

## The 12<sup>th</sup> Dr. Gerald Choa Memorial Lecture Professor Gerald Choa & Mental Health Movement

**Prof. C N Chen, OBE, JP**

President

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I first met Professor Choa on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1977, the day of my elder daughter's second birthday, when I had to rush in the morning for attending the interview in London for the chair professorship of the Department of Psychiatry at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). When I entered the interviewing room, Professor Choa sat in the middle of an impressive, if not intimidating, team of over a dozen interviewers. He looked very serious and hardly had any smiles. He briefly and clearly introduced the team and then left for anyone to throw out questions for discussion with me. I only knew a few British Chair Professor of Psychiatry, including Professors Roth, Rees, Pond and Trethowan. The others were all heads of clinical, preclinical or biology departments.

### **A Person with Careful Thought and Fairness**

In London, I had some experiences of attending job interviews. Usually, one may be interviewed by 3-5 panellists. But, in 1979, it was in fact an alarmingly crowded panel of interviewers who were sitting in front of me like an array of monuments. Later, I learned that the interviewers were around 15 in number. They included the Dean of the new medical faculty, and members of the Medical

Academic Advisory Committee (MAAC)<sup>1</sup> led by Professor Sir William Trethowen (1917-1995), then the Chair Professor of Psychiatry, Birmingham University School of Medicine (UBMS), 3 Presidents of the Royal College of Psychiatrists<sup>2</sup>, and a few official staff from the new medical faculty including Mr. Arthur Starling<sup>1,3</sup>, then the Planning Officer of the Faculty, and Mr. Andrew Chan, the Faculty Secretary. After the interview, I also learned that the Dean and his team had interviewed professorial candidates all over the world in 3 different sites, i.e., Hong Kong, London, and New York. Prior to the recruitment, they also visited several universities and medical schools in the United Kingdom to study what a new medical school should be like. Such a careful planning for the new medical school, international recruitment, and careful selection of new professorial staff, all made me feel very excited to join the University. Personally, I admire the international recruitment of staff with talent and dedication more than internal promotion by seniority, and international recruitment is the only way to aim for academic excellence and avoid nepotism.

### **A Kind Person with Human Touch**

The second time I met Professor Choa was in

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<sup>1</sup> From Mr. Starling, the MAAC was appointed by the University in 1976, upon the recommendation by the Dean, Professor Gerald Choa. It was chaired by Professor Sir William Trethowen (Chairman). Its members included Professor Sir Melville Arnott, TD (1909-1999), Professor of Cardiology, UBMS; Dr. John Z. Bowers, M.D. (1913-1993), formerly President, Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, U.S.A., Medical Educator & Historian; Professor Sir Patrick Forrest, MD, FRCS (1923-2021), Regius Professor of Clinical Surgery, The Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh; Professor James Gibson, OBE, MD, FRCPath, formerly Professor of Pathology, University of Hong Kong; Professor Gerald Choa, CBE, MD, FRCPE (1921-2001), the Dean of the new medical faculty, CUHK, formerly Director, Medical & Health Services, Hong Kong Government; Professor A. David M. Greenfield (1917-2005), Dean and Chair Professor of Physiology, University of Nottingham Medical School (UNMS); Professor Sir C. Eric Stroud (1924-2005), MB, FRCP, DCH, Chair Professor of Child Health, King's College School of Medicine; and Dr. K. L. Thong, CBE, FRCPE, then Director of Medical and Health Services, Hong Kong Government.

<sup>2</sup> Three Presidents of the Royal College of Psychiatrists were Professor Sir Martin Roth (1917-2006), President in 1971-1975, then Chair Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge School of Medicine; Professor Linford Rees, CBE, (1914-2004), then the current President in 1975-1978, and Chair Professor of the St. Bartholomew's Medical College; and Professor Sir Desmond Pond (1919-1986), then Chair Professor of the London Hospital Medical School. He became President in 1978-1981, and Chairman of the Conference of Medical Colleges and their Faculties in the UK in 1980-1981.

<sup>3</sup> Starling, AE (1988). *The Chance of a Lifetime. The Birth of a New Medical School in Hong Kong. The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong.*

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1980, when I came to Hong Kong to attend a WPA regional symposium run by the late Dr. Lo Wai-hoi. Professor Choa was kind enough to accept my request for a visit of the Faculty and received me in his office at the Basic Pre-clinical Sciences Building on the beautiful university campus. There I also met Mr. Starling and Mr. Andrew Chan. On this occasion I had the chance of talking freely to Professor Choa, and for the first time, I found him very much like a British gentleman who looked serious and stern, brief but clear in conversation, punctual in keeping his time, and particularly courteous to ladies. Inwardly, however, he was kind-hearted, considerate, and was eager to look after everyone working with him in the Faculty of Medicine.

