

Taking Imaging to the Next Level

An Interview with Pacific Healthcare's Radiologists

Their years of practice, few Radiologists would be given the opportunity to design and build an imaging centre based on their very own specifications and experience. The sheer financial outlay being probably the greatest deterrent for such an opportunity to arise. However, two Radiologists had this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity thrust upon them in 2009, and the early days of 2010 saw the fruit of their herculean endeavour very much ready for operation. Medical Grapevine speaks to Dr John Huang and Dr Ching Boon Chye about the exciting days leading up to the opening of Pacific Healthcare's Imaging Centre and their vision for the brand new establishment located in Paragon.

MG: Please share with us a bit about your background before coming to join Pacific Healthcare. What were the circumstances or series of events that led up to the opening of Pacific Healthcare's very own Imaging Centre?

Dr Huang: I was previously a consultant radiologist at Singapore General Hospital and a visiting consultant at the National Heart Centre. I was approached by Pacific Healthcare and asked to help set up a new diagnostic imaging centre. I saw it as an opportunity to do something rather different, one that does not come along very often.

Dr Ching: I was with the National Cancer Centre for 5 years before joining Pacific Healthcare Imaging. I was trained in cancer imaging which is a rather specialized field. When I was approached by Pacific Healthcare, I was told that it will be a totally new setup and that everything will be built from scratch. It was both exciting and frightening. There were so many things to learn and so many datelines to meet. Helping to set up a new centre that is the best possible within budgetary constraints was challenging. Dr William Chong, our CEO, has

been very encouraging and he did not put any major constraints on us when we were buying equipments and employing new staff.

MG: What are your individual fields of specialization and why is it interesting to you?

Dr Huang: I have always been a visual person, i.e. I always felt it easier to relate to things that I could "see" especially in the context of medicine. As a medical student and junior doctor, I was also impressed with how rapidly imaging techniques were constantly improving and could be used to help perform certain procedures in a less invasive fashion. In SGH, my role was mostly



Dr Ching Boon Chye

as a "body" radiologist, that is to say, imaging of the structures in the chest, abdomen and pelvis. Within this area, I have a special interest in cardiothoracic imaging and vascular imaging. Cancer and cardiovascular disease are the

2 biggest killers in Singapore and my area brings me into daily contact with these health problems upon which I hope to make some positive impact.

Dr Ching: Breast imaging is my field of interest. Breast screening using mammography is the only imaging tool that has been shown to benefit and reduce mortality by 30%. Breast imaging is very much an art as it is a science. There is a fine line between overcalling and undercalling a finding on mammogram and ultrasound. One has to reach a level of comfort based on his or her own working experience. Unlike reading a CT or MRI scan where the findings are more objective, there is a bit more subjectivity and decision making that it needed in breast imaging. It brings me great joy whenever an early cancer is detected even before it manifests itself symptomatically. It makes a lot of difference in the prognosis of the patient between stage 0 and stage 4. One has a chance of 5 year survival rate of 98% in Stage 0 and 10% in stage 4. 80% of Stage 0 disease presents on mammogram.

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Dr Huang



MG: Tell us something that is unique about Pacific Healthcare's Imaging Centre. What is special about it and why are you proud about it?

Together: Creating Pacific Healthcare Imaging has allowed us to construct a radiology service essentially from scratch. This opportunity has allowed us to take what we felt were the best elements from other departments we have experienced and incorporate these into something new.

We have installed the latest high-end dual source CT scanner that acquires images faster and at lower radiation doses than before. This is particularly true for cardiac CT where the whole heart can be imaged in 0.27 seconds at radiation doses that in some cases are comparable to a mammogram! The whole chest can now be imaged in about 0.6 seconds which is incredibly useful in breathless patients.

We have also installed a digital mammography unit which employs compression paddles designed especially for the Asian breast. The system also employs the latest computer aided detection (CAD) software to help detect abnormalities. This is further complemented by breast ultrasound and prone biopsy table services. Together, they all make up a Women's Imaging Centre that we hope will provide optimal breast care for our patients.

We are also in the process of installing a radiology information system (RIS) and picture archiving and communication system (PACS) that will enable the electronic archiving of reports and images that can be accessed not only by ourselves but from the desktop PCs of the referring clinician. This will hopefully reduce the clinician's archiving and storage requirements and reduce the paper wastage and administrative time spent on these matters.

While we have acquired some of the most modern and up-to-date equipment for the new imaging centre, we also realize that it is the people who operate and make use of these tools that is fundamental to providing the best level of care for our patients. Staff that are experienced and knowledgeable in their area of expertise but who are also capable of working together as a team are paramount for a quality service.



Being in close proximity to the other clinicians in our group makes communication easier and brings benefits to our patients as the process is more streamlined. A prime example of this is having a breast radiologist, surgeon, and oncologist all in the same centre. This offers the closest things to a "one stop shop" for breast related problems.

MG: How big is the team at Pacific Healthcare's Imaging Centre? Do you intend to grow this team? Where do you hope to see PHIC in the next 5 years?

Together: We are currently comprised of 2 radiologists but most importantly are backed up by a team of radiographers, nursing support, receptionists and healthcare assistants. Every member of the team is essential to providing a good service. Ultimately we would like to grow into a trusted and respected provider of comprehensive imaging services both locally in Singapore



and around the region. As business grows naturally we will be looking towards expanding the team. Pacific Healthcare also has plans to build a hospital in Adam Road and we shall be responsible for providing diagnostic imaging services there.

MG: Pacific Healthcare is one of the fastest growing Specialist Groups in Singapore. How does your role as Radiologists complement the team of Specialists in PacHealth?

Together: Radiology/ imaging diagnostics play a central and prominent role in most patient care these days. Whether it is for dental implant planning or the diagnosis of coronary artery disease, imaging has much to offer in helping the clinical specialist in decision-making and planning treatment. Being in close proximity to the other clinicians in our group makes communication easier and brings benefits to our patients as the process is more streamlined. A prime example of this is having a breast radiologist, surgeon, and oncologist all in the same centre. This offers the closest things to a "one stop shop" for breast related problems. **MG**