NATIONAL MEDICAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2009
THE AwarDEES

NATIONAL OUTSTANDING CLINICIAN AWARD 2009
PROFESSOR JOHN WONG EU LI

Deputy Chief Executive, National University Health System
Dean, NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine
Director, National University Cancer Institute, Singapore

Professor John Wong has always reached for the stars. Back in 1985, as a third-year medical officer on the brink of becoming a specialist, he decided that he needed more training.

Armed with applications to about 40 of the top US academic medical centers and recommendations from professors in Singapore, the young doctor flew to the United States and was politely turned down by every institution he approached. Finally, just before he was to board his flight home, Prof Wong secured an interview with the chairman of Cornell Medical Centre, who told him they had never taken a foreign doctor into their ranks, which were also fully staffed. The aspiring physician offered to work for free for a year. After his first year, Prof Wong was placed on the payroll and became the hospital’s first Asian Chief Resident in Medicine in 1991. In 1992, Professor Wong returned to Singapore as he felt he could contribute in a more meaningful way.

“Upon returning from the United States in the early 1990s, Professor John Wong initiated a discussion with me on how he could contribute to the development of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS) and National University Hospital (NUH). Since then, he has always excelled in tasks and responsibilities that he is tasked with. His personal care, compassion and concern for his patients have always been extraordinary and well known. Through the years, Professor Wong has developed into a visionary and dedicated leader and continues to impress me with his drive to excel in patient care, medical education and research,” commented University Professor Lim Pin. University Professor Lim Pin is with the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore and is also an Emeritus Consultant with the Division of Endocrinology, University Medicine Cluster, National University Hospital, National University Health System.

Professor Wong is a champion of research and education for improving patient care. He is a strong advocate of multidisciplinary teams involving healthcare professionals and scientists working together on problems seen in daily clinical practice, and appreciates the benefits of bringing observations gained in patient care to developing safer, more cost-effective, and more efficacious treatment through world class research.

From 1994-2000, Professor Wong headed the Department of Medical Oncology and contributed to the expansion of adult Haematology-Oncology as a specialty in NUH. He also assisted in the development of the Radiation Oncology facility at NUH.

In 1997, Professor Wong formed the Cancer Therapeutics Research Group (CTRG), involving the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore, the National Cancer Center and Johns Hopkins International Medical Center in Singapore, as well as leading university cancer centers in Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan to develop better therapies for cancers common in the region. Since then, the CTRG had carried out the world’s first “first-in-man” trial of ABT-869, a new cancer drug that looks very promising. The CTRG has also shown why a common drug used in breast cancer has different toxicity in the different ethnic groups in Singapore, as well as why different ethnic groups require different dosages of a common drug used to prevent blood clots. Insights from these differences have contributed to the development of Singapore’s Biomedical Sciences Initiative.
During the SARS crisis in 2003, Professor Wong integrated clinical epidemiology and research to stem the spread of SARS. He was appointed to the chair of the Singapore SARS consortium of local laboratories and researchers from various fields, which eventually developed and validated SARS diagnostic kits.

Professor Wong has been a passionate advocate of teaching of undergraduate students and training of postgraduate doctors, believing in the importance of investing in the next generation healthcare providers. As Dean of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine since 2003, he appreciates the challenges less privileged medical students face in having to cope with their studies parting addition to part-time work. Hence, his recent efforts to tap into philanthropy have focused on needy medical students. The scholarship and bursary funds raised have helped ensure that all deserving students at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine will be able to pursue and realize their dreams of becoming doctors.

In addition, he has also been very successful in attracting talents, both local and overseas, to join NUHS.

In recent years, Professor Wong has played a leading role in the integration of the NUS’ medical and dental schools and NUH into an academic health system, combining excellence in clinical practice, education and research to deliver the best possible healthcare to Singaporeans.
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NATIONAL OUTSTANDING CLINICIAN SCIENTIST AWARD 2009
PROFESSOR MICHAEL CHEE WEI LIANG

Principal Investigator
Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore

Professor Michael Chee is Principal Investigator of the Cognitive Neuroscience Lab, and a member of the Neuroscience and Behavioral Disorders Programme at the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore. He is also one of Singapore’s pioneer recipients of the prestigious Singapore Translational Research Investigator Award. Showing uncommon versatility, he made the transition from full time clinical neurologist to becoming a cognitive neuroscientist who runs a human brain-imaging research program.

