



Physiotherapy at the peak: an interview with Mr Elton Ng

Mr Elton Ng at the summit of Mount Manaslu (2016)

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Conquering Mount Everest is no easy feat, requiring levels of physical fitness, perseverance, endurance, and stamina that can elude even seasoned athletes. Training patients who are undergoing recovery after organ transplant to accompany you on the ascent to Base Camp is an even more impressive accomplishment. Mr Elton Chun-ting Ng, the physiotherapist who achieved this, has been featured in numerous shows and news segments over his mountaineering successes, and he works tirelessly to promote organ donation.

With an athletic mindset and a desire to help people recover to their full physical potential, Mr Ng was naturally attracted to the field of physiotherapy. He studied physiotherapy at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and graduated in 2000. He began his career working in public hospitals of the Hong Kong Hospital Authority. Much of his work at this time involved acute rehabilitation, which focuses on recovery shortly after an injury, mainly for patients of the orthopaedics, geriatrics, and obstetrics and gynaecology departments. This rehabilitation mainly involves maximising patients' physical function within a short time frame, to facilitate discharge and prevent further complications due to inactivity. During his training, Mr Ng developed a specific interest in extended physiotherapy care, where he could accompany patients in their long recovery journey, refining and fine-tuning their physical strength and stamina, with the goal of reaching or

even exceeding their prior capabilities. After 7 years in the public sector, Mr Ng established a private practice to further his physiotherapy interests, and to specialise in rehabilitation and sports physiotherapy, personally engaging with each patient through their recovery journey. Mr Ng found that he was then able to dedicate more time and effort to his patients, as well as integrating different modalities of therapy not available in the public sector, such as hydrotherapy, massage and manipulative therapy, East-meets-West techniques, and modern acupuncture. "I have gained a great sense of satisfaction from each patient," says Mr Ng of his 15 years of private practice, "and a deep sense of personal connection and involvement."

Mr Ng's interest in mountaineering also began at an early age, not least because it is "free" spiritual retreat. Taking advantage of the trails and hills near to his home, by age 21 years, he had already conquered over 250 of the highest peaks in Hong Kong and dreamed of hiking outside of Hong Kong. He recalls having opportunities to volunteer as a team physiotherapist to provide services for Hong Kong team athletes overseas. He gladly volunteered and remained in southeast China and Europe after the tour ended in order to hike different mountains. At a young age, he won multiple mountain marathon competitions and hiked in over 40 countries, while always looking for new challenges to overcome. With time, he extended the scope of his interest to rock climbing, and to ice and snow climbing. In

2016, he was featured on local television in TVB's 'Peak to Pit' (天與地), which detailed his journey to climb the arduous Manaslu in the Himalayas, which, at 8163 m, is the 8th highest mountain in the world.



Mr Elton Ng (centre) with reporters Katherine (left) and Apple (right)



Mr Elton Ng (right) with two companions at Mount Everest Base Camp (2017)

Mr Ng found that work in private practice offered enough freedom to flexibly allocate his time to his passions and charitable work. Eager to contribute to society and to combine his hobbies with philanthropy work, he initially started organising health screening, offering sports day sponsors and organising sports events for patients recovering from stroke, with rheumatological diseases, or with intellectual disability. In the mid-2010s, while conquering summit after summit across the globe, he had an idea that initially seemed outlandish: to bring patients trekking with him while climbing the tallest mountain in the world. He had previously encouraged patients to hike with him, while video-taping his hikes, to set goals for his patients and encourage them to push their limits. However, these efforts were limited to the familiar mountains of Hong Kong. During these hikes, he commonly heard patients doubt their abilities and recovery potential, believing they could never surpass their previous physical strength. "An attempt to trek or climb Mount Everest, with its hostile climate and limited oxygen levels, would be a new level of challenge for both myself and my patients," explained Mr Ng, "and I was sure that overcoming this challenge would dispel such falsehoods."

He reached out to two patients who had undergone kidney transplant and who he had been training for a long time. After months of intense training and preparation work, they headed out to Nepal in 2017. "It was not a smooth journey," recalled Mr Ng, "The photographer became sick during the early part of the hike, so I had to take over recording the journey as well as keeping an eye on my patients' health." With perseverance and determination, as well as the prior physiotherapy treatment, they were able to reach Base Camp (5334 m) in early April. Mr Ng continued to the summit of Mount Everest (8848 m) in late May. Through this climb, he garnered significant attention, encouraging many people to register for organ donation, so that more patients could be offered a new lease of life, and potentially the opportunity to embark on similar adventures. To facilitate promotion of organ donation, Mr Ng was made "Life Invigorating Ambassador" of the Hong Kong Transplant Sports Association in 2009.

The COVID-19 has disrupted the plans of many, but neither did it stop Mr Ng from continuing his charitable work and promoting organ transplants, nor did it diminish his passion for hiking. He continued raising funds for organ donation charities through completing hiking challenges. In January 2021, Mr Ng and his colleague hiked the tallest 100 peaks in Hong Kong in just 72 hours, setting a new record. Through such feats of mountaineering, Mr Ng hopes to encourage more patients going through recovery to take up hiking, as it helps with both physical and psychological recovery,

providing a sense of accomplishment while being a relatively safe sport given adequate preparation and equipment.

Especially now, in this era of technological advances, continuous learning is key to get a head start in any career. “As a professional physiotherapist,” Mr Ng advises, “one has to keep abreast of recent breakthroughs in medicine, in particular in orthopaedic surgery and unconventional modalities for rehabilitation.” Aside from physiotherapy and medicine, Mr Ng also keeps his mind nourished by expanding the soft skills that are indispensable for his career. Step-by-step, Mr Ng has acquired skills for campaigning, marketing, and logistics management in which he has found life-long value for his professional growth. He is more than grateful for all the hiccups he encountered in the past that make him who he is today. “Always be prepared and eager to learn, since you never know when opportunity will strike,” he said.



Mr Elton Ng performing an acupuncture session