



Gifted surgeon: Sir Roy with one of his paintings of himself at The Private Gallery. — By AZMAN GHANI

Still in active service

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WHEN Prof Sir Roy Calne was in Kuala Lumpur in 1999, Prof Dr Tan Si-Yen, head of the renal unit of University Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC), considered it the perfect opportunity to approach the eminent surgeon to ask if he could help the UMMC with their transplant programme.

"He said yes and we met up for further discussions," said Prof Tan, who then had him registered with the Malaysian Medical Council. Sir Roy was also made a visiting surgeon in UMMC.

So, for the past seven years, Sir Roy has visited the UMMC three to four times a year to perform kidney transplants there for free.

At 78, this renowned multi-organ transplant surgeon who is known for a string of firsts in his field — he performed the first liver transplant in Europe in 1968; he was the first surgeon to use the immunosuppression drug cyclosporin to prevent organ rejection in 1978; in 1987, he did the world's first liver, heart, and lung transplant; in 1992, the first intestinal transplant in the UK; and in 1994, the first successful combined stomach, intestine, pancreas, liver, and kidney cluster transplant — could retire well satisfied with his achievements.

But he has chosen to remain active and is still conducting research, performing transplants, painting and travelling, although he does not like the last very much. He is currently involved in gene therapy research with Australia's University Technology Sydney, and the research work is conducted in collaboration with the National University of Singapore.

It is during the trips to Singapore that he hops over to the UMMC, staying at the nearby PJ Hilton for a three-day two-night stay. While in Singapore, he also performs transplant surgery. "I am borrowing him from Singapore for a few days since he is there a few times a year, flying in from London," quipped Prof Tan.

A renal transplant fund under the UMMC pays for his airfare from Singapore and UMMC pays for his lodgings and limousine fare to and from the airport.

According to Prof Tan, the patients whom

For the past seven years, renowned multi-organ transplant surgeon Prof Sir Roy Calne has visited the UMMC three to four times a year to perform kidney transplants there for free.

Sir Roy has operated on do not even realise the eminence of their surgeon. "We just tell them a famous surgeon is going to help them," he said.

As for Sir Roy doing the operations for free, Prof Tan said they had never talked about charges or fees. "If I recall, he did say there was no need to pay for the work," said Prof Tan, who handles Sir Roy's trips from Singapore.

During an interview with him at his latest visit here, Sir Roy recalled the day Prof Tan approached him. "He is a good doctor and I am happy to help him," he said.

With his presence here, young doctors at the UMMC also have the chance to learn from the transplant pioneer in the operation theatre, said Prof Tan.

Very often, he (Sir Roy) would sit down with the young doctors after the operation to explain the complexity and the surgical techniques of the operation, he said.

"Having him here has helped to improve our transplant programme in quantity, quality and research."

Prof Tan has become friends with Sir Roy who, he said, "used to tell me to call him Roy and drop the Sir and has invited me to visit him at his home in Cambridge. I have yet to have a chance to go."

Sir Roy has visited Prof Tan at his home and even painted a portrait of his younger daughter, Shing-Ji, 11. (Sir Roy is also a well-known artist and has held art exhibitions in many cities throughout the world.)

And Prof Tan also learned to like crabs after having many meals with Sir Roy, who loves crabs.

Talking about the advantages of kidney transplantation, Sir Roy said it was cheaper than dialysis and better for the patient.

"But it cannot be done as an isolated thing. In order to get good results, you will need people with the expertise, training, and much research. And there must be financial incentives to go with the work."

Sir Roy, who shares his experience and

experiments in his book *The Ultimate Gift*, which was published in 1998, said he hopes to carry on participating in the research that has fascinated him for over 40 years and that he may continue to be involved in treating patients requiring organ transplants.

"The biology part of transplantation will remain a challenge for many years and this is also a great stimulus to continue with research. I hope that this will be possible as long as my health remains good and my hand-eye coordination steady.

"Young surgeons in training can always learn from older surgeons in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes although they will undoubtedly make their own. Over the years, I have trained many young surgeons in general surgery and transplantation, including many from all over the world who have come to Cambridge to do research and transplantation."

Sir Roy will be in Kuala Lumpur again in early May. He will hold an exhibition of his paintings and bronze works at the KLCC.

Proceeds of the sale from the exhibition will be donated to the renal failure fund under the UMMC, which began its kidney transplant programme in 1991, cadaveric kidney transplant in 1997 and spousal transplant the following year.

Starting with only five transplants a year, UMMC did 24 transplants in 2001, which was its peak. Last year, Sir Roy performed seven kidney transplants.

The majority of these transplants were among living related donors.

The forum, from 11.30am to 2.30pm on May 4, will be held at Dewan Sekapur Sirih, first floor of the UMMC's Trauma and Emergency Building.

