POSSESSING
"NERVES OF
STEEL"

"The brain is an organ of destiny. It holds within its humming mechanism secrets that will determine the future of the human race" - These were the words of Wilder Penfield, a Canadian neurosurgeon who made groundbreaking contributions to the world of neuroscience. In 1996, these words inspired a young doctor as he embarked on a lifetime career in neurosurgery. More than two decades later, his work has contributed to the laudable progress of the Malaysian neurosurgery field. In this issue, Top 10 Malaysia speaks to Dato' Dr Hari Chandran, Consultant Neurosurgeon of University of Malaya Specialist Centre (UMSC) about his background and his remarkable journey in the medical field thus far.

H ailing from Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Dato' Dr Hari Chandran was born into a family of doctors. His own father was a practising doctor in Seremban Public Hospital, just like a few uncles on his mother's side.

"I am not entirely sure about whether that influenced me to become a doctor," he says. "But I am pretty sure that I was exposed to the field at a very young age, especially when my father had an open-house policy for anyone who wanted to seek medical advice," Dr Hari recalls.

Although much of his younger days were spent in Malaysia and Singapore, Dr Hari eventually left to pursue his degree in medicine from Kasturba Medical College in India. In 1995, he returned to Malaysia and did his housemanship in Kuala Lumpur General Hospital and subsequently began his speciality training.

"I was posted to a neurosurgical team during my speciality training," he says as he explains his first exposure to neurosurgery.

"Despite the long hours, I really enjoyed doing it and decided to pursue it as my speciality," he adds.

His professional training as a neurosurgeon took him to prestigious medical schools, namely the Royal College of Surgeon in Edinburgh and the London Hospital Medical College, as well as Universiti Malaya, where he stayed on and eventually became a consultant neurosurgeon for University Malaya Medical Center (UMMC) and University Malaya Specialist Center (UMSC). Today, he works with fellow neurosurgeons and neuro-oncologists in providing a dedicated Neuro-Oncology Service that prescribes to the highest standards of care for brain tumour patients in Malaysia.

Neurosurgery is a high-risk speciality that deals with the management of the disease on the brain, spine and nervous system that requires surgical intervention. The neurosurgical unit in Malaysia has been established since the 1960s, but with only a handful of specialists running the department in the beginning.

"In 1985, there were only about three specialists handling all neurosurgical cases in Malaysia," shares Dr Hari.

"In 1996 there were around ten practising neurosurgeons all over Malaysia, stationed in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Ipoh and Penang," he says, further admitting that things were hectic back then, but they persevered nonetheless.

The neurosurgical unit of UMMC was established in 2001 and started off with only one consultant neurosurgeon, one specialist in training and three medical officers which include Dr Hari himself.

"Seventeen years later, we have seven consultant neurosurgeons, each with their own sub-speciality, and

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more medical officers and supporting staffs," says Dr Hari proudly.

Besides practising full-time, Dr Hari also dedicates his time to the research and development of the neurosurgery. He teaches as an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Malaya, in general surgery and neurosurgery for medicine, nursing and paramedical programmes.

"I enjoy teaching and sharing my knowledge with the young and hopeful minds. My personal achievement besides successfully treating a patient is the legacy of teaching that we leave behind," says the dedicated academician.

"I cherish the fact that we are now capable to train doctors to become even better than what we are," says Dr Hari, adding that the neurosurgical milestones achieved so far can never be realized without the teamwork of everyone involved in the neurosurgical services in Malaysia at large.

"Watching my trainees blossom into accomplished neurosurgeons leaves me with an intangible sense of accomplishment," he adds.

Dr Hari is currently the President of the Neurosurgical Association of Malaysia, where it works closely with the media to build awareness about the capabilities and availability of the neurosurgical services in Malaysia.

He is also the first Malaysian to be elected as a Member of the Constitution & Bylaws Committee of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies (WFNS), a major milestone that acknowledges Malaysia as the home of neurosurgical services in the region.

A Member of the Specialist Sub-Committee of Neurosurgery of the National Specialist Register, Dr Hari works to ensure that doctors designated as specialists in neurosurgery are appropriately trained and fully competent to practise in Malaysia.

As a medical practitioner, Dr Hari is not spared from the challenges faced by others who are in the same profession.

"There is an array of challenging cases that I had to go through. Time and time again I remind myself that neurosurgery is never for the faint of heart," says the avid reader, adding that he is also fortunate to be working with a resilient and amazing team thus far.

Even with a calm and composed demeanour, Dr Hari is a person full of conviction. "The medical profession is beyond the glamour and being cool at saving lives. It is always a very challenging field and one has to be ready to give the necessary commitment and investment," he says.