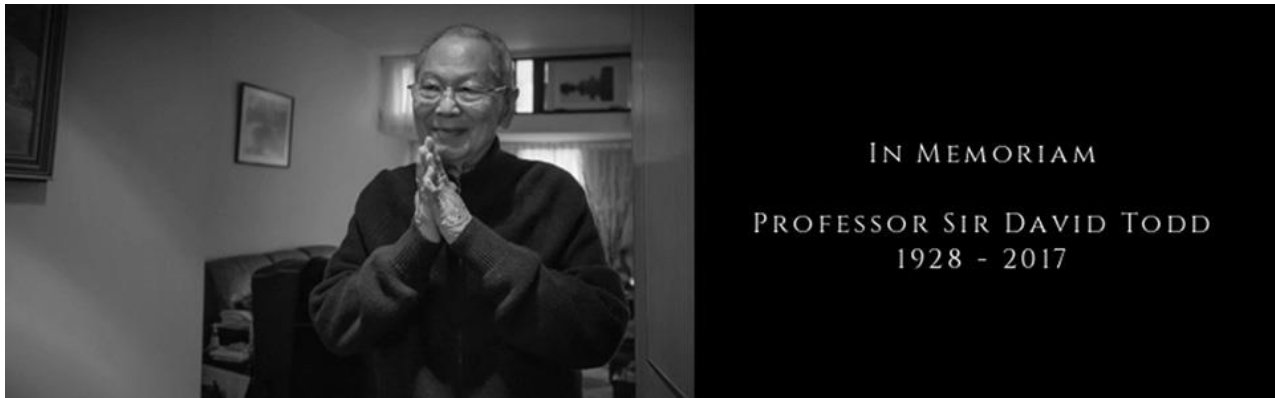


MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN OF MEDICINE

In memoriam: Emeritus Professor Sir David Todd, 1928-2017



Students, colleagues, fellow alumni, friends

It is with the heaviest of hearts that I relay the sad news of Professor Todd's passing. It is exactly 70 years since David Todd the medical student joined the HKU family. He passed away peacefully in Queen Mary Hospital a little before midnight, surrounded by his family and those dearest to him.

Sir David was the noblest of role models: a true gentleman, scholar, clinician-scientist and above all a kind teacher and friend to those who had the good fortune of knowing him and whose lives had been immeasurably enriched by his being. He was a healer of diseases, patients and society writ large.

Sir David came to Hong Kong and HKU as a refugee, much like many in his generation. Unusually, he had a multicultural background that perhaps prepared him to always keep an open mind. His adoptive father was an American missionary who founded the Paul Todd Hospital in Guangzhou and from childhood, Professor Todd knew he wanted to become a doctor. In 1937, after the Japanese invaded the provincial capital, he made his first exodus to Hong Kong aged nine. Then five years later, when the Japanese invaded here, he returned to the mainland and travelled by himself – aged only 14 years – through northern Guangdong to safety with missionary friends. He witnessed atrocities and loss by the Japanese and both parties in the civil war. There can be little doubt that these experiences endowed him with his characteristic resilience and deeply affected his sense of compassion and justice.

In 1947 he had the opportunity to come to the University to study medicine as part of the Faculty's first intake after the war, and so he returned to the city. He started his brilliant academic career by coming first in all his subjects and thereafter set an example of excellence to which subsequent generations of students and colleagues still aspire. He was recruited by his mentor Professor AJS McFadzean as soon as he

completed internship and rose to become a leading haematologist who commanded huge respect in the region and indeed worldwide. In the early 1970s he began to embrace the then newly-emerging fields of molecular biology and genetics, and pioneered their applications in his groundbreaking work on thalassaemia, amongst other subjects. In 1974 he succeeded Professor McFadzean as Head of Medicine in which capacity he served for 15 years. His key legacies included advancing international exchanges and encouraging the development of sub-specialities.

Outside of the Faculty, Professor Todd made foundational contributions to the advancement of medicine and higher education in Hong Kong. He was Founding President of the Hong Kong College of Physicians established in 1986, Founding Chairman of the Research Grants Council in 1991 and Founding President of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine in 1992. He also served as a board member of the then fledgling Hospital Authority, and as Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University. His many other signal accomplishments are too numerous to mention save to say that every one had been awed by his energy, intelligence and leadership. No list of achievements could do justice to the enormous footprints this remarkable man had left on the academic and medical landscapes.

Many former students speak with the highest admiration of his moral fibre and stern commitment to doing the right thing. He never hesitated to speak up when something did not figure, and he backed that up with academic rigour, excellent clinical skills and exemplary professionalism. Indeed, professionalism had been his unwavering goal – we must put patients first, be responsible for perpetuating the knowledge and practice of medicine, and serve the community, he would say. He coupled his professionalism inextricably with a sincere and informed humility, as reflected in his comments from a few years ago on the contributions of medicine to people's health: "Being a doctor is fine but the improvement in health in the past decades has really not so much to do with doctors or nurses but with public health measures – clean water, sanitation, better food, better education, better housing. All these have done much more to improve the general health of the community than doctors and nurses, though of course if you're really sick, you still need a doctor."

I can think of no other medical practitioner in recent memory, here or elsewhere, who personified so fittingly the values and virtues to which we all aspire – of wisdom, compassion and commitment. Sir David was, in every sense, a great doctor and a great human being. He will be so very dearly missed by us all.

Gabriel Leung

August 17, 2017