Book of Heart – 35 years of cardiology in Malaysia

This year marks 35 years since the founding of the National Heart Association of Malaysia (NHAM). Since its inception, NHAM has achieved many milestones in the field of cardiology and set the bar for quality healthcare.

PANK JIT SIN

A coffee table book (entitled 35 Years – A Heartfelt Journey – Celebrating 35 Years) was launched during the recent 20th Asian Federation of Cardiology Congress 2014 (AFCC 2014) to commemorate NHAM’s 35th anniversary. The book represents a chronological timeline of achievements, a tribute to the heroes of cardiology in Malaysia and a reference for newer physicians joining the fraternity.

NHAM council members Tan Sri Dato’ Seri Dr. Robaayah Zambahari and Dr. David Quek shared their experiences and views on the book, and what it means for the association and its members. Robaayah and Quek were both editors for the anniversary book.

When NHAM was in its infancy, both doctors had just returned from training in London and joined the association in the early 1980s. Quek recalls that the president at the time was Dr. Joseph Eravelly.

The formation of NHAM made Quek realize that they were on the verge of rapid growth in the field of cardiology. He recalls that cardiac catheterization was merely a diagnostic entity back then and “only in 1986/7 did we attempt angioplasty and PCI (percutaneous coronary intervention)!”

Upon his return to Malaysia, Quek joined Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia’s Medical and Cardiac Department and immediately set out to organize research in the field. Encouraged by the likes of Professor Khalid Kadir, Professor Izham Cheong, Dr. Segasothy and Dr. Samuel Ong, in 1990, Quek went on to win the ASEAN Congress of Cardiology Young Investigator Award (YIA) with his medical technician Khor Peck Guat. Quek said: “Being the first Malaysian to win this was a humbling honor, but it also showcased that we needed a better program to encourage more young doctors to actively engage in research, which, unfortunately, even up to now is not a very popular area in the country.”
In his foreword, Quek said: “This [book] commemo- 


brates the rich and often forgotten history of development and advances of our cardiac 


fraternity and services in our country. This is in-


teresting because although our health service is 


largely driven by the government-funded pub-


clic sector, the private sector, too, played an ex-


ceptional role in stimulating entrepreneurship in 


providing alternative paths for cardiology ser-


vices in the private sector, indeed fuelling the 


challenge for the public sector to compete and 


to eventually excel.”


During his time spent in NHAM and other 


medical societies, Quek learnt to harness co-


operation among the various allied industries 


in order to facilitate the co-sponsoring of many 


programs. NHAM regularized its annual scien-


tific meetings, which began small in 1994, and 


is now a must-attend event for many Malaysian 


physicians with cardiovascular interests, attract-


ing close to 1,500 delegates.


In response to a question about NHAM’s di-


rection over the next 5 years, Quek said: “I think 


NHAM will grow from strength to strength and be 


more focused on establishing more protocols, 


meaningful clinical practice guidelines (CPGs), 


credentialing and refocusing on cardiovascular 


education and policies. However, on a regional 


front, it would be good to consolidate our inter-


national base, including those closest to us, to 


be more competitive in a friendly way.”


Robaayah was vice-president of NHAM from 


1990 to 1992 and went on to helm the asso-


ociation in 1998. Since then, she has continued 


to be in the NHAM council. NHAM hosted the 


ASEAN Congress of Cardiology (now known as 


AFCC) in 1992 and it was there that Robaayah 


met many physicians and cardiologists from the 


region. Thanks in no small part to this interna-


tional friendship, Robaayah was nominated and 


accepted as a fellow of the American College of 


Cardiology (ACC) in 1995.


In 2000, Robaayah became Chair of the In-


terventional Cardiovascular Society of Malaysia 


(ICSM), a body under the umbrella of NHAM. 


“Through ICSM, we held regular meetings of 


cardiologists, later calling these meetings ‘Cardiology Grand Rounds’ – where we would 


meet and discuss interesting cases or problem 


cases.” These meetings were usually hosted at 


the University Hospital and National Heart In-


stitute. “Through ICSM, the energetic Dr. Sim 


Kui Hian and I represented NHAM at the Asia 


Pacific Society of Interventional Cardiology (AP-


SIC), which is a gathering of representatives of 


the cardiologists or interventional cardiologists 


in the Asia-Pacific region.” Malaysia took on the 


APSIC presidency from 2005 to 2007, during 


which time Robaayah was president and Sim 


secretary-general.


NHAM has a strong relationship with ACC 


and the European Society of Cardiology (ESC). 


In 2007, ACC’s newly-elected ACC president 


Dr. Jim Dove became the first ACC president to 


attend a NHAM scientific meeting. This set the 


precedent for other presidents and president-


elects to follow suit. In 2009, NHAM became the 


first international chapter of the ACC. The ACC 


scientific meeting in 2010 hosted the first Joint 


Session of NHAM and ACC on ‘The Mitral Valve.’ 


With ESC, the first president to grace NHAM 


meeting was Dr. Kim Fox, in 2008. In 2008,
NHAM became an affiliated National Society of ESC. The tradition of ACC and ESC presidents or their representatives attending the NHAM scientific meeting continues till the present.

Robaayah believes NHAM has done a good job in creating firm foundations in cardiology and will continue to prosper. The council is a mix of young and experienced cardiologists committed to the continuity and success of the society. In the future, Robaayah foresees NHAM continuing conducting the two successful and established scientific meetings regularly. Two National Cardiovascular Disease Database (NCVD) for acute coronary syndrome and PCI are also in place, with the number of hospitals participating continuing to rise.

As an additional note, Robaayah said: “I wish to recognize and thank all those who have contributed to NHAM and to cardiology in Malaysia. Special mention also to Dr. Sim Kui Hian, who has brought NHAM to the international level and to Dr. Jeyamalar Rajadurai for her contributions to the development of CPGs.”

To purchase a copy the book (RM100), please contact NHAM at secretariat@malaysianheart.org.