

THERAPEUTIC ENDOSCOPY IN MALAYSIA-EXPERIENCE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA MEDICAL CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR

DEVELOPMENT OF GASTROINTESTINAL ENDOSCOPY IN MALAYSIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA MEDICAL CENTRE

KHEAN-LEE GOH

*Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Combined Endoscopy Unit, University of Malaya Medical Centre,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

Gastrointestinal endoscopy started in the early 1970s in Malaysia with the help of Japanese doctors. It has evolved over the past 30 years. The gastrointestinal endoscopy unit at the University of Malaya Medical Centre has been in the forefront in providing endoscopy services to patients as well as training doctors in endoscopy in the country. In recent years, trainees have included those from neighboring countries in South-East Asia. Among our most significant achievements is the organization of regular international therapeutic endoscopy workshops since 1993 where leading endoscopists from throughout the world have accepted our invitation as teaching faculty. In 2008, the World Organization of Digestive Endoscopy accorded the high distinction of Centre of Excellence to the endoscopy unit of the University of Malaya Medical Centre.

Key words: development, gastrointestinal endoscopy, historical perspectives, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The development of gastrointestinal (GI) endoscopy in Malaysia is very much linked to our close cooperation with Japan. Our early endoscopists learned the skills from training in Japan and Japanese trainers came over to Malaysia to conduct training workshops. With the development of medical services and training throughout the country many fields of medicine, including GI endoscopy have now evolved to a level that is compatible with the highest standards in the world. Endoscopists have now trained overseas usually as part of a gastroenterology training program in Western medical centers as well.

EARLY DAYS OF GI ENDOSCOPY IN MALAYSIA

It was several years after the invention and introduction in clinical practice of the fiberoptic gastroscopy by Basil Hirschowitz in the early 1960s that GI endoscopy started in Malaysia. In 1973, Dr Peter Vaniasingham who was chief of surgery at the Penang General Hospital, went to Japan to train for 6 months under Professor Hayashida at the Jun-tendo University, Tokyo, Japan. On his return Dr Vaniasingham started an endoscopy service in his hospital using gastroscopes which were made by the Japanese company Machida and which were donated by the Japanese government through the Japan International Cooperation Agency program. The GI endoscopy in the early days in Malaysia was

carried out solely by surgeons. This was understandable as surgeons treated practically all the serious GI diseases including peptic ulcer disease and gastric cancer. Gastroenterology as a subspecialty under internal medicine was fledgling at that time. Endoscopy procedures were therefore carried out often times in the operating theater or in surgical ward side rooms or minor operating theaters. In Malaysia, the early endoscopists were the senior surgeons of that time which in addition to Dr Peter Vaniasingham included Dr Alhady and Dr JC Mehta and Dr Balasegram from the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital. In addition to Dr Yasuo Hayashida, Drs Masayuki Niwa (Niigata), Ueno (Yamagata), Sakai (Tokyo), Rikya Fujita (Yokohama) had also visited Malaysia to carry out training courses (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Professor Y oshihiro Sakai (Tokyo, Japan) conducting a hands-on training workshop in Kuala Lumpur. Circa 1980.

Correspondence: KL Goh, Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Combined Endoscopy Unit, University of Malaya Medical Centre, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: klgh56@gmail.com

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TEACHING HOSPITAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

The University of Malaya was formed in 1949 in Singapore when two colleges, the King Edward VII College of Medicine and the Raffles College combined to form a University. With the independence of Malaya in 1957, the University of Malaya in Singapore formally shifted to Kuala Lumpur to its present site at the Pantai Valley of Kuala Lumpur in 1962. The original University of Malaya in Singapore then officially became the University of Singapore. The Faculty of Medicine at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur was started by the legendary Professor TJ Danaraj, Professor of Medicine and Foundation Dean. The faculty was a top class medical school graduating doctors in 1969. The teaching hospital of the University of Malaya, then called the University Hospital was the proudest addition to the University and started treating patients from 1965. At that time, the University Hospital was considered the leading hospital in the country offering the best medical services.

