

With Inspiration, Dedication and a Pinch Of Creativity

As a not-for-profit health care provider, Mount Alvernia Hospital's focus is on the mission to improve the health of individuals and the community. To remain as a viable healthcare centre of quality and excellence for children's, women's health, medical and surgical services, the hospital has to ensure a close partnership with existing specialist doctors and be able to attract new medical practices and doctors to the campus.

Meet Dr Goh Shen Li and Dr Roy Koh who join our campus of doctors from public healthcare.



Dr Goh Shen Li is at S L Goh Women's Clinic, #05-59 Medical Centre Block D, Mount Alvernia Hospital, 820 Thomson Road, Singapore 574623. Tel: 62588174



Dr Roy Koh is at FeM Surgery, #07-54 Medical Centre Block D, Mount Alvernia Hospital, 820 Thomson Road, Singapore 574623. Tel: 62598880

Face Time With Patients

"Public health institutions are swamped with patients and waiting times are considerably longer than at a private hospital. With fewer patients in private care, doctors can afford more time for consultations, physical examinations, investigations and counselling, especially for surgeries," said neurosurgeon Dr Roy Koh who joined Mount Alvernia Hospital in November.

A former Consultant Neurosurgeon at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, Dr Koh joined FeM Surgery as a partner earlier this year because he shares the group's vision to offer affordable private healthcare in the setting of a mixed combined specialty group. He continues to serve as a visiting consultant at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, the National University Hospital and Jurong General Hospital.

Obstetrician and Gynaecologist Dr Goh Shen Li who has just set up her own clinic - S L Goh Women's Clinic - in October agreed and added, "Running my own practice gives me more time for clinical work, like seeing patients and following up on them. I have always been a people-person and clinical work brings me back to basics of medicine where I can give more individualised attention to my patients, making my work more fulfilling. In a public health organisation, I had different roles and responsibilities, and education of our juniors formed a large portion of my duties."

Reaching out to her patients

Prior to starting her own practice at Mount Alvernia Hospital, Dr Goh was deputy head and senior consultant of the Obstetrics & Gynaecology Department at KK Hospital.

For the vivacious (and always ready with a smile) doctor, there is no such thing as a 'regular day'. She elaborated, "I start at the clinic at 8.30am. I do rounds in the wards prior to that to review my patients who are admitted. Some patients need to be reviewed every few hours, especially patients in labour. Once I get to the clinic, I review results of the investigations I had ordered the day before. Some clinic sessions will be invariably interrupted by a delivery, so each day is different. We never really know when a baby decides to meet the world for the first time."

And although she has delivered many babies over the years, she continues to be thrilled when a baby takes its first breath of oxygen and begins to cry. She said, "In those precious moments of birth, there is a lot going on; my mind is going through multiple checklists to make sure the mother is healthy and doing well though I still enjoy sharing a couple's joy when they first set eyes on their newborn."

It is the fascination and passion for the field of Obstetrics & Gynaecology that attracted her when she was a medical student; and it continues to fuel her enthusiasm. It is, after all, a unique specialty that combines surgical skills with primary care.



Dr Goh explained, "Choosing a specialty after housemanship was a no-brainer for me. I became interested in Obstetrics & Gynaecology as a medical student whilst doing my student rotations. The field was fascinating; days in the labour ward left me in awe and the rotation was one of the very few student rotations that allowed hands on experience. I also appreciated the fact it was a specialty, in which most of the time, did not carry bad news for patients."

In fact, the most memorable moment for Dr Goh was the first time she delivered a baby as a medical student. "I will never forget the look on the parents' faces when they held their baby for the first time. Their joy was indescribable and the new family of three was oblivious to the rest of us in the labour room," she said. That was the defining moment for her and she has not looked back since.

Making the cut

As a neurosurgeon, Dr Koh would be the first to declare that a career in medicine was the last thing on his mind when he was growing up.

