

## Reminiscences of three former teachers: Prof AJS McFadzean, Dr Stephen Chang, and Prof Gerald Choa

*An abridged version of the talk given by Prof Sir David Todd at the Inauguration of the Medical History Interest Group held at the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences on 17 January 2009.*

Sir David began with a Russian saying: "Those who live in the past are blind in one eye but those who forget the past are blind in both eyes." He then paid tribute to three distinguished physicians who helped shape the practice of internal medicine in Hong Kong.

**Prof AJS McFadzean** was head of Medicine from 1948-74, Dean of Medicine from 1967-72 and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong in 1965.

He was a gold medalist at the University of Glasgow. The combination of brilliance, profound knowledge of medicine, Churchillian command of English and devotion to teaching and patient care made him an ideal teacher and mentor. At teaching clinics, dozing students would be hit by a piece of chalk. He was also famed for incisive remarks on

unbecoming behaviour or attire, such as "trim your finger nails, young lady". And for persons who yawned, "I do not wish to see your tonsils" added to the drama. Those in the back row were invariably questioned the most. He stressed principles rather than detail and encouraged clear and logical thinking rather than recall. He often quoted Ockham's Razor: "essences are not to be multiplied without necessity" or "among competing hypotheses, favour the simplest".

With astute clinical observation, an enquiring mind and passion for research, he led young physicians to discover medical entities hitherto not fully described. He and HC Kwaan published in the *Lancet* in 1956 a seminal article on spontaneous fibrinolysis in cirrhosis of the liver, which led to many subsequent publications and attracted worldwide interest. The work on periodic paralysis in thyrotoxicosis with Rosie Young also gained international attention. Though there was only one small laboratory, his staff were all encouraged to carry out research. Given the meagre funds and facilities, the results were most gratifying. Happily this tradition continues to the present.



Group photo: farewell party for Dr and Mrs CC Wong, Kum Ling Restaurant prior to their departure for the UK, ca 1952  
Back row (from left): Drs J Pan, ST Hiew, Gerald Choa, Olaf Skinsnes, CT Huang, Profs AJS McFadzean and PC Hou, Drs Stephen Chang, KH Chau, Ramon Ruiz, SS Leung, TW Wu, ---, Mr Yung (chief technologist in pathology)  
Front row (from left): Dr HC Kwaan, Mrs CT Huang, ---, Mrs PC Hou, Mrs CC Wong, Dr CC Wong, Mrs McFadzean, Miss Glen Mitchell (Nursing Sister, UMU), Dr Irene Osmund, ---, Dr D Todd



Prof McFadzean and Dr Rosie Young at his retirement party, ca 1974

Prof McFadzean saw the need to train local teachers and specialists rather than relying on outside talent. But he also realised the danger of inbreeding and would ensure that trainees had the opportunity to spend a year or two in overseas centres, largely to develop skills in research. In the early days when there was talk of holding the MRCP examination in Hong Kong, he worried that this would deprive young men and women of the chance to pursue postgraduate studies abroad. How true!

'The Old Man', as he was affectionately called, was known to be fierce and with a temper, but he was revered because his ultimate goal was to make us good physicians. He cared deeply for the welfare of students and established the Dean's Loan Fund for those in need.

His other interests were golf, history, poetry and Chinese antiques, and he spent many happy hours with Prof Pao-chang Hou learning about Chinese art and browsing in Hollywood Road.

On his retirement, the Department of Medicine presented him with a bronze plaque on which was inscribed a passage from Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet*: "*And all knowledge is vain save when there is work, and all work is empty save when there is love*".

Sadly he passed away in Scotland shortly after retirement. At the Memorial Service held in Hong Kong, Prof JB Gibson said in the eulogy "*Professor McFadzean played many parts in the life of Hong Kong, but it was as a doctor and particularly as a teacher of medicine that he was at his best. From this flowed his inspiration and this was the source of his unrivalled influence. Indeed no single man has had so great an influence on medicine here*".

**Dr Stephen Chang** was Senior Lecturer in Medicine during the McFadzean era. He later moved to

Nethersole Hospital to head the Department of Medicine until he passed away in 1972.

He was a graduate of the famous Peking Union Medical College (PUMC). He did postgraduate work in Boston specialising in infectious diseases, and later became Professor of Medicine at Cheeloo University Medical School in Jinan, Shantung. He came to Hong Kong after the War. He hailed from a learned family; one brother was the Bishop of Fujian and another Prof Francis Chang, head of Anatomy at the University of Hong Kong from 1959-69.

He was an eminent clinician and teacher. His approach to the teaching of Medicine was less formal, no doubt influenced by his US background. He introduced us to problem-based learning, which was adapted four decades later by the Medical Faculty at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). He was the most approachable of the senior staff, and helped many students who had difficulties with their studies. Largely through his US links, he arranged visits of many leading US physicians. One of them was Prof Chester Keefer, head of Medicine at Boston University, who was renowned for his encyclopaedic knowledge and phenomenal memory. Another visitor was Prof Louis Weinstein, an authority on infectious diseases. I shall always remember one incident. Pneumococcal pneumonia was common in the 1950s and there could be several such patients in the ward at one time. Having just seen one and moving on we came across another such patient and I thought he would quickly pass him by. But Prof Weinstein stopped and said "*Do you realize that while the diagnosis is the same, there can be major differences in the management of individuals depending on their previous health, coexisting disorders, genetic, family and social background? Tell me more about this patient*." This holistic approach is something we often forget in these days of specialisation and super-specialisation.

