

## Arthur Charles MC Yau (1929-2011)

Professor Arthur Yau, a fellow of our Academy and College of Surgeons passed away on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2011 at the age of 81. He left behind a legacy of pioneering work in orthopaedics not only in Hong Kong but also in many parts of the world including Singapore and his country of birth, Malaysia. In Singapore, he collaborated and worked closely with colleagues at our hospitals including Singapore General Hospital (SGH), National University Hospital (NUH) and Mount Elizabeth Hospital. A Singapore citizen, he was the first Asian to be appointed to the Chair of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Hong Kong.

Arthur and I with a group of freshmen from Singapore and Malaya arrived in Hong Kong in late August 1949; he was enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering while I in Medicine. He was transferred to Medicine in 1950. As active Malaysians (as we were known then) in sports, we were soon recruited for hockey and cricket. I wrote in “The Quest for Gold” in 2006, a Hong Kong University (HKU) Press publication; the Chairman and Captain of the HKU Hockey Club were in rotation, SN Ponniah, CH Chew and A Yau.... proudly defeated the team from University of Malaya (in Singapore) at the Padang (SRC) to become the first holder of the Gordon King Shield (in 1951). Arthur later excelled in Golf, a single handicapper having a record of several holes in one. Arthur and I became life-long friends, together with SM Teh and BK Poh.

Professor Keith Luk, the Head of Department at Hong Kong University wrote, “Professor Yau contributed abundantly to the University; the Faculty and the medical profession in the 1960s. Professor Yau together with the late Professor Arthur Ralph Hodgson established a ground breaking surgical operation to treat tuberculosis of the spine, which later became known worldwide as “Hong Kong Operation”. In addition to his leadership at the Department, Professor Yau was also President of the Hong Kong Orthopaedic Association (1975), Honorary Medical Superintendent of the Duchess of Kent Children’s Hospital (1975 to 1976) and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of HKU (1977 to 1978).

We are thankful to Professor Yau for his leadership when he was Head of the Department (1975 to 1980) and his continuous enthusiasm and dedication to teaching the younger generations for so many decades. Indeed, he was still teaching our specialty clerkship students even the week



before he left us.”

The orthopaedics community in Hong Kong wrote, “Hodgson & Yau became synonymous with anterior spinal surgery in the 60’s. Whereas Hodgson developed the approach to manage tuberculosis of the spine, Yau, a masterly surgeon, demonstrated to the world that this approach can be used for other pathological conditions or deformities. Yau showed that scoliosis could be corrected effectively from the front, the grafts can be placed between the vertebral bodies to encourage fusion, and that tumours in the vertebral body can be easily excised. His tenure at the University was filled with trips to visiting lectures and surgical demonstrations around the world. To witness Arthur performed anterior surgery—with such precision, grace and ease—really was like watching the creation of art. His skills drew many surgeons to the University and the Duchess of Kent Children’s Orthopaedic Hospital at Sandy Bay, where fellowships were set up for budding spinal surgeons from all over the world. Many of these are now internationally-known themselves.”

His contributions and friendship will long be remembered by fellows in our Academy and College of Surgeons and all his friends.

Chew Chin Hin

Past Master

Academy of Medicine, Singapore, 1973-1975