

PERSONALITY FOCUS



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1. What is your favorite food?

I love traditional Kerela food as I am a Malayalee. We use a lot of spice and fish in our dishes.

2. Where is your hometown?

I grew up in Sentul.

3. What do you do during your free time/weekend?

I like listening to music when I am home or when the weather is bad. Otherwise, I love going for a walk in the neighborhood. I used to play tennis and golf but not so much anymore.

4. What is your definition of work-life balance?

Work and life are two very different things to me. Work is something you must do for five days a week. Life is when I have enough time with my family for entertainment and leisure. They are my priority. But this balance varies at different levels. When I was first involved in this field, I used to spend more time at work. As I grow older, I choose to spend more time with my family and do other things that I like. For example, I love travelling. This is the time when I choose to travel more. I would like to say that as time goes, the balance changes.

5. How many children and grandchildren do you have?

I have two daughters, one of them being Dr. Tara and I have two granddaughters. My eldest granddaughter is studying law at Cardiff University and she is in her final semester. My second granddaughter has just completed her O-Levels.

6. What do you do when you spend time with your grandchildren?

I love to get involved in their lives. When we spend time together, we would talk about what they're up to recently or about their studies. We would also go out for meals or visit other relatives who are nearby.

Both of them love swimming since young and the swimming pool at home was made for them so I get to spend more time with them.



In fact, they learnt swimming in my house. We also travel together. We recently visited Koh Samui together.

7. How many countries/cities have you visited? Where?

I travel quite extensively. In fact, I have worked in five countries. I worked in India for a few years before coming back to Malaysia. I've also worked in Ireland, United Kingdom and Brunei. Other than that, I have travelled most part of the world. I've been to the United States of America, Australia, South Africa, Thailand, Philippines, among many others. The most recent trip was to a place called Bagan in Myanmar.

8. Do you still travel a lot for work?

Not as often as I used to. The last work trip I made was to India. I used to travel a lot to attend conferences. But now, I have cut it down to one conference a year.

9. What was your reaction when your daughter, Dr. Tara first told you that she wanted to be an ophthalmologist too?

I was of course ecstatic! I was glad she was willing to take the time and she has the discipline to be an ophthalmologist. To me, ophthalmology is the one field that gives great satisfaction because being able to restore vision back to a patient is almost as giving back their life. I was also happy that she chose ophthalmology as it is one of the most uncommon fields in the past.

10. Do you think you influenced her?

In some way, I might have. Although I know I should not be talking about what goes on at work when I get home. I supposed I did, but I do not regret it at all. She might have picked up the technical words of certain operations from me and it has become her interest.

ABOUT WORK AND THE FIELD

1. Tell us about your education background.

During the first two years of my schooling days, my mother and I were sent back to Kerala. I went to school there and had to study everything in Malayalam language. I was back in Malaysia by the age of eight and I started schooling in Methodist Boys' School Sentul from primary two to secondary five. I then went to the Methodist Boys' School Kuala Lumpur (MBSKL) for a short while to complete my Form 6 education.

At that point of time, there was no university in Malaysia. There was only one in Singapore, which was why my father influenced me to go to India for my pre-university studies. And I was one of those who was very fortunate to have gotten into the Christian Medical College, Vellore for my undergraduate education whereby I was one of the fifty students in that batch. My classmates and I still do keep in touch and we have reunions every now and then. I had organized a reunion for those who are here and invited the director from India.



2. When did you first start practicing as an ophthalmologist?

To be honest, ophthalmology was not my first option. I was first in surgery then medicine. One day, I received a call from the Ministry of Health offering me a scholarship to study ophthalmology in the UK. There were too few ophthalmologists in the country. I took the offer, did my fellowship and completed training in London, Birmingham and Dublin. When I came back, I was sent to the East Coast to be an ophthalmologist. I had moved to every nook and corner of Malaysia due to the lack of ophthalmologist back then. Fortunately, I chose not to bring my wife and daughters along with me all the time. I would say that it has been a fantastic change in ophthalmology from when I first started.

3. What do you enjoy the most about being an ophthalmologist?

Besides being able to save patient's eyesight, I also enjoy interacting with my fellow ophthalmologists, going for meetings, conferences and watching others perform different kinds of surgeries. Nowadays, I enjoy being in the clinic, just meeting my old patients. They have become almost like a family member to me after seeing them for over 20 years. It is satisfying to know that I make a family out of my job.

4. Can you tell us about the clinical or academic work that you are working on now?

Right now, I am trying to make a connection with other hospitals and eye centres in Asia to encourage trainees to attend meetings and conferences to exchange knowledge and learn from each other.

5. What are the challenges of being an ophthalmologist in Malaysia?

Because ophthalmology is ever changing, it becomes a challenge to someone who has been in the field as long as I have. It is a challenge to keep up with all the new advances. Which is why I often keep myself updated by attending conferences and meeting other ophthalmologists.

Another challenge here in Malaysia is to unite all ophthalmologists and to get our acts together. Because we're all scattered in our own enclave, interaction becomes limited. It is important for all fellow ophthalmologists to stay in touch with each other to keep each other abreast with medical advances. I truly feel that we will be able to achieve more by working together.

6. What would you like to achieve or see in the next five years for the field in Malaysia?

Besides getting everyone united, I would also like to see all sub-specialties grow. These subspecialties should come on a strong footing in the next five years.



7. In your opinion, where are we now, in terms of the ophthalmology field, compared to other countries?

In some fields, we are doing okay. When compared within ASEAN, Malaysia is doing alright. However, I truly believe that there is so much more out there that we have to catch up on. For example, I visited a centre in India that has its own eye bank. Not many eye banks you can find in the region. That is something that we should work towards to.

8. In your opinion, what is the major milestone that the field has achieved in the past 5 to 10 years?

The major milestone first started with moving from the loop to now, the operating microscope. The second major milestone is the concept of inserting the intraocular lens in the eye. And the third major advancement is the use of laser in eye treatment. These three already existed when I first started my profession as an ophthalmologist in other countries. However, they were not well-known in this part of the world yet. But I am glad to see that they are available in Malaysia now.

9. What can we do to improve the awareness of this field?

Public education is very important. Most people should not take their eyesight for granted. The awareness of common eye diseases should be better. More often than

not, a patient might have an eye disease that can be treated, if detected early. However, because he/she is not aware about the condition, it might be too late for treatment upon diagnosis.

10. What is your advice to those (students or medical practitioners) who are new to the field?

I would strongly advise them to never stop learning. It is important to keep abreast with the latest advancement in this field. They should keep themselves updated with the latest knowledge that they might not have learnt when they were a student.

11. Anything else that you would like to share with MSO members.

First of all, I'm happy to see all the effort that everyone has put together. I would say that the field is moving towards the right direction.

All the best to all the members and I strongly advise them to get involved with everybody in the field and progress together to break more barriers. Not to forget, we should engage the younger doctors more who are still new to the field to help them grow.