



Dr N Ganabaskaran, President MMA 2019/20

President's Speech

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I proceed with my official speech, I would like to request for you to do two important things. First, I wish to request all MMA members to be upstanding to say a prayer and thanks to all our Past – Presidents, former officials, the staffs and for all of those who have contributed to what MMA is today.

Now I would like to request to all of you to be upstanding. I wish to recite a prayer. It is not a religious prayer, but it is a universal prayer to thank God for the good things He had done for us and the country. Thank you and please sit down.

Please don't think that just because I asked you to do a silent prayer in your own religion, that I am a very religious person. I'm just like any other ordinary person. I was born and raised as a Hindu but I've been taught from young on how to respect other religions and people from different faiths. This is something that my late grandfather and my late father taught me though all three of us become the President of a temple in Johor Bahru. My late grandfather in particular was very devoted to a Dargah, tomb of a Muslim saint in Singapore where he used to visit and spend long hours and feeding the needy people and the pigeons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

"To be, or not to be"

This quote comes to mind when I think about the journey ahead of me as the MMA President.

It is a line from Robert Frost's poem, "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep. But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep"

To also quote from Shakespeare, "to be, or not to be", I had to make the decision to be or not to be the President of MMA when I contested the second time for the President – Elect post last year. But having been very involved with MMA as a life member and subsequently as a PPS representative from Johor, PPS Chairman and the Deputy General Secretary, I felt I owed it to MMA and its members as I have been a staunch believer of MMA from my early days.

I also believed that it is my duty and I owed it to my profession and my colleagues to take up this position. I have been involved with politics, public and social activities for the past 45 years and have been part of 15 organisations, serving as President for more than 7 organisations. I had served to the best of my ability and now is the time for me to use the invaluable knowledge and experience gained from over the years for my term as MMA President now.

MMA and MOH

Many of you here are expecting me to speak on the various current and pending issues but much has already been said. Many a time people have asked, "What is MMA's stand?" The MMA's stand is very simple, since the last 60 years we have always worked with the government of the day. When it comes to negotiating, we are humble at the table but when it comes to

standing for our rights, we will always stand tall and firm. As what John F Kennedy once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country". The MOH and the government also said, "Ask not what we can do for you, do what you can for us". And so this is exactly what MMA has been doing for the MOH and government for the last 60 years.

Town Hall Meeting

We have worked with you very closely, we have brought many issues to you and at every point of time when MOH needed our assistance, cooperation and input, we were there. We have served MOH and the government well. We have stood firm on many of the issues with the government. Unlike other professionals, we have refrained from stepping on to the street to march though at many times it has been on our minds.

We believe the recent Town Hall Meeting where more than 800 GPs had gathered to highlight and discuss the long pending issues that they have been facing, with our YB Minister, Deputy Minister and several officials has paved the way for optimism and the belief that the pending issues especially the Fee Schedule would soon be resolved. Just to recap the other issues that were discussed at the Town Hall Meeting:

I think it was a great meeting and was well coordinated by both MMA and other medical associations. We believe that the outcome of those issues that have been delayed for too long will be soon settled. So if you ask what MMA has done, MMA has worked and has struggled with you very closely and MMA is still waiting to see the final result which most of my colleagues have been waiting for, for many years.

Pending GPs Issues

A number of issues faced by our GPs were brought up at the Town Hall Meeting. Many had even voiced their frustration and anger to a certain extent. I do not wish to repeat what was said but for the benefit of our members who were not able to attend that meeting. The following issues were brought up by the GPs:

- a) Harmonisation of the Fee Schedule for GPs
- b) Dispensing separation
- c) The enhancement of GPs
- d) FOMEMA Fees

Sir, 53 Presidents in the past both living and those who have passed on have on several occasions spoke on the various issues that were being faced by the GPs and medical fraternity. We have all stood, spoken and

covered all the issues that we wanted you to hear but never once did we leave and take to the streets to protest or to utter an unkind word about our government and the ministry like many other learned professionals have done.

Negotiation With Government

We have stood tall and strong when we came to talk about our issues. We have been humble sitting at the negotiating table, yet we have shown our strength by standing tall and firm during two occasions. The first being in 1976 when the all housemen in this country went on 4 days work to rule to seek justice in increasing our salaries because it was then only RM630 for the past 30 years. Our firmness was reflected when the government relented and gave us an increase from RM630 to RM1240 in monthly salary. Again, we stood firm and tall when the government doctors, the MOs and the specialists fought for the increase of their allowance when another work to rule gave us an opportunity and strength to seek the increase which was also given to us. But neither of those times have we ever expressed our anger in other ways. We, the MMA, stood our ground and showed our inner strength on many occasions in fighting for the rights of the GPs, the government doctors and the specialists.

