

President's Medal 2018

Dr. Helen CHAN

The President's Medal is the highest honour that the Hong Kong Institute of Allergy (HKIA) can bestow. It recognises the distinction of an individual not only for clinical and/or scientific achievements but also for contributions to the Institute and to the growth of the discipline of allergy in the HK community. The Medal is awarded every two years at our international HKIA Allergy Convention. The first recipient of this prestigious award was Professor Sami Bahna, who has been a staunch and loyal supporter of our Institute since inception when he was the President of the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (ACAAI).

This year I am delighted to introduce Dr. Helen Hei Ling Chan as the awardee of 2018 President's Medal.

Dr. Chan graduated as a doctor from HKU in 1976 and obtained her MRCP (UK) and DCH (London) in 1979. She received her FRCP (Edinburg) in 1994 and FRCP (Glasgow) a year later. In 1998 she was elected FHKAM (Paediatrics). She is a previous awardee of the prestigious International Distinguished Fellowship of the ACAAI. She is the co-founder and managing director of Vita Green Health products.

Dr. Chan is the face of HKIA. She founded the Institute 22 years ago at a time when allergic diseases were under-recognised in HK, unlike in North America and some other parts of the world. Allergy was considered a Cinderella specialty with little scientific understanding of mechanisms and allergists were akin to "quacks." Only a minority of doctors accepted allergy testing and immunotherapy was often viewed as witchcraft. There were no formalized training programmes for allergy in HK. As a result allergic patients could not benefit from a correct diagnosis, allergen avoidance and effective holistic management.

Dr. Chan recognised the unmet need. In 1996 she banded together a group of colleagues of highest distinction in their own specialties, including dermatologists, ENT specialists, paediatricians and respiratory physicians from both the public and private health service sectors to give birth to the HKIA. The HKIA's mission was (and still is) to promote allergy as a discipline and to foster a professional forum for fellowship and scientific exchange for the benefits of patients in HK. To persuade such a highly

reputable and busy group of clinicians to work together under the banner of the new specialty was a major achievement in itself! She also obtained funding from ACAAI to support HKIA's first inaugural Convention; a collaboration that has continued to this day. It was an insightful strategy which established credibility for the nascent specialty of allergy in HK in those early days.

The rest is history and the growth of the specialty in HK is evident to all. Under Dr. Chan's watchful eye, HKIA now has links with sister allergy organisations world-wide. The number of specialists is increasing, especially in paediatric allergy but even adult allergy has its first trainee in two decades. There has been a meteoric rise in the numbers of HKIA members especially in the allied health professions. The Institute is pressing for more allergy services. It supports travel and educational grants as well as pump priming grants for pilot research studies. Numerous seminars and workshops are held during the year and HKIA hosts a successful international Allergy Convention every alternate year with an annual scientific meeting in intervening years. The Institute has come a long way.

Challenges of course remain for HKIA in the development of the discipline in HK. It is a relay race involving many dedicated colleagues in the team, but always guided in the background by Dr. Chan's steady hand and financial prudence as the Honorary Secretary of the Institute. Dr. Chan never seeks the limelight but her incomparable experience has steered HKIA wisely for close to a quarter of a century. She has given her unwavering support to all of HKIA's activities without hesitation. Her insights and advice are always timely. There can be no doubt that without Dr. Chan's leadership, perspicacity, resilience and collegiality, ably supported by her husband Dr. Tse Tak-fu who is a renowned cardiologist in his own right, allergy as a discipline in HK may never have come out of the starting blocks.

HKIA offers Dr. Helen Chan its warmest congratulations for her very well deserved President's Medal!