IN MEMORIAM: DR RAJAKUMAR

WONCA WORLD PRESIDENT1986 - 1989

It is a sad duty to announce the death of Dr Rajakumar, on November 20, 2008, at the age of 76 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Dr Rajakumar was President of WONCA 1986 -1989, and a most inspirational international leader of family medicine. Due to his determined guidance, WONCA became the organization it is today, aptly summarized in our logo ‘*World Family Doctors: Caring for People’*.

Dr Rajakumar was a leading left-wing intellectual and academician in his native Malaysia, a co-founder of the Labor party in the early 1960s. His political views brought him in conflict with the establishment and he was detained under the Internal Security Act for his views. Prior to his WONCA Presidency, he was President of the Malaysian Medical Association from 1979-80; President of the Malaysian Scientific Association from 1981-83; and for many years President of Malaysian Academy of Family Physicians.

Dr Rajakumar practiced the principle of thinking globally, acting locally. He practiced in the run-down district of Loke Yew, and remained faithful for many years to this population that did depend on him for medical care. And he fostered international relations for WONCA beyond the direct context of health care – in particular the collaboration with UNICEF, in line with his social conscience and political leadership.

He stayed fully involved in WONCA, long after his term of office had come to an end, and kept on working to improve healthcare and particularly primary care. In 2006, during the WONCA Asia Pacific Regional Conference in Bangkok he delivered the Wes Fabb Oration. This turned out to be his last official contribution to WONCA: although in spirit still the giant of old times, he was already physically frail.

Dr Rajakumar took the WONCA Presidency at the end of the London WONCA World Conference in 1986, but he could not attend the 1989 world conference as this was in Jerusalem and it was impossible for him to travel to Israel. This deprived him of the platform to conclude his presidency - a platform he had so fully deserved. This must have been a bitter personal disappointment, but he did bear it with dignity and never complained publicly of this.

His intellectual legacy is kept alive through the publication of a collection of his lectures, under the aegis of the Malaysian Academy of Family Physicians this past September.

In memory of Dr Rajakumar, hero of international primary care.

Professor Chris van Weel

President of WONCA