



PRESS STATEMENT

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Statement on the passing of Emeritus Professor K. Shanmugaratnam

We mourn the passing of Emeritus Professor K. Shanmugaratnam. He was a dedicated academic clinician who drove himself to excel and in so doing, set the benchmark for the teaching and practice of Pathology at the University and in Singapore.

Emeritus Professor Shanmugaratnam was a pathologist of international renown. He was Chair of Pathology in the University of Malaya in 1960 and remained an Emeritus Professor in the Department of Pathology, National University of Singapore. He was also the first Singaporean to be invited to author the WHO Classification of Tumours of the Upper Respiratory Tract, a work that remains the standard reference in the field of Pathology.

In 1950, keen to observe local disease patterns, he started a card index of all histologically diagnosed cancers in Singapore. This became the Singapore Cancer Registry and its establishment enabled health authorities to track cancer trends, determine incidence by age at diagnosis and survival rates, establish differences between ethnic groups and gender, formulate policies and establish programmes to address the disease. The comprehensiveness and accuracy of the Registry was fundamental in making the case to the Singapore Government for the establishment of the National Biomedical Sciences Initiative in 2000.

Emeritus Professor Shanmugaratnam taught and mentored generations of medical students and Pathology Residents, setting standards that have allowed Singapore to provide quality medical care based on accurate diagnosis.

His drive, determination and formidable intellectual powers were shown even as a final year medical student in his persuasion of a Royal Commission to raise the status of the King Edward VII College of Medicine and Raffles College to that of a University, allowing the creation of the University of Malaya in Singapore, which is now the National University of Singapore. He later headed the Faculty of Medicine as its Dean, from 1962 to 1965.

“All of us owe a profound debt of gratitude to Emeritus Professor Shanmugaratnam. His legacy is seen in the strong foundations that he put in place for the growth and development of the NUS medical school. It is also seen in the world-class practice and teaching of Pathology that is evident here at the NUS and throughout Singapore,” said the Dean, Associate Professor Yeoh Khay Guan.

“Humble, self-effacing and yet imposing because of his intellect and dedication to excellence, Emeritus Professor Shanmugaratnam’s immense contributions have laid the foundations for what is one of the best medical schools, cancer programs and discipline of Pathology in Asia. He was truly a man for all seasons and a medical legend,” said Professor John Wong, Isabel Chan Professor in Medical Sciences and Chief Executive, National University Health System and Senior Vice President (Health Affairs), National University of Singapore.

“Singapore had lost a leading light in the medical profession”, said NUS President, Professor Tan Eng Chye. “Emeritus Professor Shanmugaratnam was a much respected and revered luminary in the NUS community. His keen intellect and dedication to his work and research in pathology were legendary. He was an inspiration to all who knew him.”

The University mourns the loss of a giant in Singapore Medicine. Our deepest condolences go out to Emeritus Professor Shanmugaratnam’s family, friends and loved ones during this difficult time.

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