Possibly better known for his earlier work on imaging the bilingual brain, Prof. Chee’s research concerning the sleep-deprived brain has gained international recognition and he has been instrumental in establishing the imaging correlates of deficits in attentional control and its effects on visual processing in sleep deprived persons. He is currently investigating the specific nature of these attention deficits and interventions that might help vulnerable individuals. A second research track relates to characterizing the aging Asian brain.

The successful execution of his research has required combining the ability to ask a ‘good scientific question’, with an exceptional capacity to integrate knowledge across engineering, neuroscience and psychology. Apart from technical skills, the endeavor has also required him to harness fluctuating intellectual resources in addition to surmounting the obstacles inherent in being a pioneer.

His focus is on cognition in the context of sleep deprivation and healthy ageing. His functional brain imaging work on the sleep-deprived brain seeks to discover vulnerable points in the brain that lose function when we are sleep deprived.

He is keen to determine why some persons are more vulnerable to sleep deprivation and to use sleep deprivation as a ‘cognitive stress test’ that might prove useful in the evaluation of cognitive modulators.

In addition to his own cognitive neuroscience research, Prof. Chee has had to build up the supporting infrastructure to facilitate the work. In so doing he has contributed to the training of graduate students who are presently in top overseas laboratories – Duke, U Penn, Cambridge, UIUC and two Max Planck Institutes. For over a decade, his lab has also supported junior local researchers investigating topics ranging from learning algebra, irritable bowel syndrome and early onset schizophrenia.

Prof Chee is a keen pursuer of knowledge and a great believer in life long learning. He is as happy talking about linear algebra as he is discussing the limits of attention-driven anticipatory shifts in visual cortex activation.
Over the course of three decades, Professor Ng Han Seong had served in Singapore General Hospital in various capacities. He was instrumental in the evolution of the Department of Internal Medicine, where he first joined, into a full-fledged Specialty Department of Gastroenterology that is well recognized nationally and regionally.

His firm belief in educating the future generations is so strong that he has left a distinctive mark in the clinical department that he built up, where the spirit of teaching and sharing remains very much a part of its culture. Prof Ng has trained a host of specialists over the years and helped develop medical departments in the Division of Medicine that have gone on to produce significant work independently and made outstanding contributions to patient care delivery, medical education and research in Health Sciences. Many of the staff in the departments, who were once his mentees, have gone to assume leadership positions at SGH and in Singapore.

Prof Ng is an enthusiastic teacher who has inspired many generations of doctors. His passion for sharing knowledge and clinical experiences with the junior medical staff is unwavering. While serving as the Chairman of the Division of Medicine, he instituted a regular lecture series that spanned across the entire Medical Office posting and a MRCP PACES course and mock examination to provide more comprehensive post-graduate education for the Internal Medicine Basic Specialty Trainees.

In July 1993, he was appointed Clinical Associate Professor in the Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore and in August 1999, he was promoted to full Clinical Professor. He was voted the Best SGH Teacher in 1995. He had also served as Examiner for the undergraduate and postgraduate medical examinations for our local university as well as in Malaysia and the Royal College. He was appointed an Adjunct Professor by the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School in March 2008.

In recognition of his sterling leadership, Prof Ng was appointed Chairman, Division of Medicine, SGH, in November 2003. A man of vision, he set up the Department of Family Medicine and Continuing Care to ensure the comprehensive and holistic care delivery for patients. In November 2006, he assumed office as Chairman, Medical Board.

Regionally, Prof Ng is well recognized to be an accomplished clinician and hepatologist. He was the President of the Gastroenterological Society of Singapore and founding member of the Asia Pacific Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (APASL). He has edited and co-edited books for internists and gastroenterologists, authored many peer-reviewed scientific papers and delivered numerous lectures locally, regionally and internationally.
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NATIONAL OUTSTANDING CLINICIAN MENTOR AWARD 2009
PROFESSOR LOW POH SIM

Chair, University Children’s Medical Institute, National University Hospital, National University Health System
Associate Dean, National University Hospital
Head and Senior Consultant, Division of Paediatric Neurology and Developmental Paediatrics, Department of Paediatrics, NUH

Throughout her career, Prof Low has taken on leadership roles as a clinician and dedicated her life and work to helping children with special needs.

“It has always been heartbreaking for me to see children with neurology and developmental problems. There is a need for greater public awareness and acceptance of these children. Although there may not be a cure for all such conditions, everyone can play a role in making the lives of these children better and more meaningful by treating them as any other normal kid,” urged Professor Low.

“For instance, epilepsy occurs in 0.5 to 1.0% of the population and 60% of epilepsy cases begins in childhood. With proper care and adherence to treatment, these children can move on into adulthood, strive to build their dream careers and families like everyone of us,” commented Professor Low.

