

SurgeOn

**THOUGHT
LEADERSHIP:
CHASING THE
UNKNOWN**

Page 02

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP: CHASING THE UNKNOWN

Dr Amos Loh is a pediatric surgeon with a strong passion in research. He shares his views on how research and philanthropy advances medicine.



By Dr Amos Loh
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MY YOUNG PATIENTS

The little girl was barely five years old. We had just removed a large tumour in her chest and she was being kept alive on cardiac bypass. She remained unconscious in the ICU while her devastated parents came to terms slowly with her condition.

A month later, as if she knew her parents were ready to let her go, she eventually passed away. I sometimes wonder if my young patients have more strength and courage than they were credited for.

I specialise in paediatric surgical oncology. It is a small field not many know about. Through my training and subsequent career, I have always wondered about all the "unknowns" in these catastrophic diseases that inflict young lives that have barely started.

Unlike adults who have had long exposure to external carcinogenic factors such as smoking and drinking, cancers in children are harder to explain. Why are certain genetic mutations linked to particular types of tumours? What can we do to improve patient outcome?

DOING LESS AND WORKING TOGETHER

There are many unknowns, yet new discoveries are being made all the time and standards constantly evolve. What was previously tried and tested could be inferior options today. Therefore, it behoves us to keep raising the bar.

In surgical oncology, improving surgical technique alone is insufficient. Previously, surgeons remove tumours and organs in radical surgeries that leave patients with a lifetime of morbidity.

At times, instead of doing more, we may hold back surgeries and fill the gap with tailored radiation and chemotherapy. This requires a willingness to learn outside our discipline, understand the other dimensions of patient care, and work together as a multidisciplinary team. If we see ourselves as different parts of the same team, we can then treat patients holistically and achieve better outcomes.

FINDING ANSWERS THROUGH RESEARCH

Clinicians, researchers and scientists play different but equally important roles in advancing medicine. To me, research is a way to find answers to improve clinical care. My interest in research is a natural extension of dealing with all the unknowns that present in my patients.

I chair the VIVA-KKH Paediatric Brain and Solid Tumour Programme which covers three pillars – clinical multidisciplinary care, translational research and data analysis.

One of the translational focuses of the Programme is molecular diagnostics. Molecular sub-grouping of paediatric tumours is one aspect with increasing importance in our field. With the home-grown research assays that we have since validated internationally and rolled out as clinical tests, we are now beginning to see patient impact in terms of faster and more accurate diagnoses.

PURSING RESPONSIBLE PHILANTHROPY

A lot of what we do in biomedical research is not economically driven. Philanthropy comes in to support causes that may not reap immediate economic returns, whether to fund academic research, humanitarian outreach or bring care to the underserved segments of society.

Contrary to typical views, I find that people in Singapore are willing to give, and give generously. But on our part, we must be responsible stewards of the funds to assure donors that their money is going to the right cause.

Every child deserves a chance in life. We cannot quantify the returns from spending thousands of dollars treating an ailing child. But that too is not how we value people.

This is where philanthropy fills the gaps, so that we can continue to raise the bar for better healthcare outcomes for our patients, be they young or old.

STRENGTHENING COLLABORATIONS WITH DUKE HEALTH

In November 2018, a cross-institution team of 14 members from SGH, KKH, SKH, CGH and SingHealth, embarked on a theme focused research symposium, with the aim to achieve tangible implementable projects that are eligible for competitive funding.

The outcomes include building an enabling platform to facilitate and enable innovators from SingHealth and Duke Health to collaborate for device development as well as research projects for Vascular Surgery, Hepatopancreatobiliary Surgical clinical trials and outcomes research.



Surgery ACP team with Professor Allan Kirk, Chair, Department of Surgery, Duke University Medical Center

Surgery ACP looks forward to even closer partnership with Duke Surgery and the exciting projects that will stem forth.

