

CONFERMENT OF THE HONORARY DOCTOR OF MEDICAL EDUCATION



DR MEI LING YOUNG

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A charismatic, exuberant and passionate social scientist, Dr Mei Ling Young, is one of the three founders of the International Medical College (IMC), Malaysia's first private medical college in 1992. Together with Tan Sri Datuk Dr Kamal bin Salih and the late Dr Saidi Hashim, they had embarked on a mission – to establish an educational model that would allow more young Malaysians to pursue their ambitions to become doctors and other healthcare professionals through a globally recognised curriculum. With the help of two established professors of medical education, Ron Harden and Ian Hart, they devised a simple, brilliant but daring model and the only one of its kind in the world where all students who achieved the required standard, the outcomes, can be transferred in their clinical years to initially, five, and later, to nearly 30 renowned medical schools throughout the English-speaking world.

Mei Ling was born in Seremban, Malaysia in 1949. She obtained her BA (Geography) from the University of Auckland in 1971 and was awarded a Senior Scholarship during her studies. She continued with her postgraduate studies at the same university and in 1974 was awarded the MA (First Class Honours) and concurrently offered a New Zealand Postgraduate Scholarship and the Australian National University (ANU) scholarships for Geography or Demography. She took up the latter offer and completed her PhD thesis after her return to Malaysia.

In 1979 she joined Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang as a lecturer in Development Studies at the School of Social Sciences. Because of a keen interest in research, in 1987, Mei Ling joined Kamal Salih as a foundation associate research fellow and helped establish the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER), the first independent, non-profit think-tank in Malaysia.

Over the years, she has penned over 70 papers on migration and employment, urbanization, industrialization and socio-economic issues and has spoken at numerous seminars and conferences at both national and international levels.

Mei Ling's contributions and achievement is largely seen in the establishment of the International Medical College (IMC). Throughout her journey in developing IMC, she had assumed the position of Executive Director, and Registrar of the college. Holding both positions, she was able to balance and make decisions for both corporate and academic matters to ensure the smooth implementation of the college project.

During that period, education and health have always been regarded as the government's responsibility and there was no precedence where a private medical school used government clinics and hospitals to train doctors. Mei Ling played a pivotal role in persuading and convincing the Malaysian ministries of education and health to support the vision and mission of the college.

She also played an important role in managing two very eminent retired medical professors, Prof John Beck who was appointed as the first IMC's Foundation Dean, and Sir Patrick Forrest who later joined as the Associate Dean. The management of the international faculty and the negotiation with some of the world's best medical schools to be part of the unique collaborative education model - the Partner Medical School (PMS) was no easy task.

In 1998, the Asian Financial Crisis resulted in the depreciation of the ringgit and made all overseas education prohibitively expensive. This was especially true for medical education. Responding to this challenge Mei Ling immediately negotiated for students in UK to transfer to less expensive PMS in New Zealand and Canada. More importantly, she fast tracked the establishment of an IMU Clinical School in order to provide students the opportunity to complete the entire medical programme locally. Within nine months the clinical campus adjacent to the Tuanku Ja'afar Hospital was built and the development of the clinical curriculum completed, with faculty on board. The IMC was awarded university status in 1999, becoming the International Medical University (IMU), the first private university in the country.

Expanding its plan to be an integrated healthcare provider, IMU took the bold step to provide healthcare services to the public. In 2010, IMU Healthcare was formed with the establishment of its oral healthcare centre, chiropractic centre, medical clinic and Chinese medicine centre. Mei Ling was and still is the major driving force in this ambitious undertaking, adding the development of an IMU hospital, scheduled to open its doors by 2021.

She is currently the Advisor and Board Member of the IMU Group. Mei Ling previously held the positions of Provost (1999-2015) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International and Engagement (2016-17) at the International Medical University.

Actively contributing to the private education landscape, Mei Ling also held the positions of Deputy Secretary-General and later the President of the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges & Universities (MAPCU) from 2005-06 and 2015-17, respectively. During this period, private education flourished in Malaysia, making it equal to government providers. MAPCU worked closely with the government to ensure quality and to change the mind-set where instead of being competitors, private and government providers work together for the common good of the country.

Internationally recognised for her contributions in medical education, she was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Science from the University of Strathclyde in 2013 and the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws honoris causa from the University of Dundee in 2014. Mei Ling was also the first Asian to be awarded the prestigious Association for the Study of Medical Education (ASME) Gold Medal in 2017.

Striving for perfection is Mei Ling's greatest strength. She is always able, by a combination of diplomacy, gentle persuasion and tenacity to motivate her peers and subordinates to doing their very best. And it has been largely through her efforts that the university has managed to achieve and maintain its premier position in Malaysia.