Driven by her desire and passion to help children with neurological and developmental problems, Professor Low has spearheaded the development of new and essential clinical services and programmes in this area during her 35-year career. As Head of the NUH Division of Paediatric Neurology and Developmental Paediatrics, she has also led the paediatric neurology team to develop greater capabilities in clinical services. The Division now has greater ability to investigate and diagnose a larger spectrum of genetic neuromuscular and neurodegenerative disorders.

“The first encounter I had with Professor Low was at the age of 3½. Since young, I have been fond of her as I feel that she is a wise and dedicated doctor who is genuinely concerned about her patients. She secures a special place in my heart and I take comfort that I could always confide in her as I cope with challenging stages of my life with my deteriorating illness. Professor Low always ensured that my needs are being catered to. For instance, after my family related the problems and agony that we faced as I went through the initial weeks in kindergarten, Professor Low introduced us to the Asian Women’s Welfare Association Therapy and Educational Assistance for Children in Mainstream Education programme. This has benefited me immensely as I continue my journey in mainstream education. On another occasion when she discovered that I have developed scoliosis in early 2006, she immediately referred me to Associate Professor James Hui, a paediatric orthopaedic surgeon at NUH whom she felt could resolve my problems with the best means. Professor Low is truly an empathetic doctor who shares our pains and joys as she partners us in our rollercoaster journey. She was involved in all the endeavors I have undertaken and these were made possible with her guidance and unwavering support,” shared Ms Loh Jia Wei, 14 years old patient who suffers from Spinal Muscular Atrophy.

A passionate, dedicated teacher and mentor who has taught many young paediatricians who went on to lead illustrious careers, Prof Low continues to play an important role in the development of the curriculum for both under-graduate and post-graduate studies at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.
Lauding Professor Low for her excellent mentorship, Professor Quak Seng Hock, Senior Consultant, University Children’s Medical Institute, National University Hospital, National University Health System said, “Professor Low is a very meticulous mentor and she demands high standard from her mentees. She would always ensure that her students get the best training and teaching.”

“Professor Low is a very unassuming and meticulous leader as well as an excellent clinician. She sets the pace, never procrastinates and is always ahead of us in getting things done. As a mentor, she never micro-manages but by her own work and excellent management skills, she is a role model for junior staff like us who aspires to be the great clinician and teacher she is. Professor Low is also a consultative and humble leader who does not hesitate to ask for advice about patients from fellow colleagues of all ranks. Underlying all this is her desire to do her best for all patients and I am constantly inspired by her desire for excellence in clinical management of patients!” asserted Associate Professor Stacey Tay, Consultant, Department of Paediatrics, University Children’s Medical Institute, National University Hospital, National University Health System.

The Department of Paediatrics is well known for its post-graduate training programmes. As Chairman, Committee of Paediatrics, Division of Graduate Medical Studies, National University of Singapore for 14 years and Chairperson of the Specialist Training Committee for Paediatric Medicine for a period of 8 years, Prof Low exercised a major role in the training and assessment of a new generation of young paediatricians for Singapore.

Beyond the professional training of paediatricians, Prof Low has, during her leadership of the Department of Paediatrics, built a capable and competent team of paediatric sub-specialists at the University Children’s Medical Institute. In mentoring, nurturing and inspiring many young doctors, she has challenged, encouraged and helped her charges to achieve their potential to meet the health needs of children in Singapore and the region. Her efforts will leave a lasting legacy to Paediatric medical care in the country.

Prof Low’s sustained involvement in and commitment to the area of clinical care and student development are all the more remarkable because they are maintained even as she participates in intensive clinical research. Her work in the area of paediatric neurology has resulted in the publication of several scientific papers in high-impact peer-reviewed journals.
Professor Chew Chong Lin may well be called the Champion of Singapore Dentistry.

Dental surgeon, teacher, mentor and researcher – his 35-year-career comprises multiple milestones in teaching, clinical work and research, all of which have seen him collaborating with engineers to develop new, innovative biomaterials for use in clinical treatment.

A talent and passion for bringing out the best in others has also seen him take on significant appointments, such as being the Dean, Faculty of Dentistry, Head of Prosthetic Dentistry, Head and Chief of Department of Restorative Dentistry, Deputy Director of Medical Services (Dental) and Chief Dental Officer. Through his singular dedication and ceaseless effort, Professor Chew has raised the standard of dentistry in Singapore and the reputation of the NUS Faculty of Dentistry, National University Health System (NUHS).