ESTABLISHMENT OF GI ENDOSCOPY SERVICE IN THE UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

The GI endoscopy services started humbly in the University Hospital the late 1970s. Dr Christopher Loh Chi Loong is a physician who had worked in the UK after obtaining his MRCP (UK) diploma with Professor Alan Read and Dr Paul Salmon in Bristol. When he returned in the late 1970s, Dr John G Stephens who was an English surgeon working at the University Hospital had already started an endoscopy service. In the early years, gastroscopy was carried in the surgical minor operating theater. Dr Stephens and Loh were soon joined by Dr HB Lee, a young surgical lecturer, and Dr Damian Wong, a physician who was starting out in gastroenterology in 1978. Dr Loh, very soon after, in 1979 left the hospital and migrated to Australia and Dr Stephens also returned to the UK in 1980.

Endoscopy services slowly expanded. Colonoscopy service was added and Dr Lee also carried out some therapeutic procedures such as injection sclerotherapy. Both Drs Wong and Lee also carried out mainly diagnostic endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP). Dr Lee left for private practice in 1992 and Dr Wong in 1996. Damian Wong stayed a full 17 years in the University Hospital and was responsible for the early establishment of endoscopy into a specialized field in the hospital. He spent two sabbaticals, first in 1985 with Dr Peter Cotton in London and in 1990 with Dr Joseph Leung in Hong Kong. The endoscopy unit had then shifted to a dedicated area for endoscopy which was previously the minor operating theater of the Accidents and Emergency department. Through the efforts of Dr Syed Noori who was head of surgery as well as the Deputy Director of the hospital (and who himself carried out GI endoscopy), a specialized full-scale endoscopy unit was established in 1998 in the new East Wing of the hospital. This unit for the first time in Malaysia had its own fluoroscopy machine and properly designated areas for registration, waiting and recovery. The unit had three working rooms and two cleaning and storage rooms. It is the first fully dedicated endoscopy unit in the country and remains the leading the major GI endoscopy unit in the country.

ENDOSCOPY UNIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA MEDICAL CENTRE: A COMBINED ENDOSCOPY UNIT

In 1991, I spent a year of my sabbatical leave at the famous GI unit at the Academic Medical Centre of the University of Amsterdam with Professor Guido Tytgat and Kees Huibregtse. I worked specifically under the tutelage of Dr Huibregtse, an ERCP expert par excellence. Amsterdam at that time was a 'Mecca' for therapeutic endoscopy and trainees and visiting consultants came from all over the world. Kees Huibregtse was an exceptional man – a very warm and kind person. Such an experience at that time was indeed a god-send for a young aspiring GI therapeutic endoscopist.

With myself at the helm since 1996, works processes have evolved and streamlined and the unit was soon performing close to 10 000 procedures per year. The whole range of therapeutic procedures was carried out including the most sophisticated pancreatobiliary procedures. In 2000, the University Hospital became changed its name to the University of Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC). The unit is fully a combined unit with both surgeons and gastroenterologists (and even pediatric gastroenterologists) working together on combined endoscopy lists. A setting such as this fosters close cooperation and camaraderie among its staff and can only help and improve quality of endoscopy for the benefit of our patients.

TRAINING IN THE GI ENDOSCOPY UNIT OF THE UMMC

The endoscopy unit has had many in-house trainees over the years including our own staff from the surgical and medical units of the UMMC. Since 2000 we have taken trainees from other hospitals in Malaysia and from 2005 we have opened our doors and have taken foreign trainees. They have come for a minimum period of 6 months specifically to train in advanced therapeutic pancreaticobiliary endoscopy (ERCP). The majority of trainees have been from the Philippines who are either board certified or board eligible gastroenterologists. Starting from Dr Aaron Velasco from Mindanao, this group of advanced trainees has not only proven to be the earnest students but have worked well with our local trainees and have contributed significantly to our advanced endoscopy service at the UMMC. To date we have a total of 11 overseas trainees which also include 7 from Philippines and one each from Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Mauritius (Fig. 2).

