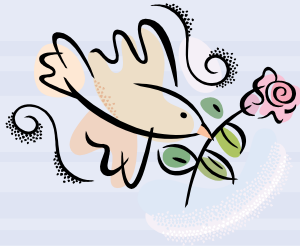


# TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR LI CHONG CHAN

*Professor John Malcolm NICHOLLS*



Professor Li Chong (“LC”) CHAN was the MB Lee Professor in the Humanities and Medicine, Chair Professor in Department of Pathology in the Li Ka Shing (LKS) Faculty of Medicine, and a Director of the Centre for the Humanities and Medicine (CHM) at The University of Hong Kong (HKU).

LC had a distinguished academic career in high school in Malaya before going to Trinity College, Cambridge and King’s College Hospital, where he graduated in 1978 with an MB BChir, and then obtained the MRCP (UK) in 1981. From 1981 to 1987 he was at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Leukaemia Research Fund (LRF) Centre, where he worked with Professor Mel GREAVES, FRS, on his PhD study on immunophenotyping of leukaemias; and later at the Royal Marsden Hospital with Professor Daniel CATOVSKY. It was during his time at the LRF when he published a large number of manuscripts on the mechanisms of leukaemia development, including a seminal *Nature* paper on the mechanisms of acute leukaemia involving the Philadelphia chromosome and a novel *abl*/protein. Further work at HKU showed how some leukaemias with a normal karyotype actually had a fusion of the mixed leukaemia lineage (*MLL*) gene with partner genes including *EEN*, leading to the development of acute and chronic leukaemias in humans and mice, thus widening the knowledge of the aetiology of acute and chronic leukaemias.

During LC’s time in London, he met and studied with colleagues who are now in key haematology positions around the world, including Professors Shuki MITZUTANI, Leanne WIEDEMANN and Zhu CHEN, the former Minister of Health in China. After training as a clinical haematologist in the United Kingdom, LC came to the Department of Pathology of HKU in 1989, where he rose from Senior Lecturer to Reader, and then Professor. When he moved to Hong Kong he continued his research interest in the molecular biology of leukaemia, and his PhD students have also followed in this area, especially in the field of *MLL-EEN* translocations, where LC developed a mouse model of human leukaemia by introducing *MLL-EEN* into embryonic



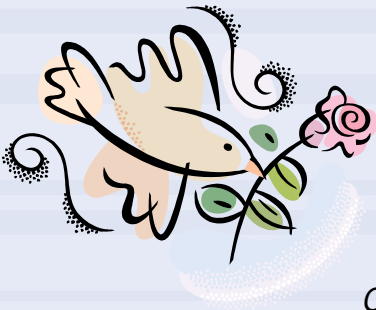
▲ Official opening of the LRF Centre (1984): LC (left) with Professor Greaves (centre) and HRH the Duke of Kent (right).

▼ LC (second from right) as a professional skier with Professor Greaves (second from left) and Professor Mitzutani (right).



◀ LC (right) at dinner at Professor Mitzutani(centre)’s house after Professor Mitzutani’s retirement international conference and party (2014).





stem cells by homologous recombination, the first in Asia and the second using this approach for *MLL* fusion genes worldwide.

LC had a special interest in curriculum development, problem-based learning in medicine, general education, and mindfulness practice. He was a Co-Director of the Medical Ethics and Humanities Unit, and the Chairman of the Medical Humanities Planning Group, responsible for the development and the teaching and learning of medical humanities, which is now part of the core undergraduate medical curriculum. In 1996 he was a core member of the planning group involved in the overhaul and reformatting of the undergraduate MBBS education programme, and visited The University of Liverpool Medical School and Harvard Medical School to understand how curriculum change should take place, and later attended the Harvard Macy Institute for Leaders in Education. His teaching philosophy was driven by the recognition that “The student of today is the teacher of tomorrow”. Implicit in this statement was the responsibility of teachers to nurture students to develop not only self-directed learning and critical thinking skills but also a spirit of inquisitiveness and the courage to challenge scientific and medical dogma. LC believed that through the teaching and learning of medical humanities, students should generate new inquiries and reflections which would enable them to understand illness and health in the wider context of the lives of people. They should become aware of the complexities and ambiguities of issues involved in medical care and practice; and should explore the nature of suffering and healing so as to enable patients to live a life of meaning despite their illness.

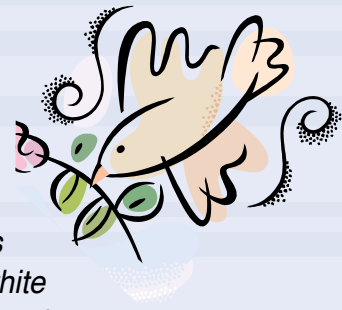
His passion for medical humanities was a realization that biomedical research and cutting edge medical technology have dominated the medical curricula in many schools over the past few decades. This has resulted in illness being managed through biomedical perspectives, with little understanding of how an individual or community’s experience of illness was influenced by social and cultural factors. To redress the imbalance and help develop humanistic care, LC was at the forefront of helping the LKS Faculty of Medicine to pioneer a core medical humanities curriculum from 2012 which would span the entire 6 years of the undergraduate curriculum, starting with first year students. He instituted the concept that narrative medicine would develop humanistic care through

a better understanding of self and others and our interconnectedness. He promoted mindfulness training – a special feature of the MBBS programme – to maximize the potential of delivery of such care by enabling health care professionals to work in situations which are difficult and challenging, hence opening up opportunities to turn towards and work with instead of away from dissonance. His regular “dinging” of the small cymbals before meetings, to “bring us to the current moment” was a regular feature in the past few years. He started teaching a course “Mindfulness, Stress Reduction and Psychotherapy” in the Master of Buddhist Studies programme in HKU in 2015, and practiced mindful living



▲ LC and his family (left) with Professor Wiedemann (third from right), Professor Mai Har SHAM (second from right) and Professor Robb KRUMLAUF (first from right) in LC’s home.

which enabled the experience of joy and peace in our busy and demanding world.



Through this medical humanities programme, students learned to understand and experience who they were beneath the white coat, the nature of suffering and healing, the role of empathy and compassion, and the importance for health care professionals to take care of themselves and to build resilience. This programme included development and running of interdisciplinary courses, seminars and symposia, which enhanced teaching, scholarship and research in the humanities and medicine. LC co-ordinated the first symposium in April 2015 “Linking Leadership in Ethics, Art and Professionalism” organized between the Medical Ethics and Humanities Unit, LKS Faculty of Medicine and CHM, in which medical and art educators, bioethicists and museum curators were invited to share their work and discuss how interdisciplinary teaching and learning could enhance medical training and ethical reasoning. One of the more memorable meetings that he helped organize in 2010 was with the Institut Pasteur in Hong Kong on the “Nature of Altruism”.

In recognition of his expertise and leadership in education, LC received an Outstanding Teaching Award (OTA) from HKU in 2009 and OTA (Team) in 2013.



Like many of his close colleagues, LC was a keen lover of music and food, and a keen advocate of his home Malaysian cuisine. He was renowned for his hospitality to previous research colleagues when they visited Hong Kong, taking them shopping in old and new markets, eating in dai pai dongs and chatting about music, food and philosophy. LC is survived by his wife, Penny, and their son Min Wei and daughter Wen Yen.

▲ LC published in Nature in the first decade of his distinguished career. (Available at <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v325/n6105/abs/325635a0.html>)



◀ LC (third from left) and his research team.

▼ LC (left) and his former PhD student Professor Eric SO (right) celebrating their paper in Nature Cell Biology in Professor So's home in London (2007).

