



COLLEGE OF

*Surgeons,  
Singapore*



*A Brief History of the College of Surgeons, Singapore  
(Formerly known as Chapter of Surgeons),  
Academy of Medicine, Singapore*

Anthony Heng<sup>1</sup> FAMS



*Address for Correspondence:*

**Dr Anthony Heng**  
Anthony Heng Surgery  
Gleneagles Medical Centre  
6 Napier Road, #05-02  
Singapore 258499.

<sup>1</sup> *President, College of Surgeons, Singapore (2004-2007)*

## ABSTRACT

The Chapter of Surgeons was inaugurated in 1966 following the formation of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore in 1957. The formation of the Chapter of Surgeons was to look after the interest of surgeons in the Academy of Medicine. Over the years, it has successfully organized many academic activities for its members. In 2004, the Chapter of Surgeons transformed into the current College of Surgeons. The College continues to involve itself in training, continuing education and examination activities.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Academy of Medicine, Singapore was duly founded in 1957 as the professional corporate body of medical and dental specialists in Singapore. The Chapter of Surgeons was inaugurated in 1966 by the Master of the Academy of Medicine, Professor K Shanmugaratnam, as one of the first two Chapters of the Academy. The first chairman elected was Mr Yahya Cohen (Fig. 1). The Fellows of the Chapter of Surgeons were all fully trained surgeons who organised meetings in their specific fields of interest.

In order to meet the growing needs of a wider surgical community in 1967, the idea of a Singapore Surgical Society was mooted by Professor Lawrence Tinckler. At the inaugural meeting of the Society, Dr Yahya Cohen was elected as the President, Dr Raj Nambiar as the Honorary Secretary and Drs KT Chan, NC Tan and VK Pillay as committee members. The main objectives of the Society were to have an organisation in which the surgeons could interact and impart knowledge to their junior colleagues.

Until the Chapter of Surgeons became active, the Singapore Surgical Society was the most active Society under the Singapore Medical Association with regular monthly clinical meetings, annual scientific meetings, monthly journal clubs and annual formal dinners held at the Raffles Hotel. Meetings held were topics relating to the direct care of patients. These events and meetings were to complement the activities of the Chapter of Surgeons.

Shortly after the inauguration of the 2 bodies, it was felt that there was much benefit to hold an Annual Combined Scientific Meeting where topics of mutual interest to both bodies could be discussed and views exchanged. The first meeting was held in 1967. These meetings were well received and had a good attendance. However, the Society was dissolved in the late 1970s as it was felt to be redundant. The Fellows of the Chapter of Surgeons decided to continue with the Annual Scientific Meeting. For nostalgic reasons, it was agreed that this meeting would continue to be called the "Annual Combined Surgical Meeting". With the increase in the number of surgeons as well as the number of specialties, the meeting continues to grow from strength to strength.

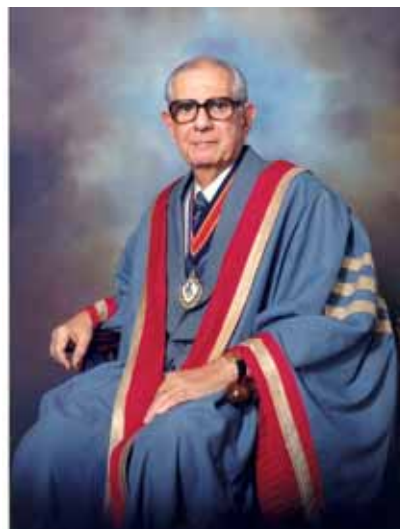


Fig. 1. Dr Yahya Cohen.

Among the notable achievements of the Chapter of Surgeons was the organisation of the 1<sup>st</sup> overseas meeting of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd) in South East Asia which triggered the recognition of the MMed Surgery certification on par with FRCSEd and also, the holding of joint MMed and FRCSEd examinations in Singapore since 1987. This also paved the way for the start of a joint Academy of Medicine and RCSEd Lectureships alternating between Singapore and Edinburgh. The first overseas lecture at the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh on " Surgery in Singapore – the Scottish Link " was presented by Dr Raj Nambiar in 1988. This was published in both the Journal of the RCSEd and the Annals of the Academy of Medicine.

