

**NATIONAL MEDICAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2009
THE AWARDEES**

**NATIONAL OUTSTANDING CLINICIAN AWARD 2009
PROFESSOR JOHN WONG EU LI**

**Deputy Chief Executive, National University Health System
Dean, NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine
Director, National University Cancer Institute, Singapore**

Professor John Wong has always reached for the stars. Back in 1985, as a third-year medical officer on the brink of becoming a specialist, he decided that he needed more training.

Armed with applications to about 40 of the top US academic medical centers and recommendations from professors in Singapore, the young doctor flew to the United States and was politely turned down by every institution he approached. Finally, just before he was to board his flight home, Prof Wong secured an interview with the chairman of Cornell Medical Centre, who told him they had never taken a foreign doctor into their ranks, which were also fully staffed. The aspiring physician offered to work for free for a year. After his first year, Prof Wong was placed on the payroll and became the hospital's first Asian Chief Resident in Medicine in 1991. In 1992, Professor Wong returned to Singapore as he felt he could contribute in a more meaningful way.

"Upon returning from the United States in the early 1990s, Professor John Wong initiated a discussion with me on how he could contribute to the development of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS) and National University Hospital (NUH). Since then, he has always excelled in tasks and responsibilities that he is tasked with. His personal care, compassion and concern for his patients have always been extraordinary and well known. Through the years, Professor Wong has developed into a visionary and dedicated leader and continues to impress me with his drive to excel in patient care, medical education and research," commented University Professor Lim Pin. University Professor Lim Pin is with the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore and is also an Emeritus Consultant with the Division of Endocrinology, University Medicine Cluster, National University Hospital, National University Health System.

Professor Wong is a champion of research and education for improving patient care. He is a strong advocate of multidisciplinary teams involving healthcare professionals and scientists working together on problems seen in daily clinical practice, and appreciates the benefits of bringing observations gained in patient care to developing safer, more cost-effective, and more efficacious treatment through world class research.

From 1994-2000, Professor Wong headed the Department of Medical Oncology and contributed to the expansion of adult Haematology-Oncology as a specialty in NUH. He also assisted in the development of the Radiation Oncology facility at NUH.

In 1997, Professor Wong formed the Cancer Therapeutics Research Group (CTRG), involving the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore, the National Cancer Center and Johns Hopkins International Medical Center in Singapore, as well as leading university cancer centers in Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan to develop better therapies for cancers common in the region. Since then, the CTRG had carried out the world's first "first-in-man" trial of ABT-869, a new cancer drug that looks very promising. The CTRG has also shown why a common drug used in breast cancer has different toxicity in the different ethnic groups in Singapore, as well as why different ethnic groups require different dosages of a common drug used to prevent blood clots. Insights from these differences have contributed to the development of Singapore's Biomedical Sciences Initiative.

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During the SARS crisis in 2003, Professor Wong integrated clinical epidemiology and research to stem the spread of SARS. He was appointed to the chair of the Singapore SARS consortium of local laboratories and researchers from various fields, which eventually developed and validated SARS diagnostic kits.

Professor Wong has been a passionate advocate of teaching of undergraduate students and training of postgraduate doctors, believing in the importance of investing in the next generation healthcare providers. As Dean of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine since 2003, he appreciates the challenges less privileged medical students face in having to cope with their studies parting addition to part-time work. Hence, his recent efforts to tap into philanthropy have focused on needy medical students. The scholarship and bursary funds raised have helped ensure that all deserving students at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine will be able to pursue and realize their dreams of becoming doctors.

In addition, he has also been very successful in attracting talents, both local and overseas, to join NUHS.

In recent years, Professor Wong has played a leading role in the integration of the NUS' medical and dental schools and NUH into an academic health system, combining excellence in clinical practice, education and research to deliver the best possible healthcare to Singaporeans.