

O B I T U A R Y **Harry SY Fang—the legend lives on**



Harry SY Fang (1923-2009)

Uncle Harry was always there for everybody, whether a relative, friend, patient, NGO, public institution, or just someone in need. He had the compassion, creativity, resourcefulness, and ability to make things happen, although he personally possessed quite modest resources.

He loved life, and lived it to the fullest. He was married to his teenage sweetheart Laura for 61 years, and was blessed with six glorious children. He ate heartily, but was never fussy about food or drink. He had boundless energy and enthusiasm, taking all tasks large and small within his stride. Fatigue only appeared when he was injured once falling on the tramway, rupturing his quadriceps tendon, and another time when he caught pneumonia on a trip to Africa. He loved his family most, then, depending on the stage of his career, his profession, and his destined life's work, rehabilitation. Mahjong with family friends provided regular relaxation, while his steward's box at the races was fully utilised for entertaining guests, with occasional jubilation.

Due to the early death of his two elder brothers, he had to care for an extended family of 14 children and 8 adults. All of the children he nurtured became reasonably accomplished in their own fields. Nearly all were at his bedside at the time of his peaceful passing on 23 August 2009.

Much has been written on his outstanding achievements as a pioneer in rehabilitation and a champion of equal opportunities for all people. Few may recall that it was he who proposed in Legco (1983) the independence of hospital services from the civil service, and also the setting up of an Academy of Medicine. This led to the W D Scott Report recommending the establishment of a statutory Hospital Authority in 1986, and a Working Party on Postgraduate Medical Education and Training, which gave birth to the HKAM Preparatory Committee in 1990. However Harry Fang's idea of allowing the hospitals to set a reasonable fee, among other suggestions for sustainability, has yet to be realised. Public hospital services remain overburdened and unsustainable, while health care reform has it seems

reached a political impasse. How I pray that he may look down from heaven now and show us a brilliant way to take this forward.

As an orthopaedic surgeon he had impeccable bedside manners and surgical skills. He taught two generations of orthopods and received numerous awards locally and abroad. The honours that he received for his many different roles and contributions far exceed the scope of these paragraphs.

He was often teased about the transoral approach to the upper cervical spine,¹ but his success as a fundraiser went beyond the normal powers of verbal persuasion. His autobiography recalls many novel methods of raising cash for a wide range of charities and public services, totalling \$1.5 billion. Moreover, he was instrumental in the Jockey Club's decision to give \$300m to the Institute of Radiotherapy at QEH, \$300m to CUHK and UST for biotechnology, \$270m to HKU for redevelopment of the Medical Faculty, and \$165m to HKAM for the Jockey Club Building. His aim was to raise another \$1.5 billion, but someone else with his smile and creativity will have to take up that burden now.

Deng Pufang, Deputy Chairman of the Chinese National People's Consultative Committee, said, "Mr Fang's departure made me lose a good teacher and friend, while the work of the disabled internationally has lost a distinguished leader. His passing leaves endless recollections. We must all work much harder to carry forth his unfinished goals, and to achieve greater splendor."

In his eulogy, York Chow, Secretary for Food and Health, said, "Human greatness is not measured by one's power or wealth. It is measured by the number of people one can inspire and motivate to render help, support, care and love to other fellow men. Harry is an international giant and a Hong Kong legend in this regard, and we are blessed to have been associated with him. His words, his stories, his sense of humour, his optimism and his smile will always stay in our hearts."

For more information on his life and epilogue, the following website is suggested: <<http://www.fangfamily.com/sirharry/>>.

David Fang

Reference

1. Hodgson AR, Stock FE, Fang HS, Ong GB. Anterior spinal fusion. The operative approach and pathological findings in 412 patients with Pott's disease of the spine. *Br J Surg* 1960;48:172-8.