Another important achievement of the Chapter of Surgeons was organising and co-sponsoring major surgical conferences in Singapore. Of particular mention is the founding of the Association of Surgeons of South East Asia in Singapore (now known as the Asian Surgical Association). The late Tan Sri Professor GB Ong of Hong Kong, who was the prime mover, contacted the Chairman of the Chapter of Surgeons through the Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore about the idea of the Association. The Chapter following on this organised a preliminary meeting in Singapore in 1975 at the Regional English Language Centre. This was attended by several leading surgeons from the region. A pro-tem committee was formed with Professor GB Ong as President and Dr Raj Nambiar as Secretary. An inaugural meeting was also organised in Singapore in 1976 and the Association of Surgeons of South East Asia was officially launched with Tan Sri Professor GB Ong as the President, Dr John Wong (in absentia) as Secretary and 2 committee members from each regional countries with founding membership. An official journal for the Association namely *South East Asian Journal of Surgery* was started subsequently with Dr Raj Nambiar as the founding Editor-in-Chief. The journal now known as the *Asian Journal of Surgery* has flourished and continues today as the official journal of several South East Asian surgical specialties.

The Chapter of Surgeons has actively promoted continuing medical education in various forms for its members. Today, there are the main meetings as well as satellite meetings and workshops to encompass the various specialties in its fold. The Chapter of Surgeons had the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Combined Surgical Meeting in 2003 as their last meeting and after which, the annual meeting was integrated into the biennial Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine programme.

A major activity for the Chapter from its very beginning has been in postgraduate education, training and examinations. Several members were actively involved in the initiation, running of postgraduate courses and examinations for the MMed Surgery and maintaining a high standard for the examination. MMed Surgery was the first local postgraduate examination to receive reciprocal recognition by the UK Colleges and later paved the way to the joint MMed/FRCSE examination.

Over the years it had functioned under the umbrella of the Academy and successfully organised many academic activities for its members. The Academy Council undertook a major review of the Academy's Memorandum and Articles of Association (M & A) in 2002 and 2003 with a view to transform a number of Chapters to Colleges. The Fellows gave unanimous support during the Academy's Annual General Meeting. The aims of transforming Chapters to Colleges were to allow the Colleges more autonomy and to enhance the development of the specialties. The College of Surgeons, Singapore was incorporated on 17 August 2004.

## THE MILESTONES FOR SURGERY AND SURGEONS IN SINGAPORE<sup>1</sup>

The development of surgical practice in Singapore has been ongoing since 1819. With the formation of the College of Surgeons (formerly known as Chapter of Surgeons) on 17 August 2004, the College has taken on greater steps into the surgical era. Under the wing of the College, there are 10 separate Chapters covering the disciplines of Cardiothoracic Surgery, General Surgery, Hand Surgery, Neurosurgery, Ophthalmology, Orthopaedic Surgery, Otorhinolaryngology, Paediatric Surgery, Plastic Surgery and Urology.

## MEMBERSHIP OVER THE YEARS

The number of surgeons in Singapore has been increasing over the years and the same increase can be seen in the membership of the College of Surgeons. The College comprised trained specialists in surgery practising in the university, public hospitals and private sector. The membership grew from 49 in 1969 to a total of 459 Fellows as of 31 December 2006.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAIRMEN OF THE CHAPTER OF SURGEONS (1966-2003) AND PRESIDENTS OF THE COLLEGE OF SURGEONS (2004-2007)

The list of Chairmen of the Chapter of Surgeons and President of the College of Surgeons since its inception in 1966 is shown in Table 1.<sup>1,2</sup>

Table 1. List of Past Chairmen (for Chapter of Surgeons – 1966-2004) and Present Presidents (now College of Surgeons – 2004 onwards)

Year	Chairman
1966-1969	Dr Yahya Cohen
1969-1971	Dr Choo Jim Eng
1971-1973	Dr V K Pillay
1973-1976	Dr R M Nambiar
1976-1978	Dr Tan Ngoh Chuan
1978-1980	Dr Robert Pho Wan Heng
1980-1982	Dr Lee Seng Teik
1982-1983	Dr Wu Dar Ching
1983-1985	Dr Gopal Baratham
1985-1987	Dr Tan Ser Kiat
1987-1988	Dr Low Cheng Hock
1988-1989	Dr Walter T L Tan
1990-1992	Dr Goh Hak Su
1992-1993	Dr Julian T K Wee
1993-1995	Dr K Satkunanantham
1995-1998	Dr Tan Koh Chai
1998-2000	Dr Abhilash Balakrishnan
2000-2002	Dr Christopher H K Goh
2002-2005	Dr Colin Song
2005-2007	Dr Anthony Heng
2007-2009	Dr Chan Heng Thye

Note: Table information was adapted from Surgery & Surgeons in Singapore – A Retrospective from 1819, page 82 (for Year 1966-1995) and past Annual Reports, Academy of Medicine, Singapore (for years 1998 to 2007).

## CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION

The College of Surgeons is actively involved in organising the Annual Combined Scientific Meetings, activities, trainings and courses for doctors and its own Fellows. The members of the College also took an active part in the teaching programme for the MMed Surgery examinations. Table 2 shows the list of regular activities organised over the years and the list is not intended to be exhaustive. Interested readers can refer to the Annual Reports of the College.