I do not wish to go on about these issues but as the new MMA President, I feel must speak up on these pending issues when given the opportunity.

Ladies and gentlemen, apart from these issues that I have highlighted, there are a few other things I wish to touch on that I feel are important to note that perhaps we should take a little time to ponder on.

We are now seeing changes in the medical landscape that once were unimaginable and I am afraid that if we don't move with the times, many of us might be left behind.

TPAs affecting the income of GPs, control of medicine prices, dispensing separation of medicines, advancement in high tech medical technology, robotics and AI is changing and transforming the medical landscape. How will we adapt? What will the medical profession look like in this fast pace digital age of innovation in the years to come?

Many patients are even self-diagnosing. This could also be a reason why we are seeing less patients at primary care level. People are more aware these days with the wealth of information at their fingertips with free access to the world-wide-web. Many of them skip consultation

and head to a pharmacist for medication because 'apparently' they know what illness they have.

There are drugs that are also sold online and you can purchase them without any prescription. Some are even promoting it on social media for all to see. Teenagers are accessing information from what they term as the dark web. For those of you who are not too familiar, the Dark Web is a term that refers specifically to a collection of websites that exist on an encrypted network and cannot be found by using traditional search engines or visited by using traditional browsers.

We must be more aware of the changing times.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During my term, I would also like to encourage my colleagues of all disciplines to attend more CPD events not just for the mandatory CPD requirements but to regularly update yourselves as there are innovations in medicine almost every other day. Malaysia is ranked high globally in terms of quality health care and we must take the standard of our healthcare to greater heights.

I see an increasing role in Primary care in the coming years and so I encourage my colleagues in Primary Care to seek more conferences even in other disciplines. Many of you are family doctors and expanding knowledge in for example paediatrics, geriatrics, gynaecology and even psychiatry will be helpful in the understanding of issues of your patients. We live in a world where people seek value. People want more for what they are paying for. It is a fact. So I urge all of you to keep on seeking knowledge.

In my term as President, I would like MMA to look at healthcare as not limited to just the scope of medicine, but healthcare from a holistic view with the various components that collectively contribute to the health and wellbeing of the nation. As healthcare providers, our voice must be heard on issues affecting the health of our nation. I feel this is a responsibility as a national medical organisation.

Sustainability is also a major concern now in healthcare. We must together, actively find ways for the poor or B40 income group to be able to afford healthcare while at the same time seek ways to make care sustainable. The government can only do so much but I do believe there is also much that we can do as we are all familiar with the system.

One area that I am particularly concerned about is our rapidly ageing population. Malaysia will be reaching

ageing nation status in 2030. We are just 11 years away and that isn't far away. There will be a need for community care centres. I do believe there is an important role for Primary health care in community settings.

There are many areas to address in aged care and I see newer services being developed to care for this demographic. Already, services such as home care, nursing homes and day care centres are sprouting out throughout the country as more elderly citizens will need care in their homes or closer to their homes.

Many elderly citizens don't have enough finances or sufficient insurance if they are struck with serious illnesses and many are living alone. These are the very real issues affecting our warga emas. As providers of healthcare, we too need to speak out about these concerns.

One of the areas we will continue to push for is a National Health Insurance and this will be a major part in our healthcare system reforms. I am confident we will see progress in this area.

Lastly, before I end I would like to acknowledge a musically talented doctor we have with us this evening. He is Datuk Dr Mohamad Ruslan Mohamad Amin (also known as Morusmaal), who is one of our members – a GP from Tawau, Sabah. Can you kindly stand, Datuk. Not many of you know that you have a recording artist among you today. Datuk Ruslan has recorded three albums to date. He started recording his songs when his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008. In 2009, he dedicated his first album to his mother titled *Oh Ibu dan Ayah*. His recording of *Salam Sayang Malaysia* – a patriotic song is played on RTM radio stations frequently and he also has a song specially dedicated to MMA titled *Jasa Utama*. Please give your support by buying his album and continue to encourage him.

Finally, before I get down from the stage, I would like to introduce a group of four medical students from WIDAD University College we saw performing in Kuantan, Pahang at the Pahang MMA Annual Dinner in March. The group is called Jasmine. They are four young ladies who will entertain you with some very lively tunes this evening.

Ladies and gentlemen, with that, I would like to thank you all once again.

Please enjoy the evening.