THERAPEUTIC ENDOSCOPY WORKSHOPS AT THE UMMC

One of our greatest contributions to the GI fraternity in Malaysia has organized regular live endoscopy workshops since 1993. From 2000, we have had annual workshops at the UMMC. These workshops have been organized in collaboration with the Malaysian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology and have grown from strength to strength. In recent years, we have attracted large audience of up to 600 delegates and have each year been able to invite the top endoscopists from all over the world to be the teaching faculty (Fig. 3). Procedures are carried out at the endoscopy unit with images transmitted live via fiberoptic cables to two



Fig. 2. Foreign trainees and local staff of the endoscopy unit, University of Malaya Medical Centre, 2009.



Fig. 3. Professors Kees Huibregtse (Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and Joseph Leung (Sacramento, USA) performing during live workshop endoscopy, 2001.

lecture halls in the Faculty of Medicine. In 2009, we had live transmission session from an overseas center as well: the Asian Institute of Gastroenterology in Hyderabad, India where Drs Nageshwar Reddy and GV Rao demonstrated cases using the Natural Orifice Transluminal Endoscopic Surgery) approach.

From 1999, we have organized yearly distinguished lectureships to honor a top endoscopist (Table 1). The culmination of our activities was in 2010. In conjunction with the Asian Pacific Digestive Week 2010, the endoscopy unit of the UMMC and the Selayang Hospital, Kuala Lumpur, each hosted one of 2 days of live endoscopy workshop on 19 and 20 September 2010. A total of 15 endoscopy faculty performed during this workshop.

AWARD OF THE WORLD ORGANIZATION OF DIGESTIVE ENDOSCOPY CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

In July 2008, we were designated as a World Organization of Digestive Endoscopy Centre of Excellence Award which

Table 1. List of Malaysian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology and University of Malaya distinguished lecturers

1999	Kees Huibregtse	Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2001	Nib Soehendra	Hamburg, Germany
2002	Chris Williams	London, UK
2003	GNJ Tytgat	Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2004	Y Sakai	Tokyo, Japan
2005	G Costamagna	Rome, Italy
2006	ATR Axon	Leeds, UK
2007	DN Reddy	Hyderabad, India
2008	Peter Cotton	Charleston, USA
2009	Jerome Waye	New York, USA
2010	David L Carr-Locke	New York, USA



Fig. 4. Dr Jerome Waye, president-elect of the World Organization of Digestive Endoscopy, officially presenting the Center of Excellence Award to Professor Ikram Shah, Dean and Director of University of Malaya Medical Centre.

runs until 2013. It was indeed a very proud moment for us, one of only four centers in Asia and one of 15 in the world. In our endoscopy workshop of 2009, Dr Jerome D Waye, president-elect of the World Organization of Digestive Endoscopy, formally presented the plaque to the Dean and Director of the UMMC (Fig. 4).

COOPERATION WITH THE BIOMEDICAL INDUSTRY

Olympus endoscopes are the most widely used endoscopes in Malaysia having a market share of over 90%. This has been not to a small measure to the efforts of Mr KC Ong. Mr Ong graduated from the University of Malaya in 1976. He started working for Hagemeyer, a Dutch trading firm who was the sole agent for Olympus Optical Company, Japan. In the early years there was little interest in endoscopes and he was mainly concentrating on selling microscopes. This soon changed. In 1995, Mr Ong started his own company Endodynamics which was given sole distribution rights by Olympus Optical Company (Tokyo, Japan). His dedication to his job, honesty and his commitment to providing a top class post sales service had endeared him and his staff to all endoscopists in the country. Although not a doctor himself, he has been fondly referred with his 35 years of involvement with

endoscopes as the 'Father of Endoscopy' in Malaysia. In a developing field like endoscopy, the provision of immediate and efficient repair and maintenance service is crucially important to the provision of a good endoscopy service to our patients.

EPILOGUE

Medicine is an ever changing and developing field. The GI endoscopy is no exception. With the increase in the popula-

tion we serve, endoscopy services must expand in volume and with the increase sophistication of endoscopy procedures available, in complexity as well. In the not-too distant future perhaps by 2012, we will move from our first home at the East Wing to another faculty in the new South Wing which will have more rooms and more equipment. The unit has a proud record of providing service and training and must now embark in more endoscopy-related research to keep up with other top centers in the world, particularly those from Japan.