

Before I begin my sharing, I want to thank the Anatomy Department for allowing me to share my experiences with everyone. As some of you may have known, last year on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, my father, Dr Tan Chee Beng, CEO Singhealth Polyclinics passed away peacefully after a 3 year fight against cancer. He then went on to perform a final act of service, to become silent mentor for surgery residents.

First off, I would like to share with everyone the life of my father. He wasn't born from a well to do family, he barely made it to medical school, and in fact, almost ended up in dentistry! During the medicine interview, one of the interviews posed him a question, asking him what would happen if they gave him dentistry instead of medicine, as he had done extremely well, getting an A in the manual dexterity test and would do well in dentistry. My father's reply to that question was "then perhaps I'm not good enough to do medicine". And of course as we know, he eventually became a great doctor.

Because of his family background, my father took up a huge study loan just to be able to study medicine, only paying it off years after he married my mother. The financial stress ever took a toll on him in his 5<sup>th</sup> year when he was doing MBBS. That year, my grandfather was retrenched due to an economic downturn, and my father was under immense pressure to pass his MBBS so that he could finally start earning money to pay off the immense study loan and support the family. He almost didn't make it, and performed poorly on the day of the MBBS, passing only after being called up for additional testing due to his poor performance that day.

He eventually went on to specialize in family medicine, becoming one of the pioneer batches to have that specialist training. Some of the notable things he did to advance family medicine in Singapore would be visiting the newly built James Cook University to learn about how the Australians taught and conducted examinations for those who wished to get a graduate diploma in family medicine. My father eventually set many of the exam papers for those who pursued the course. My father was also highly involved in the Family Medicine training programme, becoming the first chairman of the Family Medicine Residency Advisory Committee in 2010. He worked really hard to improve the quality of teaching of family medicine in Singapore, pushing for it to be taught in the polyclinics, and making sure there were enough tutors for the students to get the best possible learning environment for the students to become even better doctors.

At Singhealth polyclinics, my father was also a prominent figure. He led the way and changed how primary care was delivered to the less fortunate, transforming Singhealth Polyclinics and the primary care landscape in Singapore. In the words of many of his staff, my father forever transformed the polyclinics in Singapore. My father worked laboriously for public service, even till the last days. Despite being breathless, he still attended a meeting on the weekend before his death with the Singhealth management.

Even despite his achievements as a compassionate doctor, healthcare leader, and dedicated teacher, my father was always humble.

According to his staff and his friends, my father never cared about status and titles. Even when he was ill, he would queue up patiently to receive treatment. He never complained when the waiting time was long and always made sure not to trouble others, even if he was suffering in pain or was

feeling uncomfortable. My father believed in servant leadership, always putting others before himself and made the effort to go the extra mile to care for the members of his staff.

Despite his heavy commitments at work, my father was family man. He always made time for the family and took pains to bring up my sister and I well. I would never forget the lessons on character and having the right moral values which he drilled into me. If not for his patience and guidance, I would never be where I am today, following his footsteps to be a good doctor. My father was also a loving husband to my mother, sharing numerous wonderful memories with her while he was alive.

This is the life of one of the silent mentors. A person who has contributed greatly to society and family, well missed by friends and family alike. Behind every silent mentor are the friends and family of whom the silent mentor has left behind. Behind every silent mentor is an enriched life, full of stories and things you can learn from. During the course of the past year, in the anatomy hall lies the silent mentors who have coached you and given you the skills and knowledge you are armed with today. While they may not have had the chance to share with you the wealth of knowledge they have gained in their life, or showered you with care and concern they have shown to their friends and family, the silent mentors have given you something valuable. It is the gift of knowledge. This gift of knowledge is the last gift that they have given to the world with the very last bits of their remains. As the son of one of the silent mentors and as an anatomy student myself, I urge you to remember this last act of kindness and altruism by these silent mentors, and their gift of knowledge to you, the future dentists of Singapore. They may not have known you in life, but still they've made the noble decision to share with you this gift of knowledge in their death. They have faith that students like yourself, strangers to their lives would make good use of the knowledge they have given you. Show your gratitude to the silent mentors and make their efforts worth it. You are now the last legacy of these silent mentors. With great power comes great responsibility, and it is the hope of all your silent mentors that you use this knowledge to do good, to be of service to others and to also pass on this knowledge to future dentistry students.

Don't let the legacy of the silent mentors die out, don't let their efforts go to waste, and don't use the knowledge for the wrong reasons.

I will now end my sharing with a quote, from my father. This quote was especially special to him, because it was like his goal in life. "there are only 2 things you must do in this lifetime: Be of service to others as much as possible, and polish your inner being to its fullest radiance."

Thank you.

Benjamin Tan



**Benjamin Tan  
(son of late Dr Tan)**