

ANNEX

**CITATION ON
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE HONORARY GRADUAND
DR OON CHIEW SENG
BY PUBLIC ORATOR PROFESSOR CHONG YAP SENG,
LIEN YING CHOW PROFESSOR IN MEDICINE AND
DEAN OF NUS YONG LOO LIN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE,
12 JANUARY 2021**

Madam Halimah Yacob, President of the Republic of Singapore and NUS Chancellor

NUS Pro-Chancellors

NUS Chairman

NUS President

Distinguished Honorary Graduand

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good morning. Today, we have an immensely pleasurable task of honouring one of our own, a distinguished alumna who through her life and work exemplifies the values of compassion and public service that the NUS medical school aims to imbue in every one of our graduates.
2. Dr Oon Chiew Seng is well known as one of Singapore's earliest obstetrics and gynaecology (O&G) practitioners and a compassionate champion of underserved communities. From opening a clinic to cater to women who she observed felt more comfortable when female obstetricians and gynaecologists examine them, to volunteering at a home for the aged sick, to establishing a home for dementia patients, Dr Oon has made service to the community her life's theme.
3. She embarked on medical studies at the King Edward VII Medical College mere months before World War II engulfed Singapore. The years of hardship that followed as she doggedly pursued her studies upon being evacuated to India forged the steely, unwavering determination that has come to define her approach to life.
4. Born in 1916 in Penang, to a businessman father and a housewife, Dr Oon is the youngest of 10 children. She discovered her passion for healing and caring for the sick and vulnerable when she became a nurse at the Penang General Hospital in the 1930s. She spent two years in nursing before sitting for the Senior Cambridge certificate in 1940. Upon her older brothers' insistence that being a doctor held better prospects, she switched to studying Medicine with their support. As a medical student in Singapore, Dr Oon had to contend with loneliness, being away from her loved ones; she also had to endure the terrors of World War II, before finally graduating in 1948.
5. In 1953, she was awarded a Queen's Fellowship and went to the United Kingdom for specialist training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. She qualified as a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in 1955, one of the first women in the region to do so. She returned to Singapore to work at Kandang Kerbau (KK) Hospital under Professor Benjamin Sheares, who later became Singapore's second President.

6. In 1959, Dr Oon left KK Hospital to become the first Obstetrics and Gynaecology specialist in the private sector. She grew her medical practice into one of the most successful Obstetrics and Gynaecology groups in Singapore, only retiring in 1991 at the age of 75. She has delivered countless numbers of babies and along the way, touched the lives of many Singaporeans. I understand that there were times when she performed up to 10 caesarean sections a day at KK Hospital,! Dr Oon has served in a number of key roles, being President of Singapore's Obstetrics & Gynaecologists Society for several years, as well as a member of Singapore's Family and Population Board in 1971.
7. Setting up the Apex Harmony Lodge – the first nursing home for dementia residents in Singapore – in 1999, was Dr Oon's next professional pursuit. Already in her eighties, she was heavily involved not only in the procurement of funding for its establishment, but also pioneered a new care concept for Alzheimer's patients here in Singapore after studying elder care homes around the world. Dr Oon was actively involved in the running of the Lodge until 2012, when she was well into her nineties.. Her desire to raise awareness about dementia and support caregivers led her to contribute millions of dollars to fund research in women's health, anti-ageing science and dementia at NUS Medicine. Her contributions have enabled important findings in these fields, leading to better understanding and insight for Singapore's academics and doctors.
8. Dr Oon has received numerous clinical and humanitarian accolades in her lifetime. She is an Honorary Fellow of the Asia and Oceania Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, and is the second of only three Singaporeans to be made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, in recognition of her dedication to nurturing generations of obstetricians and gynaecologists in Singapore and the ASEAN region. She was conferred the Public Service Medal in 2000, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Ministry of Health in 2011 for her services to the elderly. Later in 2013, Dr Oon received the prestigious Public Service Star and the President's Special Recognition Award for Volunteerism and Philanthropy. In 2014, Dr Oon was inducted into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame.
9. At 104 years old today, Dr Oon doesn't seem appear to have let up, going on walks and playing mahjong a few times a week, an activity she strongly advocates to keep the mind active.
10. Dr Oon is a shining example to us in so many ways. Her spirit and vigour at the age of 104 is a testament that age alone should not sideline us. Her life of service to the elderly and the underserved community in Singapore shows us how one person with conviction can make a difference. Her entrepreneurial spirit and success in her medical career makes the case that gender is no barrier to achievement. Dr Oon, through her life and work, exemplifies the best values and character of NUS Medicine.
11. For her selfless dedication, and passionate servant leadership that has continued to impact lives and communities, it gives the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine great pride to honour one of our best and brightest lights. It is recognition that may be a bit late in coming, but it is one that the School takes tremendous pleasure in proclaiming today.

Madam Chancellor, may it please you to confer upon Dr Oon Chiew Seng the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters. Thank you.