Peking Union Medical College was founded by the Rockefeller Foundation and administered by the China Medical Board of New York. In the 1950s and 1960s, funds were used to support medical education in places like Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, and Taiwan. Through his PUMC connections, Stephen helped to persuade Dr Harold Loucks, director of the China Medical Board, that the Medical Faculty at HKU was a worthy recipient. Thus, over the years, there were gifts of library books and laboratory equipment, conference grants, and the establishment of travelling fellowships/scholarships to the US. In fact ties between HKU and the Rockefeller Foundation go back as far as 1922 when the China Medical Board donated a sum of HK\$500 000, a huge sum in those days, to endow the chairs of Medicine and Surgery.

Stephen was also a gifted musician, and played the piano and organ to the enjoyment of many. His



Dr Stephen Chang and Dr Gerald Choa in a relaxed mood, ca 1959

tennis matches with Dr George Choa and Ms Ulian Khoo, chief pharmacist at Queen Mary Hospital, were legendary.

**Prof Gerald Choa** was a founding member of the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences. My first encounter with him was memorable. Our class had just begun the first clinical year in 1949 and we all looked forward to being taught by this bright young lecturer who had just returned from the UK with the MRCP (London), a qualification held by only a handful of local physicians at the time. The session was on cranial nerves. We thought our knowledge of anatomy and physiology of the nervous system was reasonable but he thought otherwise. When it came to physical examination nothing we did was right, and we were certainly put in our place. What a fierce teacher, we thought. But initial impressions can be very wrong and behind that stern exterior was kindness itself. He was a superb clinician and erudite teacher, particularly in cardiology and neurology. Impeccably dressed, he was very much the gentleman physician.

Prof Choa was born into a prominent Hong Kong family. His father was a banker but perhaps it was the influence of the Jesuit priests at Wah Yan College that directed him to a life of service. He embraced Catholicism at an early age and remained deeply religious throughout his life. Medical studies at HKU were interrupted by the Pacific War and he went into Free China to join the Cheeloo University Medical School in Chengdu, qualifying in 1945. In

the year before graduation, he served as a Major in the Chinese Army Medical Corp but the war ended before he saw any action.

In 1956 he left the University to become the first Chinese to be appointed Government Medical Specialist at Queen Mary Hospital, and in 1962 he rose to the position of Senior Specialist. Throughout this period he continued to teach undergraduates as well as postgraduates in his excellent medical unit. However, much as he loved clinical medicine he left in 1967 to become Deputy Director of Medical and Health Services at the invitation of the Government. His administrative abilities, integrity and fairness in dealing with people had been recognised, and to him it was an opportunity to serve a larger segment of the community. In 1970 he became Director of Medical and Health Services, a post he held with distinction for 6 years.

His many achievements included the rapid expansion of medical and health services, commencement of community and geriatric nursing, formulation of a 10-year plan for medical services with an emphasis on preventive measures and care for the underprivileged including drug addicts. He ably dealt with the health problems associated with the influx of the 'Boat People'.

While many senior civil servants retired at the age of 55, he accepted a new challenge. In 1977 he became the Founding Dean of the new Medical Faculty at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His



Prof Gerald Choa and Prof David Todd with Prof and Mrs Gordon King on their last visit to Hong Kong

leadership in the planning of the teaching hospital, its curriculum, and staff recruitment contributed in no small way to the Faculty's success.

He was also an authority on the development of western medicine in China. His two books reflect this. 'The Life and Times of Sir Kai Ho Kai' is a fascinating biography of the first Chinese in Hong Kong to qualify in medicine and the second barrister to be admitted to the Supreme Court. His second book, 'Heal the Sick Was Their Motto', is a meticulously researched account of the Protestant medical missionaries in China and describes how they introduced western medicine and medical education into the country.

My three most admired teachers practised the art and science of medicine according to the Hippocratic Oath. They were excellent role models, being physicians with knowledge, integrity, wisdom, and compassion. They dedicated their lives to the betterment of health and welfare not only for Hong Kong's inhabitants, but through their deeds, their students and their publications they contributed to the health of people in other parts of the world. They understood and practised true professionalism, which is the basis of medicine's contract with society. It demands placing the interests of patients above those of the doctor, setting up and maintaining standards of competence and integrity, and providing

expert advice to society in matters of health. With the rapid progress in medical science and technology, many diseases considered untreatable in their days can now be diagnosed and overcome. But many feel that doctors have become less humane. I certainly agree with Prof David Weatherall of the University of Oxford who stated that *"But by example, no medical school can teach a young person how to be understanding and caring. This can only come from the experience of life"*. May I add that role models are essential. Dr Albert Schweitzer, the Nobel Laureate and humanitarian, said *"Example is not the main thing influencing others, it is the only thing"*.

All three of my mentors died not wealthy, but left a rich legacy in medicine and health care.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote: *"Lives of great men all remind us, We can make our lives sublime, And, departing, leave behind us, Footprints on the sands of time."* In fact, 'Footprints on the Sands of Time' was the title of Dr Stephen Chang's address to the Medical Society of the Hong Kong University Student's Union when he was its president.

Abridged by **YL Yu**

Member, Board of Directors

Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences Society

*The Editor welcomes further contributions on the history of medicine in Hong Kong.*