Table 2. List of Regular Activities

Activity	Year it was held
Teaching programme of Postgraduate Courses	1970, 1972
Combined Scientific Meetings (later known as Annual Combined Surgical Meeting)	1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003
Combined Surgical Clinical Meeting	1972
Monthly Clinical Meetings (later known as Monthly Combined Meetings, Monthly Combined Clinical Meetings, then Monthly Combined Surgical Meetings)	1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000
Continuing Education Lectures (later known as Continuing Medical Education)	1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005

Note: Table information was adapted from the past Annual Reports of Academy of Medicine, Singapore.

## LECTURESHIP UNDER THE PURVIEW OF COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

The College of Surgeons has the College of Surgeons (formerly known as Chapter of Surgeons) Lectureship (Fig. 2) and the Yahya Cohen Memorial Lectureship under its purview. The College of Surgeons Lectureship is usually organised in conjunction with the Annual Combined Surgical Meeting while the Yahya Cohen Memorial Lectureship can be organised with the Annual Combined Surgical Meeting or as a stand-alone event. Table 3 shows the list of the past lecturers of both Lectureships.



Fig. 2. Dr Colin Song presenting a token of appreciation to Prof K Satku, the Inaugural College of Surgeons Lecturer, who delivered a lecture titled "Of Role and Role Model".

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

A full 40 years have passed. The College identified the following key challenges:

### Membership growth

The College will conduct regular Fellowship Drives to encourage medical practitioners who have registered with the Singapore Accreditation Board (SAB) but have yet to be Fellows of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore to join the Academy and the College. The College will progressively build up its membership in order to stay relevant in the Academy.

Table 3. List of Past Lecturers for the Chapter/College of Surgeons Lectureship and Yahya Cohen Memorial Lectureship

College of Surgeons Lectureship (formerly known as Chapter of Surgeons Lectureship until Year 2007)		Yahya Cohen Memorial Lectureship	
Year	Lecturer (Drs)	Year	Lecturer (Drs)
1990	Lee Seng Teik	1995	Yeoh Kian Hian
1991	Robert W H Pho	1996	No award
1992	Foo Keong Tatt	1997	Seow Choen
1993	V T Joseph	1998	Lucien Ooi
1994	R Nambiar	1999	Lee Eng Hin
1995	V K Pillay	2000	Tan Kok Chai
1996	Arthur S M Lim	2001	Au Eong Kah Guan
1997	Kanwaljit Soin	2002	Sarbjit Singh
1998	N Balachandran	2003	Tan Bien Keem
1999	Low Cheng Hock	2004	No award
2000	Gopal Baratham	2005	Hsu Pon Poh
2001	Walter Tan	2006	James Hui Hoi Po
2002	Tan Ngoh Chuan	2007	Low Wong Kein
2003	Balaji Sadasivan		
2004	No award		
2005	K Satku		
2006	No award		
2007	Yong Nen Khiong		

Note: Table information was adapted from the past Annual Reports of Academy of Medicine, Singapore.

### Communication with members

The College sends out newsletter at regular intervals to communicate with its College Fellows and also to update them on any information/activities of the College. The Chapter Chairman of each Specialty also make a point to communicate with their own Chapter members via Chapter newsletter or email where necessary.

### Working together with sister Colleges

The College welcome invitations from other overseas sister Colleges that wish to explore collaboration in terms of training, education, journals or research. We will continue to explore the possibility and feasibility of working with overseas sister Colleges to come out with a better framework of programmes that will benefit our Fellows (Figs. 3 to 5).



Fig. 3. Dr Anthony Heng, College President, presenting a token of appreciation to Mr John A R Smith, President of The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.



Fig. 4. Dr Pam Montgomery of RACS with Prof. Ho Lai Yun (Master), Dr Anthony Heng (College President) & Dr T. Ravintharan (VP, Education)



Fig. 5. Members of Chapter of Cardiothoracic Surgeons with distinguished guests, Dr Anthony Heng (College President) and Prof. Ho Lai Yun (Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore).

### COAT OF ARMS

The College's Coat of Arms (Fig. 6) with the wings and the snake entwining the needle represents the international medical symbol. The Merlion represents Singapore where the College originates. The red on the needle is the national predominant colour of Singapore. The leaves serve as a support for this organisation, which also stand for unity and freedom. The colours blue and yellow compliment each other. The Latin motto "Veritas et Virtus" means Truth and Excellence.



Fig. 6. Coat of Arms.

### References

1. Tan NC. Surgery & Surgeons in Singapore – A Retrospective From 1819. Singapore: Academy of Medicine, Singapore, 1996.
2. Annual Report 1970 - 2006, College of Surgeons, Singapore.