"Honestly, I never wanted to be a doctor," admitted neurosurgeon Dr Koh candidly, who thought his strength at mathematics, physics and technical stuff rather than biology would make him more suitable to be an engineer. However, encouraged by his father, Dr Koh was interviewed at the

Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore and “amazingly I was given a place in medical school,” he grinned.

Even during his medical training, Dr Koh always had a nagging doubt about whether he had chosen the right career path. He was also torn between specialising in neurosurgery or orthopaedic surgery – until his fateful encounter with a 10-year-old girl.

Admitted into the Accident & Emergency department after she was hit by a reversing bus, one of her pupils was blown on one side (a bad sign) Dr Koh rushed her into the operating theatre. In addition, she had a massive subdural haematoma and contusions to the brain. During the operation, Dr Koh removed the clot. “Things looked bad but amazingly after one stormy month, she recovered and was discharged. Six months later, I saw her in my clinic and she had returned to school.”

Dr Koh described it as that ‘Aha’ moment, “when I realised that everything that has happened in my life, every path and decision, finally made sense” and sealed his decision to become a neurosurgeon.

“After the case, I dedicated myself to neurosurgery, never looking back, learning from many people along the way, taking all opportunities to operate and learn, and coming up with ways that work for me. It is not any different from being a technician except that the surgeon knows your anatomy very very well, knows what to avoid and what to preserve,” he added.

Challenges

Besides being doctors to their patients, both Dr Goh and Dr Koh spend quality time counselling and educating patients when things do not turn out the way patients expect.

“There are times when I have to break bad news to a patient about her pregnancy. It is sad as they usually break into tears. I encourage them to be positive and remind them that sometimes life can be unpredictable with its ups and downs. At that moment, patients don’t need a doctor dispensing medical knowledge and advice, but just comforting words with compassion and empathy. It is medicine at its most basic, something that technology cannot replace,” Dr Goh said.

“I guess the most challenging part of my job would be educating patients about their conditions - more importantly, what we can and cannot do as doctors. Communication is probably the most difficult part, managing expectations through that,” Dr Koh chimed in.

Lighter Note

Dr Goh has three children - age 4 years, 3 years and 5 months. For relaxation, Dr Goh likes to read fiction; anything from espionage novels to chick lit. “I also enjoy watching movies with my husband, which is a bit of a challenge as I never know if I will be called for a delivery. The last time it happened was when we were watching Superman – I left the cinema as Krypton imploded,” she smiled.

“My favourite activity is to read storybooks with my children before they sleep at night. So these days my reading repertoire consists largely of fairy tales and Disney characters.”

As for Dr Koh, he is into cars. “I am a petrolhead! Occasionally I go to Sepang F1 track to do a few rounds. It helps to relieve stress. I also go scuba diving because the tranquil waters and weightlessness can put you in a zen-like state.” **A**



More than just grey matter

One common misconception about neurosurgeons is that they only operate on the brain. “Neurosurgeons also operate on the spine, cervical, thoracic and lumbar pathologies, including degeneration,

spine tumors, disc replacements, fusions, discectomies and laminectomies, just to name a few common procedures,” explained Dr Koh, who specialises in keyhole spine surgeries which are minimally invasive.

He said, “The most common condition I see is actually back and neck pain, followed by head injuries and cerebral tumors. 80% of adults will, at some point, have back or neck pain; fortunately, not all will require surgery. Most spine conditions can be treated via alternative methods such as medication, exercises, cognitive behavior therapy and physiotherapy.

Another common and ‘very bad’ myth, most recently perpetuated by the Hollywood movie *Lucy*, is that we only use 10% of our brain. If the myth was true, reasons Dr Koh, then why do small strokes cause permanent paralysis and even vegetative states? Following that logic, we should be able to remove 90% of the brain and still be functional but sadly, that’s not the case.

While we may not understand all the mysteries of our brain right now, Dr Koh clarified that we do use most of our brain, each part for a specialised area. “I think it is more accurate to say that we are only aware of the 10% of the brain that we do use. Functional MRI has already shown that even in our sleep, many parts of our brain remain active,” said Dr Koh.