

Professor Fok Tai-fai

Honorary Fellow Citation



One of the chapters of *Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian)*, early history of China written by Sima Qian, is dedicated to the biographies of Bian Que and the Duke of Cang. In this chapter, Bian Que, a renowned Chinese medicine practitioner, is portrayed, and his deeds during the Warring States period are recounted. In the passage, it is mentioned that upon arriving in the city of Xianyang, Bian Que learned that the people of Qin had a fondness for children, which prompted him to begin treating sick children. This account is the earliest recorded instance of paediatric practice in China. Today, the challenges confronting paediatricians are unique due to the fact that sick infants are unable to express their suffering and cooperate with the doctor during the physical examination procedures and blood drawing steps. Additionally, infants in an unfamiliar consultation room may experience discomfort and cry extensively. It is crucial for the attending paediatrician to remain calm, observe carefully, and conduct the necessary diagnostic procedures with compassion. By doing so, all paediatricians not only provide appropriate treatment but also offer comfort to both the infants and their caregivers, mostly parents. The medical consultation process for infants thus requires patience, care, and a benevolent heart. Furthermore, the qualities of kindness and care exhibited by paediatricians are not only essential to the treatment of infants, but are also important attributes for leaders of an organisation. He who is wise can reign but he who also has a compassionate heart can lead the organisation to prominence and ultimately bring progress and stability to the community at large.

A distinguished figure in the field of paediatrics, the young Professor Fok Tai-fai graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at The University of Hong Kong (HKU). During his medical practice, he also pursued further studies and obtained a

Doctor of Medicine degree from The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). Professor Fok began his teaching career as a lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine at HKU while also practising medicine at Queen Mary Hospital. From then on, Professor Fok gained more clinical experience through professional practice in the international arena. He worked for several years in the Neonatal Unit of the John Radcliffe Hospital, a teaching hospital affiliated with the Oxford University Medical School in the UK. He also contributed his expertise to the Medical Centre of McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada. In 1984, Professor Fok joined the Faculty of Medicine of CUHK. He served as professor and Chairman of the Department of Paediatrics, a position he held from 1995 to 2004. Reflecting on his choice of specialty in medicine, Professor Fok vividly recalled: 'I initially considered between surgery and paediatrics, and didn't know how to choose. Ultimately, I opted for paediatrics through drawing lots. That notwithstanding, I have always had a fondness for infants and I know I have sufficient patience in dealing with children. Perhaps this personal character of mine has made me suitable to become a paediatrician.' During his early practising years, Hong Kong was experiencing a high birth rate. The circumstances required him to attend to up to sixty new cases a day, all of which were newborn babies. Despite the demanding

workload, Professor Fok dedicated himself to his clinical practice, earning the respect of his colleagues. His caring and forbearing attitude with patients helped establish a strong reputation in neonatal care for his Department. Upon assuming the role of head of the Paediatrics Department at CUHK, Professor Fok shouldered significant responsibilities and faced long-term challenges in providing quality medical services and coaching both medical students and young doctors. From 2004 to 2012, he served as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of this University, during which he spearheaded numerous development initiatives. These included, among others, the introduction of public health courses for medical students and the establishment of the School of Biomedical Sciences. Additionally, he played a crucial role in the setting up of the CUHK Medical Centre. Professor Fok's contributions and achievements have significantly strengthened the Faculty of Medicine, elevated the international standing of CUHK, and served the community of Hong Kong with distinction.