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QUICK TAKE ON SIR ROY CALNE

- 1947: Entered medical school aged 16.
- 1954-56: Served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in Singapore and Hong Kong. Stayed briefly in Kuala Pilah.
- 1956-57: Orthopaedic surgeon in Oxford.
- 1958: Became a surgeon at the Royal Free Hospital in London.
- 1959: Began research on organ transplantation at the Royal Free Hospital and described the first effective immunosuppression for experimental kidney transplantation.
- 1960: Introduced the use of anti-cancer drug azathioprine as an effective control of kidney rejection. This provided the impetus for transplantation of other organs such as the heart and liver. (The use of azathioprine in 1962 was a watershed in the development of clinical transplantation.)
- 1960 to 1961: Collaborated with Dr Joseph Murray of Harvard Medical School, US, and Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts and Nobel Laureate George Hitchings of Burroughs-Wellcome drug company to develop and test improved immunosuppressants. The result was Imuran.
- 1965: Joined Cambridge University as professor of surgery, and later became department head.
- 1968: Pioneered and performed first liver transplant in Europe. Continued with his work on improving immunosuppression techniques aimed at prolonging the life of liver transplant recipients. Also credited with the first pancreas and intestinal transplants in the United Kingdom.
- 1970: Wrote *A Gift of Life: Observations on Organ Transplantation*.
- 1974: Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.
- 1977: Developed the immunosuppressive agent cyclosporine A, a breakthrough, and introduced it into clinical practice a year later.
- 1985: Wrote *A Colour Atlas of Pancreas Transplantation: (Paratopic Technique of the Body and Tail Segment) (Single Surgical Procedures)*.
- 1987: Performed the world's first liver, heart, and lung transplant.
- 1988: Befriended Scottish painter John Bellamy who had undergone a liver transplant. The two became friends and the artist gave the surgeon some art lessons.
- 1986: Knighted.
- 1987: Wrote *Liver Transplantation: The Cambridge-King's College Hospital Experience*.
- 1992: Performed the first intestinal transplant in the UK.
- 1994: Did the first successful combined stomach, intestine, pancreas, liver, and kidney cluster transplant with two other surgeons. Also wrote a book *Too Many People*, where he warns of the dangers of the continuing, rapid growth in the world's population.
- 1996: Wrote *Art, Surgery and Transplantation*.
- 1998: Wrote *The Ultimate Gift* and retired from University Chair.
- 2000: Wrote *The Illustrated History of Surgery*.
- 2002: Awarded King Faisal prize for medicine.
- 2003: Received the Prince Mahidol Award 2002 for Medicine from the King of Thailand.



Note: Sir Roy authored numerous books, some of which are used as textbooks, and contributed papers to numerous medical publications.

Painting from a surgeon's point of view

PROF Sir Roy Calne likens surgery to art: both require careful planning, skill, technique and familiarity with the available tools and materials.

In both disciplines, the challenge to do better is always there, but perfection will never be achieved, he said.

"Operating is stressful and painting is difficult. Both involve manual work. But I enjoy the challenge of both," he added.

Fascinated by drawing and colouring since he was a child, Sir Roy has painted intermittently, mainly on holidays for relaxation.

His interest peaked in 1988 when he met the distinguished Scottish painter John Bellamy, who underwent a liver transplant operation in Cambridge in Sir Roy's department.

Bound to his bed, Bellamy asked for brush and paint when he was taken out of the intensive care unit and painted a total of 60 pieces during his three-week hospital stay.

Sir Roy became friends with Bellamy who taught him how to use colours and techniques. He also realised that his perception of a patient was different from that patient's self-image.

Spurred on by the Scottish painter, Sir Roy focused on his own subject - transplantation, which included the patients, organ

donors, children involved in transplants, nurses and his colleagues. He also realised that transplantation was a subject never delved into by artists.

Sir Roy immortalised his patients and colleagues in his pieces, which reveal their strength, bravery, pain and the suffering they undergo, from a surgeon's point of view.

Painting his patients, both young and old, after their surgery also helped Sir Roy to build rapport with them.

Sir Roy subsequently widened his horizon and began to paint nature or anything that took his fancy.

"I can paint what I like. If I needed to paint for a living, I would probably starve," quipped Sir Roy, who likes a blend of bold rich colours and his style is a contemporary style. He donates the proceeds of his art exhibitions to local charity.

He held his first exhibition in Kuala Lumpur in 1998, and then in 2003. About 65% of the proceeds from the sale of paintings went to the Malaysian Society of Transplantation.

Proceeds from the upcoming exhibition in KL will be donated to the UMMC renal fund.

This time around, there will be more than 30 pieces, including his work with bronze.



Deep concentration: Sir Roy creates a powerful sense of drama and atmosphere of calm in this liver transplant operation.

His subject varies. There are several pieces of nudes, a few of nature and some portraits.

Sir Roy will be holding his third art exhibition here at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in

conjunction with the 11th Asia Pacific Congress of Nephrology from May 5 to May 8. After this, the exhibition will be at Shalini Ganendra's The Private Gallery (May 9 to June 30, where viewing is by appointment only.) For more information, visit www.theprivategallery.com