Obituary

Professor Tan Sri Guan Bee Ong, P.S.M., O.B.E., M.D., D.Sc.

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It is with profound sadness that the Council of the Asian Surgical Association mourns the passing of Emeritus Professor Tan Sri Guan Bee Ong on 10th January 2004, at the age of 82, after a long and courageous battle against cancer.

Born in Sarawak, Malaysia, Professor Ong was appointed Chair Professor of Surgery by The University of Hong Kong in 1964. He was the first ethnic Chinese at the university to hold this distinction and led the Department of Surgery until his retirement in 1982.

He was a driving force behind the establishment of the Association of Surgeons of South East Asia in 1976 – which was later renamed the Asian Surgical Association (ASA). Under his leadership, this association thrived to become a major forum for surgeons in the region and beyond to meet and share their professional experience. After his retirement, he maintained his interest in the affairs and activities of the association. His presence at various meetings was a matter of immense delight and profound happiness to all. His interaction with the new generation of surgeons was like that of a grandfather admiring the achievements of his grandchildren.

As a master surgeon who reached the pinnacle of his profession, he put Hong Kong, and, in turn, Asian surgery, on the world map. His extraordinary skills were legendary and were recognized at the international level, and earned him the respect of the global surgical community. He cultivated a spirit of original research endeavour and encouraged innovation in surgery and surgical education among his colleagues.

Some of the notable honours he received included the titles of Panglima Setia Mahkoka by The King of Malaysia, and Officer of the British Empire (OBE) by Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain. He was also a recipient of many other honours and honorary fellowships of colleges and professional societies abroad. He was made a member of nearly 30 organizations and societies around the globe.

The respect that surgeons in Asia today command is, in no small part, due to the labour of Professor Ong, who prided himself on being able to do “everything”, and who made it happen not so long ago. The Asian Surgical Association will always be indebted to him for his vision, his leadership, and his unsurpassed dedication for the almost thirty years since its inception. A world-class surgeon extraordinaire, his spirit and legacy continue through the G.B. Ong Lecture, a lecture named in his honour, delivered during our Biennial Congress of the ASA.

Professor Ong will be dearly missed by all whose lives he touched. We offer his family our most sincere condolences and deepest gratitude for sharing his life with us.

Asian Surgical Association