‘Man, pay more attention to women’

Retired gynaecologist wants more done for women and puts her money where her mouth is

Dr Oon Chiew Seng has a brick gaze and reads without glasses. She is also sharp as a tack, and does not shy from calling a spade a spade. Then again, one would not have expected anything less of a gynaecologist, she thinks.

She was the first gynaecologist to go into private practice, in 1939. She founded and ran Singapore’s first nursing home for dementia patients, the Apex Harmony Lodge, in 1993.

And earlier this year, she pledged a generous gift to the National University of Singapore which will be used to set up a medical fellowship in her name at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. The Oon Chiew Seng fellowship will fund research in women’s health and ageing science.

On his return from a trip to India, where his mother stayed for a month, Dr Oon was surprised to find that she was more aware of her age and its consequences. He thought it was just because his mother was a housewife.

"But I thought it was because he already wanted to be a doctor himself too. But my father had cabinets of books on Chinese medicine and he wouldn’t have any of his children studying Western medicine," she adds humorously: "My brother also couldn’t be a lawyer because lawyers tell lies, you see. So he studied engineering: he was a Queen’s scholar."

"If I could go back to the future, I would love to have more for women. It’s as simple as that."

Dr Oon Chiew Seng

Women’s woman

In this society, everything is men, men, men. So I come along and say, ‘Pay more attention to women.’ I’m a woman, I would like to have more done for women. It’s as simple as that.”

Dr Oon Chiew Seng