VISITING PROFESSOR PROGRAMME TO DUKE NUS SURGERY PROGRAMME

Surgery ACP invited Assoc Prof Michael M. Awad as a Visiting Professor to Duke-NUS Medical School (Duke-NUS) Surgery Programme from 6 to 12 January 2019. He was hosted by Assoc Prof Tan Hiang Khoo, Surgery ACP Academic Chair and Assoc Prof Chong Tze Tec, Vice-Chair (Undergraduate Education).

Michael M. Awad, MD, PhD, FACS is an Associate Professor of Surgery at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. He has held a career-spanning interest in medical education having served as a general surgery residency director, medical student surgery clerkship director, and associate dean for medical student education.

Assoc Prof Awad reviewed the surgical education programme, focusing on the undergraduate component. He met Prof Ian Curran, Duke-NUS Vice Dean, Duke-NUS Education Office, Dr Veronique Tan and Prof Wong Wai Keong, Duke-NUS Surgery Programme Co-ordinators. He had the opportunity to interact with Duke-NUS surgery students and the Surgery Interest Group. The breakfast talk on "Robotic Surgery" and an Academic Hour on "Trends in the Future of Medical Education" rendered the sharing of his knowledge and experience with medical students, residents and faculty.

Assoc Prof Awad proposed opportunities in areas of clerkship, faculty development as well as career counselling and mentoring.



Meeting with Duke NUS Y2 Students



Assoc Prof Michael Awad giving a talk on "Trends in the Future of Medical Education" during Academic Hour

NSQIP

The American College of Surgeons – National Surgical Quality Improvement Programme (NSQIP) is a risk-adjusted, outcomes-based programme that allows hospitals to measure and improve their quality of surgical care.

SGH's Division of Surgery (DoS) is spearheading NSQIP's implementation in Singapore, having embarked on the programme since June 2017. The NSQIP team, led by Surgeon Champion - A/Prof Ong Hock Soo, currently comprises 3 surgical clinical reviewers (SCRs), surgeon representatives from various departments - A/Prof Cheow Peng Chung (Hepatectomy & Pancreatectomy), Dr Chok Aik Yong (Colectomy & Proctectomy), Dr Harold Heah (ENT-Thyroid), Dr Jeremy Ng (H&N-Thyroid) and a DoS administrator.

Our SCRs are registered nurses who have worked in surgical specialties. They undergo rigorous training on data collection by NSQIP and require a yearly re-certification by NSQIP to be a qualified SCR.

We started with collecting clinical data for seven procedure-targeted modules: appendectomy, colectomy, proctectomy, esophagectomy, hepatectomy, pancreatectomy and thyroidectomy, and in September 2018, expanded by adding the bariatric module to our portfolio.

The semi-annual risk-adjusted reports by NSQIP have allowed us to benchmark ourselves against more than 700 other participating hospitals and identify our areas for improvement. Quality improvement projects are then put in place to address these areas so that we can further improve the outcomes of surgical patients and potentially decrease institutional healthcare costs.

Our results for the period: Jul – Dec 2017 had revealed several exemplary areas and areas of opportunities:

EXEMPLARY

compared to average NSQIP Hospitals

BASED ON ALL CASES OF 7 PROCEDURES:

- Mortality
- Ventilator > 48 Hrs
- Sepsis
- C. Diff Colitis
- ROR (Return to Operating Room)
- Readmission

With interest from fellow surgical departments like Urology, Orthopaedics and other SingHealth institutions, we are hoping to expand NSQIP across the cluster so that we can reap greater benefits as a whole.

Meet our NSQIP team!

AREA OF OPPORTUNITY

LENGTH OF STAY (LOS)

(date of surgery to date of discharge)

- Colectomy
- Proctectomy
- Pancreatectomy

(Cohort excluding those with defined morbidities and morbidities present at time of surgery)



From left to right: SCR: Ng Lei Beng, DoS administrator: Claire Wong, Surgeon champion: A/Prof Ong Hock Soo, SCR: Edwin Joshua Ang
Not in photo: SCR Angelina Foo.

