

Dr Andrew Chew Guan Khuan (1929–2012) Honorary Member, FAMS



Dr Andrew Chew was a Fellow of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore since 1965. On August 19, 2004, he was conferred its Honorary Fellowship at a ceremony during the Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine attended by President SR Nathan, President of the Republic of Singapore and Patron of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore.

Then, he was still serving as the Chairman of the Public Service Commission and the Pro-Chancellor of the National University of Singapore. His unexpected demise is a loss to the entire medical fraternity and to Singaporeans at large.

Dr Chew was born on October 11, 1929 in Kuching, Sarawak in Borneo. He came to Singapore and studied at St Andrew's School, passing with Grade I in the 1948 Cambridge School Certificate Examination (slightly late due to World War II). He excelled in sports in the well-known tradition of the school, and was a tough and adept rugby player. He embarked on a career in Medicine, having graduated with MBBS from the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1955 and joined the Singapore Civil Service as a Medical Officer in the Ministry of Health at the tender age of 27 years. A disciple of Professor Sir Gordon Arthur Ransome, Dr Chew trained in Medical Unit I at the Singapore General Hospital. In 1959, he was awarded a scholarship to London for a course leading to the MRCP, which he passed within six months of arrival. He returned to Singapore in 1960 to be the Senior Registrar at the Thomson Road General Hospital, under the late Professor Seah Cheng Siang, who was then the physician in charge as well as its Medical Superintendent. Dr Lee Hoe Guan and Dr Wong Kum Hoong were fellow Senior Registrars then.

At the age of 35 years, Andrew was promoted to Medical Superintendent, Thomson Road General Hospital and a superscale officer in the Civil Service in 1964. Three months later, he moved to Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) as its Medical Superintendent, and it was he who re-organised TTSH into four medical units from the previous three. Three years later, he was appointed as the Medical Superintendent of Kandang Kerbau Hospital, and in 1968, at the age of 39 years, he was promoted to Senior Consultant grade. In 1970, he became Medical Superintendent of Singapore General Hospital and a year later, he was promoted and returned to the Ministry of Health as Deputy Director of Medical Services (Hospitals). A most supportive medical administrator, he promoted joint

collaborative projects between the Tuberculosis Research Committee and the British Medical Research Council, leading to the establishment of present day short course therapeutic regimens for tuberculosis.

Doing sterling work in the Ministry, Andrew was duly recognised and awarded the Public Service Administration Gold Medal in 1975. Two years later, he was concurrently appointed as the Acting Permanent Secretary of Health and the Director of Medical Services at the age of 48 years. His meteoric rise through the superscale grades of the civil service was phenomenal, and by 52 years, he was Permanent Secretary Grade A. In 1984, at the age of 55 years, he left the Ministry of Health to concurrently take up the posts of Second Permanent Secretary (Public Service), Ministry of Finance; Permanent Secretary (Special Duties), Prime Minister's Office (under Mr Lee Kuan Yew); and Deputy Head of the Civil Service – three important and high-profile portfolios. About seven months later, he was appointed Head of the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary (Public Service), Prime Minister's Office. He retired from service on October 11, 1994 and was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. He was also a fellow of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of London and Edinburgh.

Andrew was the archetypal true, dedicated and loyal civil servant, who would have signed off letters as "Yours obediently". He gave his whole life to the civil service such that when he retired at the age of 65 years, the government still required his excellent professional services. He was Chairman of the Central Provident Fund from 1994 to 1998, followed by Chairman of the Public Service Commission until July 2008. He served as Chairman, Board of Governors, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (from 1976); Member, Presidential Council for Minority Rights (from 1994); Member, Legal Service Commission (from 1998); and Chairman, Lee Kuan Yew Exchange Fellowship and Scholarship Fund and Dr Goh Keng Swee Scholarship Fund (from 1998). In 2002, the government conferred on him the Distinguished Service Order.

In the last two years of his life, Dr Chew underwent three major operations. First, he had bladder surgery. Then he had his hip joint replaced – a long-standing injury from his rugby days as a schoolboy. He recovered and returned to golf. In 2012, he underwent cardiac valve surgery at the National University Hospital, but suffered a stormy postoperative period. Sadly, he did not recover and passed away in the hospital on February 29, 2012. Despite his busy schedule of service, Dr Chew led a full life enriched with friends. He was a man of devout faith, always "doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly". He was a family man, a devoted and loving husband,

father and grandfather. He is survived by his wife Jennifer, daughter Juniper (a PhD), son Paul who is the Head of Ophthalmology at NUS, their spouses and four grandchildren.

Dr Chew was always decisive, and not one to procrastinate. He dealt with challenging problems with clarity of vision and a

brilliant mind. To those who say doctors are too narrowly trained, Dr Chew proved otherwise. He was an administrator par excellence, and we are grateful for his life of service to the nation. His sterling service to Medicine, to the Civil Service and to Singapore will long be remembered.

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