

## AFOEM Fellows interview series

This series provides insight into the careers of retired and actively serving physicians in Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

### **Dr Farhan Shahzad**

#### An interview with Dr Kar Chan (KC) WAN

MBBS, DIH, M.Sc.OccMed, MFOM, FACOEM, FAFOEM, G.Dip.Pub Admin

**Farhan: Hi KC, it's a pleasure to meet you. Please tell us about yourself.**

**KC Wan:** My pleasure Farhan. In 1969, I graduated from Singapore University with MBBS and in 1972 I attended the London University M.Sc. Occupational Medicine in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The course was conducted by Prof. Richard Schilling who was renowned for his work in 'byssinosis' and I had the privilege to meet Dr Donald Hunter, the author of Diseases of Occupations. There were 24 students from Australia, USA, UK, Ireland, Kenya, Uganda, Burma, Singapore and I was from Malaysia. In the class were Dr David Douglas and Dr Bill Bisby who subsequently set up the Australian College of Occupational Medicine when they returned to Australia. The training included sessions in the London Skin Clinic, Brompton Chest Hospital and Harwell Atomic Centre in Oxford. I had a posting with Dr Tim Carter who later became Director of OHS in UK at the Rio Tinto Lead Smelter in Wales where I gained experience in inorganic lead health surveillance. My M.Sc. dissertation was Noise Induced Hearing Loss in a Malaysian quarry.

**Farhan: How did you develop an interest in Occupational & Environmental Medicine?**

**KC Wan:** My interest arose from the Industrial Health lectures in Singapore University delivered by Public Health Professor Dr Phoon Wai Onn, as Occupational Medicine at the time had yet not been established.

**Farhan: Let's talk about your achievements, memories and highlights of your career.**

**KC Wan:** From 1973 to 1979 I was occupational health consultant to the Malaysian Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour where I investigated inorganic lead poisoning in a battery factory which I presented at the Manila SEAMEO medical conference in 1976. In August 1979, I arrived in Perth and worked as an Occupational Physician in the WA Meat Commission abattoir at Robb Jetty Coogee and Occupational Health, Clean Air and Noise Abatement Branch of the Health Department of Western Australia. I had the honour of working with:

- Dr Alan Cumpston who was Director of Occupational Health & his successor;
- Dr Fred Heyworth and Health Commissioner Dr Jim McNulty who is renowned for his work with asbestosis, mesothelioma and silicosis in WA.

From 1938 till my retirement in 2001, I was Chief Occupational Health Physician and medical factory inspector in the Department of Occupational Health & Safety (DOHSWA) that became WorkSafeWA.

My duties included working as medical factory inspector in charge of all medical and health facilities in WA, Consultant to the Mines Inspectorate and the Workers' Compensation Commission as well as chairing the Pneumoconiosis Medical Panel which is now the Industrial Diseases Medical Panel (IDMP) that make medical determinations on pneumoconiosis, mesothelioma or lung cancer on claimants for worker's compensation. The highlights of my career is the eradication of silicosis in 1984, eradication of zoonoses such as Brucellosis, Q fever & Leptospirosis and prevention of inorganic lead poisoning in Western Australia. Following the presentation of my paper on Silicosis in Western Australia at the Asian Occupational Health Conference in Beijing, the PRC sent a delegation of government officials to Perth to explore the WA experience for preventing silicosis in mining. As Adjunct Professor, I worked with Edith Cowan University and Curtin University with courses in distance learning and training of doctors in Perth, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia.

**Farhan: What's your legacy and what are you currently focusing on?**

**KC Wan:** My achievements include setting up the medical determinations process and criteria for the IDMP and the health surveillance programs for inorganic lead and urinary carcinogen MOCA.

I am interested to share my occupational health experience in WA in reducing exposure to hazardous substances in the work environment, prevention of occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis, zoonoses and recently made a submission to the National Task Force on silicosis.

I am of the view that for occupational physicians, clinical competency for diagnosis and management of work-related diseases and injuries is paramount.