of Medical Unit IV at TTSH in 1964. He then took on the role of Medical Director of the hospital in 1979. From there he progressed up to the Ministry of Health and in 1981, became the Deputy Director of Medical Services (Hospitals Division), taking over from Dr JMJ Supramaniam. He held this post till his retirement from service. He moved office when the Ministry relocated from Cuppage Road to the College of Medicine building at College road. He worked with Dr Andrew Chew and Dr Kwa Soon Bee who were the PS(Health)/DMS, one succeeding the other. It was the era of rapid expansion of public hospitals, national medical centers, and medical specialties from the late 1970s to the end of the last century. It was my privilege to be posted to the Ministry at College road during this period to serve as the Director Medical Manpower (from 1987 to 1995) under all three of them. Dr Chew received the Public Administration medal, Gold (PPA(E) in 1983 his services to Medicine, Medical Education, and Research.

As the Medical Superintendent of TTSH, he was tasked to set up the Civil Aviation Medical Board at the hospital to take over this role from the British who were withdrawing from Singapore. He continued to serve on this board in various capacities until October 2024. In the later years, he continued to drive himself to Changi Airport where the medical board deliberations take place. He enjoyed the interaction with the pilots and the intellectual discussions with other board members especially those trained in Civil Aviation.

Professor Chew contributed much to academic medicine. He achieved Fellowship of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore in 1963. In 1975, as the Master of the Academy of Medicine, he conferred the Honorary Membership of the Academy on our nation's founding father and Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. For postgraduate education, he served as the Deputy Director at the SPMS (School of Postgraduate Medical Studies). This statutory body was set up by Dr Toh Chin Chye, Deputy Prime Minister and Vice Chancellor of the University of Singapore. In the early 1970s, the School set up the local postgraduate Master of Medicine degrees in various specialties. These degrees are conferred by the University of Singapore at its annual convocation ceremony. The SPMS was renamed the DGMS (Division of Graduate Medical Studies) under the National University of Singapore in 1980. He continued to examine candidates for the Master of Medicine (internal Medicine) exams. He occupied this office at Kent Ridge until 2024. He worked with the Directors, from Professor SS Ratnam, Lee Eng Hin, Chen Fun Gee, right down to the present Director, Associate Professor Clement Tan. He developed and maintained cordial links with many eminent Presidents of sister colleges in the UK, Australia and the USA. The American College of Physician conferred the MACP (Master of the ACP) upon him, a rare distinction and honor for a Singapore doctor, and the only one to date.

As a renowned chest physician, he is best remembered for the research on short course chemotherapy in the treatment of Pulmonary Tuberculosis in Singapore. These clinical trials were done in collaboration with the Medical Research Council of the UK led by Professor Wallace Fox. The results of these trials impacted significantly the duration and efficacy of treatment, shortening the duration of therapy from 18 months to 6 to 9 months, and with near 100% cure rates. These chemotherapy regimens are now standard therapy for the disease in the world.

He contributed significantly also to the work of the Singapore Medical Council, the Specialist Accreditation Board and the National Medical Ethics Committee.

A true gentleman at heart, brought up on Christian values, Professor Chew was a doting and loving husband, father and grandfather to his family. He is survived by Elaine, the eldest daughter, twin daughter, Eileen and Eireen, and son Edward, and their families. A dear friend to us, we salute and honor the man, his life of service and contributions to the community, the medical profession and the nation. I personally wish to record my gratitude to him for mentoring me; for the time we spent together at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the DGMS, NUS, the Academy of Medicine, and the Ministry of Health, over the past 50 years. It was my pleasure and honor to golf with him on the several occasions when he was able to do so and to witness his happiness and satisfaction that his golf was still up to par.

Chee Yam Cheng

Past Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore (1998-2000)

Dr Chew Chin Hin was a titan in medicine. A role model of role models. A mentor of mentors. He trained and inspired generations of doctors, many of whom had gone on to assume leadership positions in the medical profession. He always had time and a kind word for younger doctors.

I benefited much from his advice and especially his encouragement, without which, I must admit, I would not have joined the AMS Council years ago or ran for Master-elect in 2023.

I will always remember his clarity of thought, kindness, and humility.

Wong Chiang Yin

Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore

It is my fortune and honor to have known Prof Chew Chin Hin.

For more than fifty 50 years, he was first my teacher, then my doctor, my boss (when he was in MOH), then my colleague and finally I am proud to call him my friend.

He is truly “a friend in need is a friend indeed”. He is such a caring boss a brilliant clinician and teacher, and always fatherly figure. He demonstrated that “the heart of medical education is the education of the heart”. Knowledge makes you a doctor; compassion makes s you a healer.

