

Remembrance: Keiichi Suemasu, MD, 1926–2015

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Keiichi Suemasu died on January 29, 2015 at the age of 88 at Saiseikai Central Hospital in Tokyo, where he was the Emeritus Director. He was admitted due to the worsening of pneumonia symptoms that had started 1 month previously. Despite rigorous treatment, he passed away.

Dr. Suemasu was born in Yokosuka city in 1926. He graduated and received his MD degree from Keio University School of Medicine, Tokyo in 1951. Before becoming an attending surgeon at the National Cancer Center (NCC) Hospital in 1962, he obtained a residency and was enrolled in fellowship training programs at Keio University Hospital, and worked at Ashikaga Red Cross Hospital as Chief of Surgery. From the beginning of Dr. Suemasu's career at NCC, he devoted himself to surgical practice and research on lung cancer. He was promoted to Chief of the Endoscopy Department in 1974 and to Chief

of Operation Theatre in 1978, and played a principal role in the development and management of surgical practice in the cancer hospital. He was appointed Deputy-Director of the hospital in 1978, Director in 1989, and President in 1992. Until he retired in 1994, he was actively involved in establishing nationwide systems of treatment and research for patients with cancer. In 1997, he became the Director of Saiseikai Central Hospital, Tokyo, which was one of the most active general hospitals in the Tokyo metropolitan area. His talent and leadership in hospital management had extended from the field of cancer to general medicine, and he remained successful until his retirement in 2006.

Throughout his professional life, Dr. Suemasu was an active academic surgeon, a great mentor, and a mediator who brought harmony to the groups he worked with. As a pioneer in lung cancer surgery in Japan, he helped establish lymph node mapping and evaluated the prognostic significance of systematic lymph node dissection in lung cancer, developed a new surgical technique (bronchoplasty) for lung cancer, established clinicopathological concept of “early” lung cancer, refined the lung cancer screening program, together with his colleagues Dr. Shichiro Ishikawa and Dr. Tsuguo Naruke [1–3].

Among these, the promulgation of lymph node map had a significant impact on surgeons: the concept of classifying lymph node stations in the hilum and mediastinum according to anatomical landmarks was not only quite novel, it was also practically convenient for describing the exact location of metastatic lymph nodes during surgery for lung cancer. Dr. Suemasu strongly supported the series of studies that were mainly performed by Dr. Naruke. He never intended to principally lead the study in the group, but rather made every possible effort to facilitate the studies of his junior colleagues and achieve harmony in groups with different, yet strong, personalities. These

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achievements were made possible only because of the unique, valuable, and friendly character of Dr. Suemasu, which attracted many young investigators and made the Department of Thoracic Surgery at NCC the most renowned team in Japan. His professional life as a cancer surgeon was based on a dedication to others, which is a precious traditional virtue in Japan.

We have been very fortunate to have such a great leader as Dr. Suemasu, with vision and warm heart. As the last student of Dr. Suemasu, I also realize his greatness as a mentor after I by myself got the job to teach juniors at Keio University. We miss him very much, and are deeply grateful to him for making lung cancer surgery in Japan a worldwide model of innovation and leadership.

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