SGH OT NURSING AND INDUSTRY PARTNER JOHNSON & JOHNSON ENTERS TWO YEAR MOU TO PROVIDE TRAINING FOR MAJOR OPERATING NURSES ON MINIMALLY INVASIVE SURGERY



Happy participants of the inaugural training session

The Support Programme to Advance & Reinforce Knowledge and Skills (SPARKs) has basic and advanced course components comprising of various modules. Basic level modules are targeted for trainee nurses, which aim to promote faster procedure adoption, patient safety and surgical site infection prevention. The subspecialty-specific advanced modules, are targeted for senior nurses and aim to provide nurses with basic procedural knowledge and their roles in delivering safe surgery.

The two-year MOU marks a commitment towards providing excellent nursing training. The inaugural SPARKs Advanced Programme on 21 Sept 2018 was attended by 20 registered nurses from General Surgery department. It was an engaging course with the highlight being a simulated operating room set up for two surgical procedures, with guidance from faculty members, Dr Lim Chin Hong, Consultant, Upper GI & Bariatric Surgery, SGH and Dr Koh Ye Xin, Associate Consultant, Hepatopancreatobiliary and Transplant Surgery, SGH.



PROPOSED FOO KEONG TATT PROFESSORSHIP



The Father of Urology in Singapore, Professor Foo Keong Tatt is the epitome of a passionate educator, dedicated researcher and thought leader.

Over the last four decades, Professor Foo has devoted his time and energy into the progression of Urology in Singapore. Due to his significant contributions, urology became a recognized specialty in 1988.

Through the years, Professor Foo has received numerous awards and made a continuous effort to mentor generations of urologists in Singapore and Asia. Under Professor Foo's guidance, these young professionals have learnt from his compassionate spirit and are now actively providing valued patient-care.

Not only was he the founding President of the Singapore Urological Association in 1986, his visionary leadership as the Secretary General of the Urological Association of Asia for close to a decade, and as the Honorary Executive Director of the Association helped to bring Singapore to the international urology scene.

The proposed Foo Keong Tatt Professorship will be established under the Surgery Academic Clinical Programme in honour of Professor Foo's passion and contributions to urology. The Professorship will strive to spur excellence in research, education and practice, strengthening Singapore's thought-leadership position of Urology globally.

We hope that more philanthropic gifts toward the professorship will play an important role in nurturing and

encouraging innovation, and creativity for current and future urologists. This, in turn, will empower them to develop meaningful transformative solutions that will be beneficial for urological conditions such as prostate diseases, bladder health and urinary stones diseases.

Professor Foo said, "In the practice of medicine, we must always remember our core purpose, which is to improve the care of our patients. We do not just treat patients, but we care. To care, we need to have compassion. We do not just care but must strive to improve on the care. And to improve on that care, we need to do research, and teach the next generation of doctors to be better than us." With the generosity of our donors, we aim to have continual pursuit in research and education for the betterment of the health of our population

MEET YOUR MENTOR

Surgery ACP organised a Meet-Your-Mentor session for Duke NUS Medical School (Duke-NUS) and NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine students on 27th October 2018. This programme aimed to systemically and effectively pair clinicians and/or scientists with students who are keen on research, based on their interests and strengths.

The session was commenced by Dr Teo Jin Yao, Director of Resident and Student Research Mentorship Office. Dr Teo welcomed the students with a short introduction of Surgery ACP and sharing more on Resident and Student Research Mentorship programme. This is followed by valuable insights sharing by Dr Cai Ming Zhe, Dr Darren Chua and Dr Koh Ye Xin. The light-hearted yet informative sharing has brought much knowledge and laughter to the students. Students were able to interact with mentors from the Department of General Surgery, Hepatopancreatobiliary and Transplant Surgery, Colorectal Surgery, Otolaryngology, SingHealth Duke-NUS Head and Neck Centre, SingHealth Duke-NUS Breast Centre and Division of Surgical Oncology to learn more about their research focus and potential projects.

