



Clinician and teacher, sportsman and coach: an interview with Dr Henry Lam

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When we interviewed Dr Henry Lam, he had just returned from Thailand where he had competed in a bridge tournament. Dr Lam is known among medical professionals for pioneering the breast screening service at the Well Women Clinic in 1990 and serving as College Warden from 2008 to 2016. But, as if his stellar medical credentials were not impressive enough, Dr Lam was also the team official for the Hong Kong bridge team at the Asian Games in 2018 which brought back two silver and two bronze medals. “My annual leave is mainly spent on sports training, academic conferences, and clinical teaching,” he explained, as we wondered how he manages to juggle his roles as a radiology consultant at Kwong Wah Hospital, Hong Kong, a trainer in radiology, and an avid athlete.

Dr Lam’s love for bridge began long before his love for medicine when, at age 10, his elder brother taught him how to play. He went on to join the bridge team at his high school, where he learned to perfect the game and won Inter Secondary School Championship at age of 19. Despite his hectic work schedule as a medical student at the University of Hong Kong, Dr Lam became a dedicated member of the Hong Kong Contract Bridge Association. After graduating, Dr Lam did not give up his passion for bridge, despite the frenetic pace of life as a doctor, and travelled the world representing Hong Kong in multiple regional and international competitions. He attained the grandmaster grade in Bridge after becoming Hong Kong Open Champion in 2010 and 2011. His World Ranking is currently 181 in the

senior series.

Although Dr Lam has won a plethora of tournaments and competitions throughout his bridge career, he spoke fondly about winning the 18th Asian Games in 2018. “It was definitely the most memorable moment in my journey,” he said as he proudly showed off his collection of trophies. As the Hong Kong team official, Dr Lam was responsible for training and improving the team, helping them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and boosting team morale. He explained to us that bridge is like a “mind marathon”, requiring immense focus and attentiveness for many hours. As a result, he had to ensure that the team were in a level-headed mental state throughout the marathon. His dedication to the team and their hard work ultimately led to the success of the Hong Kong team in the event.

Dr Lam is most proud of his personal achievement in winning the Hong Kong Medical Association’s Sportsman of the Year award 3 years in a row. Throughout his life and medical career, Dr Lam understood the importance of a healthy work-life balance: “Time is not a problem; the problem is how to allocate your time,” he opines. Growing up, Dr Lam enjoyed playing various sports, from badminton and table tennis to sailing and windsurfing. Even as a practising physician, Dr Lam continues to dedicate time to exercising every day, reserving his Mondays and Sundays especially for his childhood favourites, table-tennis and badminton.

Physical fitness was not the only reward that Dr Lam earned from sports. Dr Lam appreciates the

importance of transferable skills, and he has learned techniques from sports and other professions or specialties that have helped him in his medical career; such as adopting a surgeon's practice of chatting to a patient while allowing local anaesthesia to take effect, which could also help to calm a patient undergoing radiological procedures.

Dr Lam says that the mental discipline needed for sports and professions stems from a conscious-subconscious distinction. His experience with sports showed him that a good foundation of basic skills is earned through good practice, so that these become subconscious and habitual, leaving more conscious brainpower to devote to the game at hand. Dr Lam finds this process of learning and developing subconscious skills to be directly applicable to the workplace. Once basic skills have become routine and part of the subconscious, one can use logical deduction for more complicated investigations and analysis of the clinical information available. The parallels between training for bridge and practising medicine allowed Dr Lam to hone his skills in both at the same time.

Dr Lam has also had a remarkable medical career. When decided to specialise in radiology, it was still a rather undeveloped specialty in Hong Kong. Doctors had only plain film imaging and fluoroscopy. Surgeons had little information prior to operating, unlike today, where various imaging modalities and other information allow for much more precise planning of operations. Dr Lam identified a need for development in the Radiology Department at Kwong Wah Hospital, as well as in neuroradiology and breast-

focused medicine subspecialties. He saw Kwong Wah Hospital as the perfect opportunity to develop his pilot project, the Well Women Clinic, which provides breast and cervical cancer screening services for women. Despite the number of cancers detected by screening, Dr Lam remarked that the high opportunity cost associated with population breast screening hinders it being adopted as a Government Policy.

Owing to his expertise in radiology, Dr Lam was the Examiner for the Joint Fellowship Examination of the Hong Kong College of Radiologists (HKCR) and Royal College of Radiologists and represented the HKCR in the Macao Consultant Examinations. He was also the External Examiner of the Final Master of Medicine (Diagnostic Radiology) Examination in Singapore. Dr Lam was also instrumental in establishing a structured radiology training rotation in the early 1990s, and he continues to teach trainees annually to prepare for fellowship exams. As Dr Lam prepares for retirement, he has meticulously annotated and organised his previous work to pass down a treasure trove of knowledge to future radiologists.

Although Dr Lam will be taking off his white coat soon, he has no plans to put down his badminton and table-tennis racquet: "it's less about longevity than active life expectancy, for which I have plans to extend as long as possible." Before we bid our farewells, Dr Lam showed us one of his latest hobbies—Chinese calligraphy. He wrote the Chinese character for "to be still like water", perhaps alluding to the fluidity of his life as both a clinician and teacher, and as a sportsman and coach.



Dr Henry Lam (centre) with student reporters (from right) Nathan, Man-tsin, Bianca, and Henry