Obituaries of Professor Tuem Bunnag, M.D.: Father of Obstetrics & Gynaecology of Thailand


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Professor Tuem Bunnag, Father of Obstetrics & Gynaecology of Thailand, was born on the 3rd March 1894 and was the 7th child among his siblings of General Lieutenant Chao Praya Suriwongwatanasak and Khun Tabtim Bunnag (O-sathanon). He was sent to serve as a royal page under His Royal Highness Prince Songkhanakarin or so-called 'Prince Mahidol' in the Royal Palace in his childhood and was the first student under the royal patronage of Prince Songkhanakarin or Somdej Pra Rajabida to be sent to study in Germany. After finishing his medical studies, he was encouraged by Prince Songkhanakarin to be a member of the Rockefeller Foundation. Later on, Professor Tuem was kindly advised to be trained further in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Professor Tuem was under the royal patronage of Prince Songkhanakarin for his overseas studies for 21 years.

He returned to Thailand and joined the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology as an Instructor Level 2, medical civil servant, at the Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital and had become the Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology since 1931. He held this position for 27 years. He had received the royal trust of our present King in working as an Obstetrician for the royal births, namely the Crown Prince, His Royal Highness Prince Vajiralongkorn, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Walailak.

During his term as the Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Professor Tuem had laid an important background for the work of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the Department. Apart from his tremendous contribution to the works at the Department, Professor Tuem was a kind, dedicated and good teacher to his students with a moral and clear mind. He pointed out to us all the importance of having nurses as assistants in work. Nurses and midwives were essential assistants in maternal care. Without them, physicians would not be able to do their job properly. The happiness and joy of the patients lay on the hands of the "female". We should be aware of the need of this issue and should extend our "friendship" to one another. Professor Tuem also taught us to have a consciousness of being a "teacher". He further gave us the thought that "being a teacher is easy" but "how to be a good teacher is difficult": "Do not let the students think that do as teacher teaches and do not do like what the teacher has done". In terms of being a physician, Professor Tuem said that in medically treating the patients, we should take into consideration the best benefit they will receive from the physicians in the first place. The reward of what we do will be followed like a shadow. Sometimes, we may be disappointed by materials. Deep down in our mind, we are proud to be able to use our professional to assist our human colleagues. He gave some insights about the delivery (vaginal birth) that delivery is a natural course; we should not disturb it when it is not necessary. What he
had said is still a fact that can be applied always. So far, the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology has been serving the public for more than 90 years. Moreover, the Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital was the first ever medical school and the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology was also the first ever established in the kingdom, so we can say that almost all the Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in the past were Professor Tuem Bunag's students. He has been considered the "father" of the subject Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Thailand.