If you are interested to be a Duke-NUS Research Mentor, to nurture budding surgeon-scientists, please contact the Research Administrative Team.



DR ANNALISA NG, COLLEGE OF SURGEONS GOLD MEDAL



Dr Annalisa Ng is an associate consultant in General Surgery, CGH whom was recently awarded the College of Surgeons Gold Medal. This annual award serves to recognise the efforts of the best performing Advanced Surgical Trainees (ASTs) as well as to render encouragement for ASTs to excel in their Exit Examinations.

She shares her thoughts about being the winner and dishes out some advice for her juniors going through the same path.

How did you feel when you found out you were the winner of the College of Surgeons Gold Medal (General Surgery) 2018 for your performance in the 2017 FRCS (General Surgery) Exit Examination?

I was very surprised! I think it is safe to say that every candidate's main aim is to pass the examination and I am no exception. I am very thankful and blessed to have excellent seniors who sacrificed much of their time, giving us tutorials which were invaluable for the exam preparation. Not to mention the great study buddies I had who shared their knowledge and helped with mock Vivas and clinical examinations. It was truly a team effort and my award would not have been possible without them.

What advice would you give to your juniors for their Exit Examinations?

Start studying early. This is probably easier said than done given the workload and duties of a General Surgery senior

resident, but consistency is the key. Start coming up with algorithms of how you would manage a certain surgical condition on call, what are the operative steps for common surgical emergencies, etc. Every night call and operation provides you with a learning opportunity.

Find a core study group (of about 3-4 people) who will be your Viva partners, mock exam patients, knowledge banks and your pillars of support as the exams draw near.

Find good seniors/mentors to take you through examination cases and Vivas. They will help to critique your examination technique and correct any bad habits that you may have picked up over the years.

Lastly, practise, practise and practise. Be it for Vivas or clinical, continue to hone your examination technique till it is polished and becomes second nature for you.

CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS

ACP PROGRAMME GRANT FY2018 CYCLE 2

This funding supports programmes that will seed development and facilitate advancement of the ACPs' academic medicine (AM) strategic goals.

(A) CLINICAL INNOVATION

To promote transformative innovation in healthcare delivery, and to cultivate a spirit of entrepreneurship in this area in line with AM priorities.

Project Title:
BETTER-RISK-STRATIFICATION OF PATIENTS NEEDING PHYSIOTHERAPY AFTER EMERGENCY ABDOMINAL SURGERY (BREATHE-EASY)



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(B) EDUCATION SUPPORT

To encourage development of healthcare education programmes or initiatives which are sustainable and in line with AM priorities.

Project Title:
TURP CURRICULUM



Dr Kenneth Chen
Associate Consultant
Urology, SGH



IT'S NOT THE MOUNTAIN WE CONQUER, BUT OURSELVES

By Dr Ng Jia Hui
Year 5 ENT Resident

I have always been immensely awed by the vastness of Mother Nature. Something about the juxtaposition of a minute human being against the permanence and grandiosity of nature always helps put things into perspective for me, resetting my mind and soul from the hustle and bustle of daily work. What is better than a trek into the wild is doing it with a bunch of equally enthusiastic friends! Five of us (four Otolaryngology and one Orthopaedic surgeon) spent 7 days trekking across Markha Valley in Ladakh, also known as "land of high passes". We trekked up to nine hours and 25km a day, through an ever-evolving terrain of rocky canyons, gorges, meadows and valleys. The hardest part of the trek was a steep climb up a snowy tundra, at an altitude of 5.2km, to reach Kongmaru-la pass. Besides the trek, the time spent huddling in our tents from the bitter cold over hot tea and Maggi noodles, washing our hair together in the icy cold stream, and getting excited over little luxuries we would never have thought twice about in Singapore made this an unforgettable trip for all of us.



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