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The human side of my practice is the most important part while offering the latest available technology and treatment option is one of the biggest advantages of my practice.

– DR. MICHAEL WONG, UROLOGIST

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A man who wears many hats, urologist Dr. Michael Wong is internationally recognised for his surgical expertise and academic contributions to the field of urology, especially in the sub-specialised field of endourology and female urology.

Now the President of the Singapore Urological Association, Dr Wong had originally trained to be a liver surgeon, but as fate would have it, he developed a kidney stone and spent three days in agony as the stone passed through the urinary tract. It was a life-changing moment, he decided to switch tracks and it took a year to switch courses. This was in the early days when the Department of Urology at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) was literally in its infancy (it's still the oldest department of Urology here) – “I was the first Singapore-born urologist in the history of the department,” he says with a chuckle.

Dr. Wong who has done several American fellowships (one in Endourology and urolithiasis; another in female urology and neuro-urology; and yet another in robotic surgery), has worked very hard to hone his expertise and raise his portfolio to international standing. He is the only urologist from ASEAN to sit with other world opinion leaders and experts in the field as director of the International Society of Endourology. He says, “It's been a great challenge and I love it. It keeps me in the forefront of urology so I can offer patients the latest, not just from within Singapore, but from the world. I'm careful not to remain stagnant when it comes to academic thinking and patient care. When they come into my clinic, they get the world class standard of care.”

He jokes that urologists are highly sought after. He says, “Both gentlemen and ladies in their prime, especially above the age of 50, will start to need a urologist. Ageing and sexual issues, prostate health and bladder problems are common indications for them. For the younger set, male reproductive issues and kidney stones are frequent problems.”

Urology, he says is a much younger specialty than most other disciplines. Although prostate health, stones and cancers of the urinary tract are the most common issues it tackles, the field of urology has since expanded and is constantly evolving. Dr. Wong shares that more research is being done on kidney stones and its management especially on how best to treat stones via minimally invasive surgery as in endourology. In the management of prostate cancer, new modalities are coming up as better robotics and more effective medications to treat prostate cancers are developed. Urology is also ready to be the gatekeeper in the treatment of andropause or male ageing, especially with hormone replacement therapy. Dr. Wong shares, “Urology has the most advanced technology for its surgical procedures amongst the medical disciplines. There is a continuous advancement in the various machines for endoscopy and lasers for example.”

Despite the many positions he's helmed throughout his career, which includes being the pioneering director and then medical director of the Business Development division at SGH, while simultaneously holding the title of the director of the Urology Centre, Dr Wong says it's important not to neglect your family and crucial to achieve a work-life balance. The key to it, he says, is not to create separate structures but synergise them. Dr. Wong is a father of three girls, who are 14, 10 and 9 and strives to reconcile his busy schedule with personal time with the family. He travels overseas on an

average of six times a year to speak at international urology conferences, tags on family holidays to these trips at least 50 per cent of the time, allowing the family to spend time away together. One of the most recent trips the family took was to Osaka and Kyoto.

Although Dr. Wong left for private practice in 2007, after 21 years in the academic institution, things haven't slowed down for him. “In most parts of Asia, when you go into private practice, you tend to travel less for academic meetings. However, that has not been the case for me as my schedule for international speaking engagements is even bigger than before,” he says. His academic practice right now is focused on international medical conferences and sitting on the journal boards of American and Japanese medical publications, although he says that may change in the next few years because he wants to teach more in the regional medical institutions and universities. He still publishes scientific papers regularly and writes at least two articles a year, for example, reviews in American medical journals and chapters in medical textbooks. A recent article of his, he shares, talks about “the use of Botox in urology, the revival of its medical use for overactive bladders in women.”

One of his future challenges, he says, is to maintain his peer review and worldwide recognition. In fact many top recognised professionals overseas do recommend him to patients who have relocated to Singapore or in the nearby regions. But academic qualifications and expertise aren't the only criteria that make a good doctor. The greatest strength of his practice, he feels, is the time and effort he makes to relate to and understand his patients' needs. Dr. Wong's consults frequently involve counselling and not just the dispensing of medication or the advice for surgical treatments. He advises them on the various options available and will often direct them to websites to read up more about the treatments available. “Technology is one of the biggest building blocks of my practice,” he says. Patients are encouraged to communicate via email and he makes it a habit to promptly respond within 12 hours. This helps him foster strong doctor-patient rapport and contribute to the efficiency of the clinic practice.