

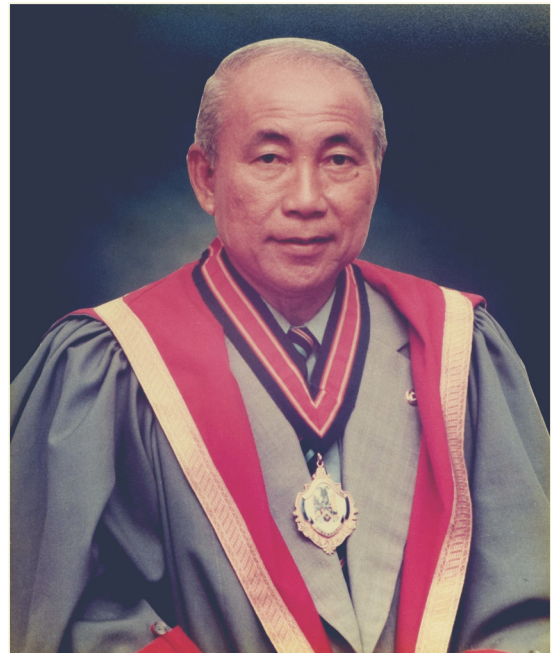
## Dr Robert Loh Choo Kiat, *JP, BBM, PJG* (1925 – 2017)\*

Dr Robert Loh Choo Kiat was born in Singapore in 1925. His education was interrupted by World War II, but he graduated with MBBS in 1949 from Bombay's top medical school, the Seth Gordhandas Sundahas Medical College and the King Edward VII Memorial Hospital. He returned to Singapore soon after, joining the Singapore General Hospital (SGH).

Thankfully for us, ophthalmology was to be his passion and his career-long discipline. He subsequently underwent postgraduate training under top ophthalmologists including Sir Stewart Duke-Elder (known as the “Father of Ophthalmology”) at the world-renowned Moorfields Hospital in London, before he returned to SGH, joining the Eye Department at Norris Block, as a Registrar in 1954.

In 1958, Dr Loh was awarded a scholarship to take the FRCS Edinburgh examination (which he passed), returning soon after as a young Head of the Department of Ophthalmology. Dr Wong Kin Yip and Dr Loh were the first Singaporean Heads of Ophthalmology in the public sector. They started the long and tortuous journey, teaching and building up the clinical service, and reputation of SGH's ophthalmology department.

Dr Loh's contributions to the field of Ophthalmology in Singapore have been immense. From a small department of only a handful of ophthalmology trainees, he built up and trained numerous expert eye surgeons within a decade and instituted in them his ideals and values in the treatment of patients, regardless of their social status.



Among these contributions included the establishment of the first Eye Bank, introduction of micro and laser surgery, lens implants, retinal detachment surgery, corneal grafting and other innovative procedures that we take for granted today.

Early in the 1960s, Dr Loh set up the Singapore Society of Ophthalmology (SSO) with only 13 members and was



Third APAO Congress held in 1968 with Congress President, Dr Robert Loh (seated in front row, 12<sup>th</sup> from the right).  
Photo courtesy of the family of Dr Robert Loh.

\*A similar tribute article on Dr Robert Loh by Prof Chew Chin Hin has been published in an Eulogy in SMA News, Vol. 49, No. 4, April 2017 issue.



Dr Robert Loh (seated in front row, 5<sup>th</sup> from the right) at the AMS' Annual Induction Comitia Dinner held on 16 April 1970.

elected as its founding President for more than a decade (1963-1976). Today, SSO has a membership of more than 200 ophthalmologists. The Society laid the foundation for the formation of the Chapter of Ophthalmologists, which subsequently transformed to become the College of Ophthalmologists of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS). In 1964, Dr Loh was elected as President, Singapore Medical Association (SMA), being one of only 2 ophthalmologists who has served as the President of the SMA.

In 1968, Dr Loh hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asia Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology (APAO) meeting successfully in Singapore. As Congress President of this relatively new meeting, he laid the foundation that allowed the College of Ophthalmologists and SSO to bid and successfully bring the APAO Congress back to Singapore. In March 2017, Singapore hosted the 32<sup>nd</sup> APAO Congress, with more than 5200 delegates from over 75 countries.

During the 1960s, Dr Loh also served on the AMS Council, advancing much of Singapore's postgraduate specialty training programmes and higher examinations. In 1975, he was elected as Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore where he served until 1978.

Charity was also a lifetime commitment to Dr Loh, and he led the YMCA, a Christian charity from 1970, where he served wholeheartedly for over 20 years. He was conferred President Emeritus in 1993. For his dedicated commitment in service to the community, he was appointed by the Singapore Government to lead the newly restructured National Council of Social Service in 1992 as its first President. It was only in 2002 that he retired.

While many do not personally know nor have the privilege to meet or interact with Dr Loh, ophthalmology colleagues in Singapore have been one of the significant

beneficiaries of Dr Loh's vision, legacy and foundation building work in the early formative years of Singapore ophthalmology in the 1950s and 1960s. Today, Singapore ophthalmology has a global, leading reputation as a centre of excellence and we are where we are only because we are reaping the fruits of the work of giants such as Dr Loh. We must and will continue to uphold his vision, dedication and legacy.

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