Instrumental in the development of dentistry in Singapore, Professor Chew oversaw the set-up of the National Dental Centre (NDC) as the Chair of the Planning Committee from 1989-1995. He remained as its advisor until 2000. Appointed Chief Dental Officer from 2001 to 2006, Professor Chew introduced important policies to align the practice of dentistry for all graduates, including the groundwork for the Specialist Register, a new Dental Act and Continuing Dental Education. An advocate of continuing dental education, Professor Chew set an example by being the first dentist in Singapore to be awarded a PhD degree in Dentistry by NUS.

As Director of the NUS Faculty of Dentistry Graduate School of Dental Studies since 1986, he introduced five structured Dental Specialist training programmes that included a thesis component. Four of these have conjoint examination status with the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh.

Appointed Dean of Dentistry in 1995, Professor Chew established international recognition of the faculty through a new competency-based curriculum, increased the quantity and quality of research and embarked on a community dental project, providing professional dental care to the elderly poor.

During his tenure, Professor Chew introduced a compulsory research programme for all undergraduates, further enhancing the research culture in the Faculty of Dentistry. A number of students’ projects have won local and regional awards, some of which have translated into publications in peer-reviewed international journals.

Professor Chew is also the first Director of the Centre for Advanced Dental Education, set up in 2007 to formalize Graduate Diploma and continuing dental education programmes, which enjoy a strong following from the profession, including dentists in the private sector.

Through the years, Professor Chew has nurtured and mentored a number of students, many of whom are now established dentists and leaders in the profession. He continues to supervise the research work of graduate students. A dedicated mentor, Professor Chew always strives to amalgamate students’ knowledge in the management of the patients’ dental conditions – to the extent of conducting weekly classes after office hours on his own time for final year dental students.
Clinically, Professor Chew is one of Singapore’s leading specialists in Prosthodontics and is much sought after by patients both locally and regionally. Recounted Dr Marlene Teo, a periodontist who is an adjunct staff of the Faculty:

“As a student, I remember being in awe of our Dean, Professor Chew who is known to be a perfectionist in the clinics. My hands would sweat and turn clammy whenever he called my name. He would look steadily at us and ask questions which I could never answer to his complete satisfaction! Upon graduating from dental school though, I started to see Professor Chew for who he really is; a self-deprecating, kind and humble clinician with an unmatched dedication to his patients and students. When I first joined NUS as a periodontist, Prof Chew was one of the first specialists to consult me on cases relating to periodontology, despite his vast experience in dentistry.

“Prof Chew has great clinical acumen and always has his patients’ best interests at heart. As his mentee, I have learnt that “less is more”. His treatment plans are always simple yet functional and the patients are invariably satisfied with the outcome. On one particular occasion, I was amazed by his dedication, when despite having undergone minor surgery, he insisted on coming back to school to treat a mutual patient of ours. He finally agreed to rest at home when I assured him that I could take care of the entire treatment plan for our patient until he had recovered fully.

“I am grateful that Prof Chew has taken me under his wing and given me many opportunities to prove myself.”

Apart from his focus on dental education and clinical care, Professor Chew is also an innovative researcher, having initiated and worked with collaborators from the engineering sector to develop biomaterials to improve the properties of dental resins and extend their usage in dentistry. This venture has been highly successful and has resulted in a number of patents. Since 2001, he has been an active member of the Faculty Research Committee.

And despite Professor Chew’s heavy workload, he makes himself available to students and colleagues.

“Professor Chew has served the university selflessly for the past 35 years. A great leader, mentor and team player, he has a gift of building teams of people who work well together under his leadership and stewardship. He capitalizes on each individual’s strengths and motivates each person to give of one’s best. Professor Chew leads by example and he has no qualms in rolling up his sleeves and working alongside his subordinates, To this day, Prof Chew’s long working hours are a testimony to his dedication for the vision he has for the students, the patients, the faculty and the profession. He conducts weekly after office and out of timetable clinical seminars just because he believes that it is important to share his vast clinical experience with the final year students. Despite his long waiting lists, Prof Chew treats each patient with a strong service oriented approach and as Dr Teo says “great clinical acumen”. In his lifetime, Prof must have attended the most functions, talks and activities for the faculty as he walks his talk – by being there physically to support the school. His whole career has been one of total commitment to the faculty, the students and the University, his patients and the profession. Professor Chew is indeed a living example of the core values of the University and the hospital!” said Associate Professor Jennifer Neo, Head and Senior Consultant, Department of Restorative Dentistry, University Dental Cluster, National University Hospital, National University Health System. She has known Professor Chew for over 30 years.