

The passing of a legend

DATUK Dr Yeow Chai Thiam (*pic*) passed away at home in Port Dickson on Thursday.

This man left behind a renal hospital in Seremban and an unrealised dream. Like all politicians, he may have his detractors in politics but this man is a legend!

The story must have started more than 20 years ago when Dr Yeow was trying to help some of the renal failure patients in Seremban, who would have died if no dialysis was provided. To undergo dialysis, one needed to be hooked up to a dialysis machine three times a week at four hours per session.

There were few dialysis machines available at the Seremban Hospital. Private hospitals then were few and most did not have dialysis facilities. Patients either died or families were rendered destitute for want of money to fund their dialysis.

To save these patients, Dr Yeow used his capacity as an exco in the state government, to canvass for the setting up of a dialysis centre in Seremban.

This centre came into operation in 1997 and soon, from a few haemodialysis machines, grew into a large dialysis provider with nearly two hundred machines, catering to more than 800 patients in cen-



tres in Negri Sembilan, Johor, Selangor and Sarawak.

Patients in Negri Sembilan might not have realised how lucky they were compared to residents elsewhere in the country and the world. A charity hospital that provided low-cost dialysis was one of a kind in the world!

Dialysis is expensive. Even at cost, with optimum standard, trained staff and doctors in attendance, it could easily cost more than RM2,000 per patient per month, excluding other medications. Multiply that by 800 patients per month and you can see how enormous the cost can be. And this does not include the cost of the building, other facilities, training of staff, etc.

Each time I delivered renal

access lecture overseas, a picture of the Mawar hemodialysis centre would immediately attract admiration and lead to tons of questions.

People were curious about a “charity renal hospital”, something unheard of. Who funds it? What is the role of the government, health insurance and how come Malaysians can be so generous and kind?

I was asked to provide renal access surgery to Mawar patients about five years ago. This surgery is to create a fistula to enable dialysis.

Dr Yeow was concerned about how patients had to travel out of state, wait for a clinic appointment and then for the operation. Many were wheel-chair bound and families needed to take time off from work, travel by taxi or borrowed cars, to send patients for surgery.

Dr Yeow managed to convince me, despite my over-stretched schedule, to start a low-costs renal access surgery programme in Mawar.

Money is hard to come by in charity and Dr Yeow knew this. He was the CEO of a successful hospital with no pay. He managed many charity drives – dinners, talks, personal appeals, trying to sustain a centre that sustained life.

When his political support

sagged and the economy slowed, he knew Mawar had to generate income to survive. The only way was to appeal to the Government for funds and to convert Mawar into a private hospital so that funds derived could be ploughed back into charity dialysis.

Despite his retirement from politics, patients told me Dr Yeow did his rounds in Mawar every morning, greeting patients and asking about their well-being.

Families, irrespective of race, flocked to see him, when they were afflicted with chronic renal problems requiring dialysis. Dr Yeow helped patients of every ethnicity and certainly many rural Malays and Indians had benefited.

I am humbled by the benevolence, compassion and energy of this man. He was way above many of our politicians, who spoke more than they delivered, self-centred and created issues to gain prominence.

On the passing of this legend, I pray that his dream will be realised, that life will go on for his patients with renal disease.

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