

INTERVIEW WITH ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DR NORSHAMSI AH BINTI MD DIN



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1. Tell us about your hometown and family

I was born in Universiti Malaya Medical Centre (University Hospital at that time) and grew up in Kampung Tunku, Petaling Jaya. But both my parents are from Malacca before they moved to Petaling Jaya in the 1960s. I am the fourth among nine siblings. Besides me, I have two younger brothers who are medical doctors as well. One of them is an anaesthesiologist in HKL and the other one is a urology MO in Hospital Selayang. I am married with five children, age ranging from eleven to nineteen. Three of them were born during my master study in Ophthalmology.

2. Tell us about your educational background

I graduated from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 1997. I did my housemanship in Universiti Malaya Medical Centre. I was then sent to Sarawak for 2 years after completion of my housemanship. I then came back to Peninsula Malaysia and served at Hospital Tengku Ampuan Rahimah, Klang.

Subsequently, I started my Masters in Ophthalmology at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and graduated in 2007.

3. Where did you do your subspecialty?

I did my PhD study in University College of London. My field of study was uveitic glaucoma. I was lucky because I could also do a clinical fellowship in uveitis and glaucoma in the three years that I was at Moorfields Eye Hospital. I was honoured to be attached to Professor Susan Lightman for uveitis and Dr Keith Barton for glaucoma in Moorfields Eye Hospital. They were great teachers.

4. What is your favourite food?

I love to eat all sorts of food. If I would have to pick a favourite, it is going to be anything which is spicy. I like tomyam especially.

5. How do you juggle between work and family?

It is definitely not easy to achieve a work-life balance. At times I still need to settle some work at home, for instance, replying emails, correcting student's proposal or write-ups, reading online journals and many more. But I try my best to settle my work during office hours so that I can spend my leisure time with my family. That needs a lot of effort too.

6. What do you enjoy the most about being an Ophthalmologist in Malaysia?

Being an Ophthalmologist always gives me a boost when you see those patients with impaired vision come to you and their vision improves after proper treatment. You will become more motivated if patients show their gratitude and appreciation. I always tell my students, the most important thing that matters to patients is their vision because it affects their quality of life.

7. What are top 3 challenges when it comes to treating eye condition in Malaysia?

Compared to those developed countries, we have a number of challenges in treating patients with eye problems in Malaysia. First of all, there is lack of knowledge and awareness among Malaysian patients in general, particularly in glaucoma. Some of them

come to us at a very late stage when the disease is already advanced and the loss of vision is irreversible. Besides that, non-compliance to treatment and follow-ups is also another challenge. Some of the patients fail to understand that it is important to monitor their progression. This can be either be due to lack of awareness in patients or a busy clinic setting which prohibits the doctor from spending more time to explain their problems to them. Thus it is important for the physicians to try their level best to give explanations and options in spite of running busy clinics. Last but not least are always their financial constraints. There are always better drug combinations or treatment modalities which can be too expensive and this affects our decision making.

8. As a head of department and in a training center, what do you aim to achieve/see in the next 5 years?

I would like to improve the quality of the facilities and services but it is definitely not easy and involves a lot of budgetary issues. Also, I would like to improve the quality of research among the lecturers and the Masters students. I believe this is very crucial as it means synthesizing new knowledge, contributing to society and helps bring the university to an international level. Furthermore, I would like to reduce the turn-over rate amongst the lecturers because experience takes years to develop. The leak of experienced lecturers to the private sector affects the training of our students and the future generation, and also the quality of service to our patients. The university has spent a lot of money to produce experienced lecturers but to no avail. The university can never compete with the private sector financially. Perhaps we could cultivate more passion in teaching and learning among our lecturers and make them feel more appreciated. I don't know how much I can do, but I will try my best.

9. In your opinion, how would it be possible to become a successful Ophthalmologist?

Be diligent and vigilant. Have passion in whatever you do. Have passion in knowledge. Keep on learning even after you have graduated, because knowledge has no limit.

10. What is your advice to those who are interested or new to this field?

For those who are interested or new to this field, you need to be passionate with what you do. Allow your passion to become your purpose, and it will one day become your profession. In addition, you need to be patient with your patients. Spend more time with them to understand their concerns and make sure they understand their illness well to ensure good compliance and follow-ups. Last but not least, always try to give back to society.



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