

A TRIBUTE TO A MENTOR BY A PROTÉGÉ

Firstly, I would like to thank the MSO for allowing me to write a special tribute to Dato' Dr Ahmad Mt Saad, someone that has been more than a mentor to me. Dato' Dr Ahmad hugely shaped my view on life, work, and many other things since we first met in 2002.

Where do I start, we share so much, however the moment I start drafting this piece, all I get is overwhelmed by the emptiness Dato' has left behind.

In the name of Allah, The Most Merciful and The Most Gracious



Dato' Dr Ahmad Mt Saad

I reported duty to the Ophthalmology Department, Hospital Alor Setar in April 2002 as an Ophthalmology MO. That was my first encounter with Dato' who was the HOD. I remember him as a soft spoken leader and I felt very welcomed from the get-go. Being part of the open system masters program in UKM afforded me the flexibility to be based in 2 places at the same time. Fast forward a few years and I returned to Dato' as my supervisor during my subspecialty training in glaucoma. Completing my subspecialty, I continue to serve in Alor Setar where the legacy of Dato' Dr Ahmad, continues to radiate in omnipresence.

I still recall fondly the memories of managing the glaucoma clinic under the supervision of the late Dato', who at the time was the Glaucoma Consultant. Many share my view, that they have never met someone as impressive, smart and grounded as Dato'.

The story of Dato' resonates closely with us all. Dato' is a true-bred "Kedahans", born in Kubang Pasu at the northern tip of Kedah, at a time when young Malaysia was coming out of a Communist Insurgency.

Dato' graduated with an MD from UKM in 1985 around the time Kubang Pasu shot up to take the center stage in the nation's political arena. 1994 saw Dato' graduate from UKM with a Masters in Surgery, majoring in Ophthalmology. He went on to subspecialize in Glaucoma from Queen's Medical Center, University of Nottingham, UK. Dato' has given us 35 years of illustrious medical service, of that 25 years has been at Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah, Alor Setar. Dato' served as the head of Glaucoma services in Malaysia from 2002 till his demise. There is no doubt that Dato' has been

close to his roots, contributing in uplifting the eye care to Kedahans and Malaysians in general. Dato's passion has been in developing and nurturing the next line of Ophthalmologists and Glaucoma Surgeons, and he kept discharging this till the very end.

Dato' always treated patients as a whole, to achieve a good quality of life, balancing between treatment risks and side effects with a patient's personal needs, without compromising the outcome. He always customized the glaucoma treatment according to each patient. He also always reminded us that glaucoma is a lifelong disease which has a far-reaching impact on the patients and their families. He made us understand how difficult it would be for a patient to lose sight and reinforced the need for us to work on improving the management of glaucoma to prevent blindness. He strongly advocated screening of first-degree relatives of glaucoma patients. Dato's 4 important advice in his final years were:

- i) Always look out for and manage the complications that arise from glaucoma drainage device implantation especially corneal decompensation

- ii) Make use of optical coherence tomography as it is a promising tool to monitor the structural progression and to detect glaucoma at an early stage
- iii) Always prioritize the quality of life in glaucoma patients
- iv) The need to establish a glaucoma shared care services to better manage the requirements of glaucoma patients

Having spent a dozen years working with him in the operation theatre, I have seen first-hand the evolution of his glaucoma filtering surgery. The current method carries the highest success rate as compared to the previous method that he had endeavored. He has steady hands and amazing surgical skills. These are some of his notable quotes in the surgical theatre:

“... complications do occur; what is important is how you manage the complications...”

“... trabeculectomy is the best method in controlling the intraocular pressure, provided you do it well.”

“... to a patient, vision matters most, they might not be as concerned about the intraocular pressure reading as the surgeon.....”

Even in the ward, Dato' made sure that the ward nurses knew the visual acuity and visual field status of glaucoma patients to assist with their mobility, instillation of eyedrops, food intake and prevention of falls. Quality of life of a glaucoma patient was always his main concern. In clinics, Dato' stressed the importance of documentation as glaucoma is a chronic disease with lifelong follow-up. He insisted that optic nerve head examinations must be standardized, detailed and recorded properly. For patients under his care, he always wrote a long documentation including his long term plans for them so that any doctor who manages the patient after him would know what is happening and what can be done.

About 3 weeks before he passed away, I was yet again amazed by the humility and dedication of Dato' when he apologized to me for being unable to do any surgeries due to his medical condition. Even when he was that ill, during his second last admission in the ward he still asked about his post-operative patients' findings and condition. Gaining his trust is something that I treasure. Though he was my supervisor and teacher, he always treated me as a fellow colleague. He made me comfortable and patiently honed my surgical skills throughout the training. This is the main reason I gained confidence in managing and making decisions for our glaucoma patients. The training under him was enjoyable.

Thank you for being kind, caring and for the support and encouragement. Thank you for all your teaching and pearls in ophthalmology. You will be greatly missed by us all. May your soul rest in peace, Dato' Dr Ahmad.

“Ya Allah, berilah rahmatMu ke atasnya, sejahtera dan maafkanlah dirinya, kurniakanlah syurga tertinggi untuknya.”

[Please click here to view a video “Tribute to Dato' Dr Hj Ahmad bin Mt Saad” by Dr Wan Mohd Redzuan bin Wan Hassan \(Medical Officer, Ophthalmology Department, Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah, Alor Setar\)](#)



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