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Colour Doppler US image shows an aneurysmal dilatation of an artery in the right gluteal region, with turbulent flow and thrombus formation within.
(Refer to pages 426-428)

The second century of medical education in Singapore: reflecting on the past and looking to the future

W C G Peh

The first century of medical education in Singapore was recently celebrated with the prominence deserving of a premier institution that started life very humbly as the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School on July 3, 1905. Our medical school was formed as a result of a petition from leading Chinese and other non-European communities, headed by the Honourable Mr Tan Jiak Kim, a businessman and philanthropist. The then Colonial Secretary stated "lack of student material" as the main difficulty for the establishment of the school. Reflecting the cautious approach adopted by Sir John Anderson, then Governor of the Straits Settlements, a foundation fund of \$71,000 from public subscription was requested from the Colonial Secretary. A sum exceeding this amount was raised at short notice from the Chinese community in Singapore and Penang, making launching of our medical school possible⁽¹⁾.

It is very appropriate that a century later, another significant philanthropic contribution has resulted in our medical school being renamed the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine of the National University of Singapore. It is hoped that this endowment will not only re-spark the spirit and tradition of philanthropy for Singapore medicine, but also refocus academic medicine so as to reach truly international levels in all disciplines. It is well recognised that all top medical institutions worldwide rely heavily on generous and altruistic benefactors in order to fund and sustain their teaching and research activities.

At the Centennial Medical Dinner held at the Istana on July 3, 2005, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew pointed out that "promising students will gravitate towards good teachers", and "students are likely to become outstanding graduates when they meet stimulating teachers". Minister Mentor Lee also observed that of the initial batch of seven students who graduated in 1910, only three came from Singapore⁽²⁾.

While our medical school has produced many cohorts of doctors who have served Singapore very well over the past century, we could do more to return to our roots in embracing talented individuals from outside of Singapore. The establishment of our second medical school, a graduate-level entry American-style programme in collaboration with Duke University, represents a big step forward in bringing diversity and a fresh infusion of ideas and expertise in the form of students, teachers and researchers to Singapore. The inevitable friendly competition with our existing medical school will be beneficial to all.

To commemorate the start of the second century, the Singapore Medical Journal is pleased to launch, over the coming year, a series of historical articles entitled the Centennial of Medical Education.

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Most of the articles will be authored by Professor Lee Yong Kiat, widely recognised as the leading medical historian in Singapore. Many factual gems can be gleaned from the first article on the evolution of Medicine as a specialty in Singapore⁽³⁾. For example, being a radiologist, I was gratified to learn that Dr John Sutton Webster, who was appointed the very first Professor of Medicine in 1922, chose, on successfully passing the Cambridge radiological qualification, to relinquish this professorial appointment to return to his passion of Radiology and became Singapore's first specialist radiologist in 1926.

Professor Lee's article also highlights the important contributions made by government doctors, particularly from the Singapore General Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital, to educating medical students. Most of the teaching staff in the early years were in fact doctors from the government service, army doctors and general practitioners. Our two medical schools should consider substantially increasing the involvement of doctors and scientists from outside the University, e.g. restructured hospitals, government medical services, private sector, military medical corps and Biopolis, to maximise utilisation of our talent pool to teach and inspire our future generations of doctors.

Considered reflection of our past will positively influence planning for the future. **SMJ**

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