On this occasion, I was shown the future of our residence on the campus, the new site of the future hospital for the new medical faculty. At the time, the site for the future hospital was nothing but a huge waste land. The plan for the CITY ONE estates was still in the planning room.

Knowing my Taiwan connection, Professor Choa also asked a Professor Chen (陳荊和教授) (1917-1995), then Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies, CUHK, to entertain me at the Royal Jockey Club Shatin Clubhouse restaurant. There I met Professor Lin Tzong-biao (林聰標教授) (1936-1998), the Head of the Department of Economics & later jointly the Head of New Asia College, CUHK. Since 3 of us were previously all associated with the National Taiwan University, we had a good time albeit meeting for the first time.

Just prior to Christmas Eve in 1980, my wife and I with our two children arrived in Hong Kong. After a temporary stay at the Chung Chi Clubhouse, we moved into our residence at 8B, Residence 9, CUHK. In the next day, Professor Choa asked the faculty driver to take us to the then only supermarket in the only housing estate, Wo Che Housing Estate, in Shatin, and we 'ransacked' the shop and got what we needed for the new apartment within 2 hours. All in all, we, as a family, were so grateful to the Dean for his additional care for our living in Hong Kong.

### A Pioneer Specialist in Medicine among Chinese Physicians in Hong Kong

Professor Choa studied medicine in the University of Hong Kong (HKU) in early years, but his studies were interrupted by the Japanese invasion

of Hong Kong. He continued his medical studies in Cheeloo University Medical School (齊魯大學醫學院) and qualified M.D. in 1945. In the following year, he was conferred MBBS by HKU. As a senior medical student in China, he also joined the army as a major in the Chinese Army Medical Corps<sup>4</sup>.

During the postgraduate years, he received training in tropical medicine at the University of Liverpool, cardiology in University of Birmingham, and neurology at the Institute of Neurology, Queen Square, London. Thereafter, he attained DTM&H in 1948 and MRCP in 1952 (FRCP in 1968 & FRCP Edinburgh in 1972).

In 1952, he was offered a lectureship in medicine at HKU. In 1956, he became the first Chinese specialist (and senior specialist in 1963) in medicine at the Queen Mary Hospital (QMH). In 1967/1968, he was invited to join the Medical and Health Department (M/HD) of the Hong Kong Government. 2-3 years later, in 1970, he became the Director of the M/HD, a job that he had held until 1976, when he retired from the directorship<sup>4</sup>. In the following year, he was invited to join the CUHK as the Founding Dean to build a brand-new medical faculty and Professor of Administrative Medicine. Between 1979 and 1981, he was Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the CUHK.

He contributed so much to the Hong Kong medical community. In 1972 he was appointed by Her Majesty the Queen as CBE. He was a Founding Member of the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, a Founding Vice-president of the Hong Kong College of Physicians and Founding Fellow of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine. He retired from CUHK in 1987 and was awarded an Hon. LLD. In 1995 he was also made an Honorary Fellow of the HKU.

### A Person who is Mindful of the Need for Mental Health Work

After Hong Kong became a British colony in 1841, there was no attempt for the colonial government to build a hospital. However, in 1850, a bungalow was converted into the Civic Hospital in Hong Kong in 1850, and further rebuilt in 1874<sup>5,6,7</sup>. Still then, European lunatics were sent to a prison, but their Chinese counterparts to Tung Wah Hospital, built since 1872, where they were '*confined in dark and dreary cells under Chinese native doctors' supervision and those who were violent were chained like beasts*' as reported by Philip Aryes (1893) and quoted by

<sup>4</sup> Todd, D. (2001). Gerald Hugh Choa. In: *Obituary. Royal College of Physicians' Museum, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2001.*

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Dr. Lo (2017)<sup>6</sup>. By 1894, the surge of the severely mentally ill in Hong Kong led the Government then to arrange with the Canton authorities to transfer Chinese patients to the Fong Chuen Mental Hospital, and non-Chinese were repatriated to their countries of origin<sup>6</sup>.

By 1892 the Old Mental Hospital was built in the High Street, Sai Ying Pun (西營盤), Hong Kong Island, originally used as a dormitory for the European nursing staff of the then Civic Hospital. After the end of World War II, Hong Kong returned to the British reign. The Sai Ying Pun Mental Hospital, or the High Street Mental Hospital, in 1945 had 200 beds for the mentally ill patients. Because of its proximity, it became the teaching hospital for the medical students from the University of Hong Kong. Prior to the arrival of Professor Yap Pow-meng in 1971, presumably the teaching of psychiatry was included within the department of medicine. Since Professor Choa was the specialist in medicine from 1956 to 1967, it was possible that he might be involved in attending psychiatric patients and in the teaching rounds at the High Street Mental Hospital. This may explain why as soon as he joined the M/H Department of the Government, he was happy to accept as the Presidency of the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong in 1968. Under his leadership, the Association hosted the 1971 World Congress of World Federation for Mental Health, as well as annual programmes of Mental Health Week in Hong Kong. He was also instrumental in building the Irene House as a half-way house in 2000, the first of its kind in Hong Kong<sup>8</sup>.