Professor Chew is truly a “DOCTOR AND A HEALER”. I salute him. He is a star that shall shine for all eternity, and continues to guide us all.

Low Cheng Hock

Past Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore (2004-2006)

I met Dr Chew Chin Hin when I was a young Paediatric Registrar soon after passing my M.Med. (Paediatrics) and posted to the Department of Paediatrics, Tan Tock Seng Hospital in 1977-1978. In 1980, as the Medical Superintendent of TTSH, Dr Chew supported me to take up the Commonwealth Fellowship to undertake training in Neonatal Intensive Care at The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Canada, setting me on a path less travelled by my peers.

When I returned from training, I worked at the Department of Paediatrics, Alexandra Hospital. Very soon, I was drafted into the task force to set up obstetrics and gynaecology service at Singapore General Hospital. In 1986, as the Acting Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health, Dr Chew posted me to SGH to set up the neonatal service. I became the founding head of neonatology at SGH from 1986 to 2004 for almost 18 years.

Dr Chew encouraged all the young specialists to become fellows of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS). When I was elected Master, AMS from 2006-2008, Dr Chew never stopped giving me his encouragement and support. He told me he was very pleased and honoured to be the Gordon Arthur Ransome orator at the golden jubilee of AMS, during the Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine opening ceremony in 2007. At the same ceremony, the then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was conferred Honorary Fellow of AMS. He also proudly told me that he was the Master, AMS, who conferred the Honorary Fellowship of AMS to Mr Lee Kuan Yew in 1975.

Dr Chew spared no effort in advancing medical specialisation in Singapore. He was totally dedicated to the noble cause of AMS. He was instrumental in building bridges between AMS and the Royal Colleges of United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and Hong Kong. For his life-time contributions in tuberculosis control in Singapore, he was conferred the Master, American College of Physicians in 2008, the only doctor who received this rare honour in Singapore.

Dr Chew continued to be the honorary advisor to the Joint Committee of Specialists Training (JCST), under the Division of Graduate Medical Studies, National University of Singapore, and AMS. His most recent assignment for me was to be in the accreditation team to certify the intensive care departments in Singapore, in early 2024.

Dr Chew Chin Hin has been my most respected mentors. He is the role model to all doctors in Singapore.

Ho Lai Yun

Past Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore (2006-2008)

Dr Chew Chin Hin has devoted many years of life to postgraduate medical training.

Through his efforts he has succeeded in MMed to be recognised as equal to the MRCP.

Dr Chew has been Master of AMS from 1973 to 1975 and has many inspired younger colleagues to continue the aspirations of the Academy. Dr Chew's passing on leaves us with a sense of loss and sadness.

Rest in peace, Dr Chew.

Fock Kwong Ming

Past Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore (2008-2010)

Professor Chew has been a pillar of light and strength for the medical fraternity. He has dedicated his life to the pursuit of excellence and contributed tremendously to the profession in different aspects including the Academy of Medicine, professional leadership, medical education and clinical excellence.

Indeed, his is a life well lived and his legacy lives on not just in his professional life but in his family and friends.

Truly, Professor Chew has a reward that awaits him in eternity. “I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Sophia Chew

Assistant Master (Academic Affairs), Academy of Medicine, Singapore

Dr Chew Chin Hin, in his lifetime, has contributed greatly to the development of postgraduate training in medical studies in Singapore and affiliated countries. Many of us have benefitted.

We would like to place on record our gratitude for what he has done for the medical profession in Singapore.

Professor Cheong Pak Yean and Professor Goh Lee Gan

**Past Presidents, Singapore Medical Association and
College of Family Physicians, Singapore**

You are, and always will be, a lodestar of the local medicine fraternity. We are immensely indebted to you for elevating our community, through your wisdom, vision, and guidance, over the many decades you've faithfully invested your life in Singapore Medicine.

Words fail me, but for someone of your stature to be so humble and so gentle, speaks volumes of your Christ-likeness.

I got to know you through aviation medicine, but the stories you had shared me with over those sessions of aviation medical board, or in those car rides during which i had the privilege to accompany you on, taught me way beyond medicine. It taught me life, and a life well lived.

Your love towards Mrs Chew also touched me. In the way you mention her in tenderness, especially in shared moments of sickness. Your marriage epitomizes what is meant by "in sickness and in health". It must have been a tremendous void that descended when she departed in glory, but you remained strong.

In these final hours, I just wish you well, knowing that as fellow brethren in Jesus, we too shall meet again in the great beyond.

Until then, take care Prof Chew. I will miss you dearly, but will also carry the advice you've imparted close to my heart as we try to honor your legacy in SG Medicine.

In Christ

Junhao (Koh Choong Hou)

Past and Present Aviation Medical Officers, Ministry of Defence, Singapore