Dr. Isao Kawamura, a Pioneer in Morbid Obesity Treatment in Japan

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On May 10, 2012 International Federation of the Surgery for Obesity and Metabolic Disorders—Asia Pacific Chapter (IFSO-APC) and Japanese Society of Surgery for Obesity and Metabolic Disorders (JSSO) lost one of its founding members. Dr. Isao Kawamura died of a heart attack at the age of 69. Dr. Kawamura was born on June 12, 1942 and received his medical degree from the School of Medicine of Chiba University in March 1968. He also received his Ph.D. from Chiba University after completing his surgical residencies at Chiba University Hospital. He was a research fellow at Harvard University from December 1980 to March 1982. Soon after his return, he started working in the Department of Surgery at Chiba University Medical School and there, performed the first surgical procedure on a morbid obese person in the same year. Japan is believed to lag behind other advanced countries in bariatric surgery, but this epoch-making but much-needed surgery by Dr. Kawamura changed the current status of research and the development of surgical techniques for the treatment of morbid obesity in Japan.

In April 1990, when he was an Associate Professor at the Department of Surgery of Chiba University Medical School, he became Director of Ishibashi General Hospital in Tochigi Prefecture. He moved to Shimotsuga General Hospital as Director in October 1995. Through the years, he continued his research and surgery for the treatment of morbid obesity and in 2008 he became Honorary Director of Kamagaya General Hospital, as well as Director of bariatric and metabolic surgery at Kamagaya General Hospital in Chiba Prefecture. In the fall of the same year, IFSO-APC was founded to serve as a regional chapter in Asia Pacific to encourage new surgeons to develop bariatric surgery techniques and further research. Dr. Kawamura brought

awareness to this part of the world, as he had always said that bariatric procedures in Asia Pacific is on the high.

His contribution toward the treatment of morbid obesity became recognized throughout Japan and he was appointed Clinical Professorship at Chiba University Medical School as well as Toho University Sakura Medical Center in Chiba. He was a council member of the Japan Society for the Study of Obesity and a board member of the Japanese Society for Treatment of Obesity, an honorary member of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery and a lifetime member of IFSO. He served as President of the 9th IFSO Conference in Tokyo in September 2004, the 10th Asian Congress of Agricultural Medicine and Rural Health in Tochigi in November 2005 and IFSO-APC and JSSO Congress 2011 in Hokkaido in February 2011.

Expectations for bariatric surgery are quickly rising in Japan. However, the number of surgeries performed in Japan is still low compared to other parts of the world. Dr. Kawamura opened the door to this new surgical field and emphasized the importance of such surgeries. In order to continually bring new ideas to Japan, he not only attended almost all conferences related to bariatric surgery, he also participated by speaking at some and became an inspiration for many surgeons with an interest in the field. Presently, most surgery is performed by laparoscopy and many workshops are frequently conducted in many parts of Japan as well as in the world. This surgery has recently been proven to be one of the best treatments for Type II Diabetes. Obesity, which was once hard to cure, is something curable.

Dr. Kawamura once said, “I performed that surgery in 1982 because such operations were necessary due to an increasing number of severely obese people.” And he was right. Back in the 1980s, many people did not take this very seriously, but now in the twenty-first century, many of us really appreciate his courage. He was our teacher, mentor, advisor, friend, and father. We all appreciate his contribution and will miss him at every conference we attend.

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