After I began working at the CUHK in 1981, Professor Choa told me that, since I requested to have research funds, there was a Hong Kong Taipan, Sir John Keswick, who was willing to donate a large sum of money for mental health work. In 1981, in the presence of Sir John Keswick (the donor), Professor Ma Lin (the Vice-Chancellor of the CUHK), and Professor Choa, we received the donation and started planning for a Psychiatric Epidemiology Research Unit (PERU)<sup>9</sup>. In 1981-1984, we joined the Department of Family Medicine, CUHK, and ran

a weekly seminar on concept and methodology in epidemiology. Our staff also conducted reviews on screening instruments and pilot study of community survey in Tai Po. A large-scale community survey in Shatin was conducted and completed in 1984-1986<sup>10,11</sup>. Sadly, and unfortunately, Sir John Keswick passed away in 1982. The Committee in charge of the Keswick Foundation believed that the Funding was only for the Survey and withdrew all the money and equipment left after the survey. Our dream for a permanent PERU was crashed. The major regret was the loss of all research personnels and equipment required to carry more epidemiological work within PERU. On a happier note, this community work did appear to stimulate more small-scale psychiatric epidemiological studies after the survey. In any case, without the help of Professor Choa and Sir John Keswick, the work of Survey and the aftermaths would not be possible.

Another major assistance Professor Choa did was to introduce me to Mr. T. P. Khoo (邱大斌先生), who introduced me to the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong, in 1981. Since then, I had had the opportunity to learn what a community mental health work in practice. Since then, I became a life member (1981), Executive Chairman (1983-1998), Vice-President (1998-2006), and President (2006-2023) of the MHAHK. Perhaps because of him, I was also able to follow his step as Chairman of the Action Committee Against Narcotics (1993-1998). These community experiences, in addition to my Chairmanship of the Advisory Committee on AIDS (2005-2011), made me more mature as a life student of psychosomatic medicine.

It is not easy to find a doctor who was trained in the hard core of medicine to show interest in and/or sympathy for psychiatry, but Professor Choa is such a rare one. In the history of the development of psychiatry, we are well aware of social stigma to our patients, but how many people know the social stigma to the personnels and institutions working for psychiatry within the medical profession? Worse still, these social stigmata do not only come from

<sup>5</sup> Choa, G. H. (1981). *A History of Medicine in Hong Kong*. In: *Medical Directory of Hong Kong, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Federation of Medical Societies of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

<sup>6</sup> Lo, W. H. (2017). *Development of legislation for the mentally ill in Hong Kong*. *Hong Kong Journal of Mental Health*, 43(1): 22-26.7.

<sup>7</sup> However, the civil hospital was functioning between 1846-1937, as quoted in the Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on Sai Ying Pun Community Complex (accessed on 23.11.2023).

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Gerald H. Choa Memorial Fund, *The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong* (2000).

<sup>9</sup> Chen, C. N. (1981). *The need for a Psychiatric Epidemiology Research Unit*. *Hong Kong Journal of Mental Health*, 9(3): 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Chen, C. N. et al. (1993). *The Shatin Community Mental Health Survey. II*. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 50: 125-133.

<sup>11</sup> Chen, C. N. et al. (1994). *The Shatin Community Mental Health Survey. I. The Use of a modified two-phase design. A paper reported at the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Congress of the German Psychiatric Society, Cologne, Germany in 1994*.

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the lay people, but they also came from our medical colleagues or administrators.

During my tenure as Professor of Psychiatry at CUHK, it was not uncommon for colleagues to tell me that they knew very little about psychiatry. Such a modest expression conveyed a sense of humbleness but in fact could have meant the opposite way, i.e., *'it is not a subject important enough for me to know'*.

After my retirement in 1998, I have come to know that our academic department of psychiatry was moved out of the Prince of Wales Hospital where the medical school is in place. Even in the current redevelopment, I also learned that the administration has so far either refused or delayed allowing the

return of the academic psychiatric department back to the main general hospital. Research has shown that psychiatry's main job is not only to provide chronic care to the severely mentally ill, but also to look after many more patients with common psychiatric disorders, i.e., those with neurotic, personality, suicidal & substance use problems<sup>10</sup>, as well as others with medical disorders but with comorbid common psychiatric disorders. These acute patients require in-patient or day-patient unit in a general hospital setting. How much do we hope for administrators like Professor Choa who knew what an academic department of psychiatry need to strive for excellence! W.H.O. proclaim that there is no health without mental health. It is only paying a lip service here. We miss you Professor Choa!