Professor Fok has dedicated himself to the practice of medicine for several decades, providing care for countless newborn babies, particularly premature infants in the intensive care unit. His diagnostic skills are remarkable, but equally important is his compassionate attitude towards his patients. Witnessing

these young patients growing and thriving brings him great joy. Likewise, in the realm of medical education and research, Professor Fok has played a pivotal role in nurturing and guiding numerous young medical students and researchers towards success. By empowering them to make a difference in the lives of those in need, he has left a lasting impact on society. Professor Fok's expertise and dedication have garnered him immense respect in the medical field. His years of experience in teaching, research, and medical practice have earned him a strong rapport with his students and widespread recognition within the medical community. He is acknowledged as a world-renowned expert in paediatrics. He has contributed over 360 research papers to prestigious international medical journals and served as member of the editorial boards of several esteemed medical journals. His research interest encompasses neonatal care, with a specific focus on the prevention and management of respiratory diseases, neonatal infections, neonatal growth, and in addition, medical education. In recognition of his contributions, Professor Fok has been bestowed with the title of Honorary Life Member of the Hong Kong Paediatric Society. He has also been elected Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of London and Edinburgh, as well as Fellow of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine (Paediatrics) and the Hong Kong College of Paediatricians. These

accolades further underscore his exceptional achievements and expertise in the field.

A highly respected figure in the medical field, Professor Fok served as Pro-Vice-Chancellor of CUHK from 2013 to 2021, concurrent to his responsibilities within the Medical Faculty. As one of the key members of the senior management, Professor Fok played a pivotal role in external affairs and oversaw the institution's development. Throughout his tenure, he excelled in many of his undertakings, including securing multiple donations for the University. Furthermore, his strategies in internationalisation have helped raise the global ranking of the University and consolidate its position as one of the world's top-tier universities. These achievements can be attributed to his exceptional foresight and stewardship. As a result, this institution has become a leader in the region attracting not only the best students but also first-class faculty.

With a calm and caring demeanor typical of a paediatrician, Professor Fok helped govern this institution with empathy and compassion, earning the respect and admiration of staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders. He is a staunch advocate for a better healthcare system in Hong Kong, exemplified by the many recommendations he made as the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine to the government,

among which is the recruitment of an appropriate number of non-locally trained doctors and other healthcare workers with relevant clinical experience to address the shortage of medical professionals in Hong Kong. Moreover, Professor Fok attaches great importance to instilling medical ethics in students and young doctors, and encourages frontline medical staff to diligently fulfill their duties. For his academic leadership and remarkable professional experience, he has been appointed several important positions in the medical field: President of the Hong Kong College of Paediatricians (2003-2006), Chairman of the Medical Services Development Committee of the Hospital Authority (2005-2012), and Vice-President (General Affairs) of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine (2012-2016). Since 1998, Professor Fok has been a member of the Medical Council of Hong Kong, where he also chairs its Deemed Preliminary Investigation Committee. In addition, he is member of the Hospital Governing Committee of the Hong Kong Children's Hospital. As member of the Research Grants Council of the University Grants Committee, he chairs its Theme-based Research Scheme Selection Panel. Additionally, he serves as Honorary Consultant and Cluster Coordinator in Paediatrics of the New Territories East Cluster. For decades, Professor Fok has rendered invaluable services towards improving Hong

Kong's healthcare system, leading by example with his integrity and selfless service.

After a distinguished career spanning decades, Professor Fok retired in 2021, and was bestowed with the esteemed title of Emeritus Professor by the University. Throughout his illustrious career, he has received numerous accolades, including the 2003 Outstanding Paediatrician of Asia Award, the 2002 CUHK Vice-Chancellor's Exemplary Teaching Award, the 2003 University Education Award, and, on five separate occasions, the Faculty of Medicine Teachers of the Year Award. In recognition of his exceptional contributions to the public healthcare system, he was appointed a non-official Justice of the Peace and honoured with the Silver Bauhinia Star by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government.

An internationally renowned paediatrician, Professor Fok embodies both the compassionate spirit of a doctor and the exemplary leadership qualities of an academic administrator. His unwavering dedication to the healthcare system in Hong Kong has contributed significantly to the betterment of the city, earning him admiration and respect from his peers. Mr Chairman, it is my great pleasure to present Professor Fok Tai-fai for an Honorary Fellowship of the University.