

2023 Donald Gunn Lecturer CITATION ON PROF WONG MERNG KOON- Francis Wong Keng Lin

Good Morning, Distinguished Guests, Professors, Teachers, Seniors, Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen. It brings me great honour to deliver the citation for this year's Donald Gunn Lecturer: Associate Professor Wong Merng Koon. If there is one thing that Prof Wong taught me during my training under him, is that he doesn't like the "usual, boring" stuff. So! I've decided to honour my leader, my teacher, my benefactor, my work daddy, and most importantly, my trusted friend, with a citation that will do him and his style justice: a heart-felt one.

Who is Prof Wong Merng Koon? I would say, first of all, a fearless leader that leads the way up in front.

Throwback to the not-so-distant past of early 2020, where COVID was still surfacing, we didn't know how lethal it was, and there was no vaccine available. SKH discovered a dormitory called S-11 in Punggol that was sending in more and more cases to the EMD. Orthopaedic surgeons were part of the group called to address this rapidly escalating health catastrophe. We had to go to the lion's den to find out what's going on, and of course, all of us were scared. Yes, this was the start of the explosion of cases in Singapore.

As head of department, Prof Wong could have easily assigned his staff to be deployed to the ground, while being in the safe zone, in the hospital or home. Honestly, on retrospect, many leaders in other hospitals have chosen this method. Not Prof Wong. He was the first one to volunteer to go down to the dormitories. Here he is, dressed in blue surgical scrubs, going down to the ground, as the first man of the team. He chose to do the highest risk activities, such as being the one to swab the migrant workers, exposing himself to all the mucus from the never-ending coughs and sneezes of the patients. I vividly recall we were burning up in the PPE due to the sweltering heat, and Prof Wong actually personally bought wireless stand-up fans for us to make us comfortable.

So yes, a leader that leads the way in front, caring for his team even in the toughest conditions.

Prof Wong Merng Koon is a Teacher. Many teachers are dedicated, persistent, nurturing. These qualities are there for Prof Wong. But one thing that stands out for him, is his willingness to walk the tough spots WITH us. What do I mean by that? When we are faced with a difficult trauma case on our night calls, who do we call? When we unfortunately encounter a bad complication, who do we call? Prof Wong. Why him? **Because simply, he will sacrifice his time to help us grow, by being with us for our toughest cases, by showing up at ungodly hours of the night to bail us out, so we learn what to do or what not to do.** He backs us up, so we build our confidence with his support. He has many students, they come and go. He teaches them everything he knows, he holds nothing back, and even if his students move on to greener pastures, Prof Wong is always a proud teacher to see them progress in their careers.

His style can be summarized in the elvish saying in Lord of the Rings, "Onen i-estel Edain, U-chebin Estel anim."

Translated: I give hope to men, I leave none for myself. As a teacher, he gives us hope and meaning and knowledge, at his own expense.

Why is Prof Wong a friend? A friend comes to you when you are in need, to help you out, to support you, during your darkest times. A true friend gives honest advice, even if it is hard to hear. He has touched many lives, mine included. In my darkest times, when I had to leave my "home planet" as the then reigning "Darth Lord" has executed the "Order 66" to eliminate all the Jedi, it was Prof Wong's continuous support that gave me a path to his safe abode, giving me advice each step of the way, ensuring that I escaped the "evil clutches of the Sith Lord." His continued support for my career, including being there for my PhD examinations to support me despite his busy schedule, was a true testament of his friendship and support. He is like a father to many of us, and walks our life journeys with us, be it at work or in our personal lives, always supportive and nurturing.

He has been a pillar of strength for many of us, and especially for me, I thank him for all the advice he has given me, for me to reach my career and life goals and to be truly happy again.

Without further ado, please join me in welcoming the Donald Gunn Lecturer of 2023, Associate Professor Wong Merng Koon!