

*Giants in Urology*

## Professor Foo Keong Tatt

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Professor Foo Keong Tatt is widely celebrated as the “Father of Urology” in Singapore, not only because he was among the first doctors to practice urology exclusively but also because of his significant influence on the current generation of urologists in the country.

Professor Foo's urology lineage can be traced back to Dr. Roger H. Whitaker, from whom he learned transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) on a Smith and Nephew Fellowship in the United Kingdom in 1976. Upon his return to the National University of Singapore Department of Surgery in 1977, he was one of three surgeons performing the novel surgery of TURP for benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

However, the surgical community gave a lukewarm reception to the idea of practicing only urology: branching off from general surgery was seen as leaving the pack and was frowned upon. With a singular mission to establish urology as a standalone discipline, Prof. Foo undertook pioneering work and published papers on the results of TURP, stone surgery, as well as bladder cancer and upper tract urinary infections, including tuberculosis. His research clearly demonstrated the benefits of specialized urological care, establishing the field as a distinct and vital specialty in Singapore. He sowed the seeds that would flourish over generations into the vibrant Singapore urological community of high international standing that exists today. With the dreams of safe urological practices across Asia, and having ensured that Singapore was well-served by trained urologists, he then focused on less-developed parts of Asia. Prof. Foo was the Secretary General of the Urological Association of Asia (UAA) from 1998 to 2006 and the Director of the Asian School of Urology from 2006 to 2010, aiming to ensure that well-trained urologists would be available throughout the region. He was awarded "UAA Honorary Member" in 2016. He has always believed in the power of collaboration, stating, "A candle by itself has limited power, but when each lights up another, collectively they could light up the whole of Asia".

Prof. Foo was born in 1941 in Penang, Malaysia (then 'Malaya'). After graduating from the University of Singapore in 1965, he returned to Malaysia to become a houseman at Penang General Hospital. Then, he was posted as a medical officer to the less-developed east coast of Malaysia. He later joined the newly established University Hospital in Kuala Lumpur as a trainee in surgery for two years. He was then sent for further training to the United Kingdom at the London Chest Hospital and later received a job in a district hospital in Galashiels, Scotland, becoming a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, in 1971. On his return to Singapore, he spent four years as a lecturer in the Department of Surgery at the National University of Singapore. After gaining support and approval to develop urology as a specialty, he was sponsored to train at the Institute of Urology in London. This journey took him to the new Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, where he learned the novel technique of TURP under the tutelage of Dr. RH Whitaker.

In 1988, he was appointed the first Head of the Department of Urology at Singapore General Hospital (SGH), which he developed into a regional center of excellence. Some of his original team members later led illustrious urology departments at other hospitals in Singapore: National University Hospital, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and Changi General Hospital. He was a founding member of the Singapore Urological Association (SUA), which, alongside the Joint Committee on Specialist Training, became a driving force for the training and accreditation of specialist urologists in Singapore. In recognition of his work, Prof. Foo was awarded the Public Administrative Medal (Silver) in 2001 by the President of Singapore. In 2018, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the SUA.

What stands out most among his many achievements are his contributions in advancing the knowledge of clinical BPH, and he has authored over 100 academic publications in this field. It is his lifetime passion, which he describes as his romance with BPH. He challenged conventional thinking by proposing a staging system based on the degree of obstruction and severity of symptoms rather than the entrenched predominantly symptom-based treatment approach. His most notable research is on intravesical prostatic protrusion (IPP). He demonstrated that IPP is strongly associated with bladder outlet obstruction and

the clinical progression of benign prostatic enlargement, proving superior to traditional parameters like prostate volume and uroflowmetry readings as a standalone predictor. But it was never an easy ride as his ideas were not readily accepted by the world. It took him years of painstaking research, sparking further studies and validation by other groups, before his work gained recognition from the international urology community. Today, his insights on IPP and BPH staging continue to influence clinical practice and guidelines globally. As a testament to his relentless pursuit of knowledge, he was recognized as one of the World's Top 2% Most-Cited Scientists in 2024 in a list compiled by Stanford University and Elsevier.

Despite his illustrious career, many accolades, and high standing in the urology fraternity, Prof. Foo is notable for his down-to-earth approach—rooted in humility, hard work, and a constant dedication to improving his craft. His life's philosophy of balance in all things influences his clinical practice of treating when necessary and avoiding overtreatment. He embodies peace and stability, never allowing even the most challenging patients or hospital administrators to disturb his calm. He reminds us to always remember our one core purpose: to improve patient care. To achieve this, doctors must be competent, compassionate, and committed to research and teaching the next generation to be better than their predecessors. He constantly emphasizes to young specialists the need to focus on the human aspects of medicine: "The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease".

Prof. Foo is also a man of diverse interests. When not practicing urology, he is an avid painter, with a fondness for Chinese art styles and calligraphy. His beautiful works have often been on display in charity auctions, and he has published an art book titled "The Art of Living and the Art for Living". He is also well-versed in playing the Casiotone and the Chinese flute. He shares a passion for nature with his wife, Dr. Chew Sek Yuen, a leading gynecologist in Singapore. In their younger days, the couple would snorkel around the region and film underwater scenes of coral reefs. His abode is a living experiment in ecosystems, featuring flowering plants, a vegetable garden, a koi fishpond, and a bird sanctuary. In a beloved yearly tradition, Singapore urologists and department staff gather for a tour of his home on the second day of the Chinese New Year to welcome the Lion Dance troupe and enjoy good company.

Prof. Foo exemplifies the art of balancing a demanding career with a richly rewarding personal life. His holistic approach to living not only defines his personal philosophy but also serves as an inspiration to his colleagues and students. In 2024, Prof. Foo celebrated his 83rd birthday. He is currently an Emeritus Consultant in the Department of Urology, SGH, and continues to be a mentor, a role model, and a friend.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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