

Department of Orthopaedics & Traumatology



Queen Mary Hospital



The University of Hong Kong Medical Centre

Tribute to a Pioneer and Leader in Orthopaedic Surgery Professor Arthur Charles Yau Meng-Choy (1929 to 2011) MBBS, FRCSEd, FACS, FAMS, FHKCOS, FHKAM

We are deeply saddened by the passing on the 13th of January 2011 of a pioneer and leader in Orthopaedic Surgery – Professor Arthur Yau.

Professor Yau was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1929. He studied Engineering for a year before taking up Medicine at the University of Hong Kong, graduating in 1956. Soon thereafter, the late Professor AR Hodgson saw Professor Yau as a young talent and recruited him in 1962 as a part-time lecturer into the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Hong Kong. He progressed through the ranks of senior lecturer and reader to take up a personal Chair in 1972. He became the Head of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery in 1975 and continued to serve in this capacity until 1980. He was a founding member of the Western Pacific Orthopaedic Association (1962), President of the Hong Kong Orthopaedic Association (1975), Medical Director of the Duchess of Kent Children's Hospital (1975-1976), organizing chairman of the first Scoliosis Research Society meeting in Hong Kong (1977), and was Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong (1977-1978). After he entered private practice at the Canossa Hospital in 1980 he continued to maintain a close relationship with the orthopaedic fraternity in general and the University Department in particular. He was a founding fellow of the Hong Kong College of Orthopaedic Surgeons and served as a council member from 1987 to 1993. He remained in the Court of Examiners of the college and played an active role in its development.

Professor Yau's contributions to orthopedics were immeasurable and cemented him as a true pioneer in the field. In the 1960s, together with the late Professor Hodgson, they established a ground-breaking surgical operation to treat tuberculosis of the spine through the anterior approach. In 1966, he was one of the three named surgeons to participate in the prospective multicenter clinical trial on the

treatment of tuberculosis of the spine initiated by the Medical Research Council of London. This study demonstrated that the treatment that he and Professor Hodgson pioneered provided the best results, and the technique was later dubbed the "Hong Kong Operation." This put The Duchess of Kent Children's Hospital and the University of Hong Kong on the world map, and ushered the beginning of what became an unwavering stream of top spine surgeons to visit Hong Kong to learn this technique. Around that same period and along with Dr. John O'Brien and Professor Hodgson, Professor Yau was instrumental in developing the halo-pelvic traction apparatus. This external fixator of the spine enabled gradual correction of severe and rigid spinal deformities while minimizing neurovascular complications. In the late 1970s, he developed for anterior spinal fusion a titanium mesh implant, which is a forerunner of the present day anterior cage used by many spine surgeons around the world.



Although Professor Yau was a very active orthopedic surgeon, he always found time for sports, family, and friends. It was typical for Professor Yau to indulge in Malaysian cuisine and of course golfing – his second passion after orthopedics.

Professor Yau was a scholar, an educator, an innovator, a master surgeon, and a beloved friend. He was not only a

pioneer and leader in his craft but also a man who lived his life to the fullest. Professor Yau is and will remain a role model in the hearts of many worldwide.

He is survived by Catherine his wife, six children and six grandchildren, and an entire community of orthopaedic colleagues and appreciative patients.

We offer our sincerest condolences to his family.

**Department of Orthopaedics and Traumatology
The University of Hong Kong**

Eulogy at Prof. Arthur Yau's vigil 23-1-2011

Arthur Charles Yau Meng-Choy was born in Malaya in 1929. He graduated from the medical school of University of Hong Kong in 1956. After working for a few years with the Government and a period of overseas training in England, he joined the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery of the University in 1962, eventually becoming Chair Professor in 1972. His superb surgical skill, in partnership with the innovation of Professor Arthur Hodgson, established Hong Kong as one of the top 10 spinal centres in the world.

He was President of the Hong Kong Orthopaedic Association in 1975 and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University in 1977-78. Even after he moved into private practice in 1980, he continued to teach medical students and residents up to the last days of his life.

Arthur, as we fondly called him, was an excellent Golfer and that was well-known. But very few realized that he chaired the Athletic Association of the Student Union 1952-53, participated in the Triennial Interschool Game, and excelled in crickets and badminton. He has lived a full life and had been blessed up to the end. He passed away peacefully without any pain or even the awareness of his final passage into another world. He is not only an idol for many of his students, but also an envy of his friends.

**Prof. Chow Shew-Ping
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
The University of Hong Kong**

On behalf of the Department of Orthopedics & Traumatology of the University of Hong Kong, may I say a few words to bid the last farewell to our respected Prof Arthur Yau.

Many of us in the audience this evening would have been taught by Prof Yau at one time or another either during or beyond the medical school days. He was also my mentor in orthopedics and it was he who convinced me in 1979 to switch from an MO with the government to a lecturer with the University Department which I have since served diligently for over 3 decades.

Prof Yau was affectionately called 'Choy Suk' by everybody in the profession although no one would ever address him as such in front of him. We would still call him Professor Yau or Prof simply because of our deepest respect for this great teacher. Those of us who are old enough would know the character 'Choy Suk' in the old Hong Kong cartoon who symbolized integrity, bravery, dexterity and foresight. This is indeed the most appropriate nick name for Prof Yau.

Among the senior Professors in his days, 'Choy Suk' was one of the most amiable and approachable professors. Very often during the grand ward rounds he was the one who would defend the junior doctors when they encountered surgical complications. I recall a couple of his famous sayings: 'doesn't matter, it must have been a very difficult procedure, the surgeon knows best'; or he would say 'don't

worry, if you don't get into trouble that means you haven't done enough yet'. You would agree with me that these are the most reassuring and encouraging words a resident in training would like to hear. We are thankful to Prof Yau for his leadership when he was head of the Department from 1975-1980 and his continued enthusiasm and dedication to teaching the younger generations for the past half a century. Indeed he was still teaching our specialty clerkship students the week before he left us.

While we mourn the passing of our great teacher and friend, we are also grateful to the Lord for giving Prof Yau a long life that he has lived to the fullest. May he now rest in peace.



**Prof. Luk Dip Kei, Keith
Head of Department
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