**AGENDA ITEM 1.8**

**OBITUARY**

**PROFESSOR HOCK LIM TAN**

**MBBS (Adelaide), MD (Adelaide), FRACS (Paediatric), FRCS (Eng) (*ad eundem*)**

**PAEDIATRIC SURGEON**

**07 JANUARY 1949 – 09 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Professor Hock Lim Tan was an internationally-renowned pioneer and revolutionary in paediatric surgery and a global authority on laparoscopic surgery in children.  A graduate of the University of Adelaide in 1971, he was the first surgeon to describe many laparoscopic procedures both in adults and children - now accepted as standard surgical procedures around the world.

As a junior doctor, Hock was inspired by late paediatric surgeon Brian Douglas. At the end of a rotation, Hock was called in by Brian for an assessment, together with best friend and partner-in-crime, John Nelson.  To this day, John still recalls the words which Brian said to Hock: “I believe that if you continue with paediatric surgery, you will not only be one of the best in Australia but have a major influence on the world’s knowledge.”  It was prophetic.

Hock moved to Adelaide for school when he was 14 years old.  It was there, during his university days, that he met his wife Evelyn (in his words, “the most beautiful woman in Adelaide”). They were married in Singapore (also in 1971) where Hock completed his internship, before moving to Whangarei in New Zealand where his daughter Melanie was born in 1973.  At that time there were no surgical registrars in Whangarei, so as a second-year house officer Hock was already performing appendicectomies.

Following a stint in Auckland, Hock returned to Adelaide as a surgical registrar, where his son Alex was born in 1975.  At the end of this term, the only job offer he received was in Southampton, England.  The salary was modest and with a young family he could not afford to make the move.  Then fate intervened.  Around that time, Hock presented a paper at a conference on appendicitis.  He had noticed that the incidence of appendicitis increased in high climatic temperatures, and identified an association with appendicitis and dehydration.  The late Nate Meyers, from the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne, was impressed with Hock’s research and offered him a job as a neurosurgical registrar - working with Elizabeth Lewis, who still remembers him fondly to this day.  So Hock moved his family to Melbourne.  The following year, Hock was offered a job as a urology registrar by Justin Kelly (who sadly also left us in 2022, not long after Hock).  The rest is history.

Hock’s consultant career ultimately began in Canberra in 1981.  Thereafter saw appointments as a paediatric surgeon and paediatric urologist back at the Royal Children’s Hospital in 1985, eventually circling back to Adelaide as the inaugural Professor and Head of the Department of Paediatric Surgery at the Women’s and Children’s Hospital from 2001-2007.  Towards the end of his career, Hock moved back to Kuala Lumpur, where he had been invited as Distinguished Professor and Head of Paediatric Surgery at the National University of Malaysia to establish its Advanced Surgical Skills Centre - so he could make a difference in his country of birth after spending so many years away.

Hock also had the rare distinction of being invited to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children (GOSH) in London, as a consultant specialist in minimally invasive surgery.  There, he trained the surgeons and theatre nurses, and assisted in developing paediatric laparoscopic neonatal surgery and urology, and in setting up paediatric thoracoscopic surgery, such as for the management of paediatric achalasia.  Hock was also a visiting surgeon in cities such as Cape Town, Hong Kong and Bangkok.

Hock was not only gifted with his hands; he was an academic and a revolutionary.  He wrote countless scientific papers, over 40 book chapters and several books, and was awarded an MD (Doctor of Medicine) in recognition of his work.  He was an Associate Editor of the 7th edition of the most authoritative textbook on Paediatric Surgery, together with colleagues at GOSH – ‘Operative Pediatric Surgery’, which received a Highly Commended accolade at the British Medical Association Book Awards in 2014.

As per Brian’s prophecy, Hock was a true innovator.  He redefined the fundamental principles and counterintuitive concepts in laparoscopic surgery to overcome the technical challenges which it presented.  He collaborated with industry (most notably, Karl Storz), designing the first miniaturised laparoscopic instruments for children, as well as generations of advanced instruments that followed.  With revolutionised principles for ergonomics, heuristics and cognition in laparoscopic surgery, Hock made his operations easy and popular to perform for experienced and junior surgeons alike.  His novel training concepts have become widespread and achievable across the Asia-Pacific.

Hock pioneered and popularised a number of minimal access procedures and techniques, including:

• Laparoscopic pyloromyotomy for hypertrophic pyloric stenosis, with Tan endotome;

• Transperitoneal laparoscopic pyeloplasty for congenital pelviureteric junction obstruction, with pyelotomy scissors, percutaneous hitching and stent insertion techniques;

• Portless insertion technique for infant laparoscopy;

• Simple purse-string laparoscopic hernia ligation, with self-righting laparoscopic needle;

• Laparoscopic choledochal cyst excision with hepaticoduodenostomy;

• Diagnostic laparoscopy for necrotising enterocolitis in premature babies;

• Laparoscopic strip-tease appendicectomy;

• Single pass puncture and double railing technique for percutaneous nephrolithotomy in children.

His more recent inventions for advanced surgery include the Robi Tan laparoscopic bipolar forceps series and the Tan RoTaLock laparoscopic trocar.

Hoc inspired and attracted many young surgeons around the world to the specialty of Paediatric Surgery. Like Brian Douglas before him he instilled the desire to help unfortunate children with honesty and respect being far more important than personal gain.

Hock exuded an unwavering optimism throughout all his life, in everything he did.  People were drawn to his boundless energy and charisma - and his unique, infectious sense of humour that would light up a room.  Sometimes, the space would even resonate with his Sinatra-like vocals.  Hock loved music; his talent for it, and knowledge of it, would attract awe and respect from his musician friends.  Hock is also dearly remembered by family and friends for his passion for food, and the incessant enthusiasm he generated in sharing his diverse culinary experiences, together with his limitless generosity.

Most of all, Hock was dedicated to his patients and their families.  Hock’s legacy and passion for his work, his innovation and his brilliance, and the countless children whose lives he improved will be palpable for generations.

*This Obituary was provided by Professor Tan’s children Melanie Tan and Alex Tan, also Nick Chao, Tony Sparnon (FRACS) and Dr John Nelson (FRACS)*