In memoriam: Juro Wada (1922–2011)

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Dr. Juro Wada, a pioneer in cardiothoracic surgery in Japan and the 34th president of annual meeting of the Japanese Association for Thoracic Surgery, passed away on February 14, 2011, at his home in Ikebukuro, Tokyo. He was 88 years old.

Juro Wada, was born on March 11, 1922, in Sapporo, attended the School of Medicine at the University of Hokkaido (MD 1944), and obtained the PhD degree in 1949 with his thesis on immersion hypothermia. Dr. Wada went to the United States in 1950 on a GARIOA Fellowship and served as a surgery fellow under Professor Owen H. Wangensteen at the University of Minnesota. He was the first trainee from occupied Japan after World War II and served in several institutes as a surgeon, doing research in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery before returning to Japan in 1954.

Dr. Ohno, president of Sapporo Medical University, offered him an assistant professorship that year. Dr. Wada soon established a new department of cardiovascular surgery and rose to the position of full professor. Hypothermia in cardiac surgery, hyperbaric treatment in air embolism, and the widely used Wada–Cutter valve prosthesis were among his well-known achievements. The Wada–Cutter valve was chosen by Dr. Denton Cooley for use in the total artificial heart in 1969. Dr. Wada developed many operative procedures in cardiovascular surgery and repair of chest deformities, notably the so-called sternal turnover technique in funnel chest repair. On August 7, 1968, he performed the first heart transplantation in Japan and the patient survived 83 days after operation. This eventuated in controversy, however, because brain death had not been legally defined in Japan.

In 1977, Dr. Wada became chairman and professor of surgery at Tokyo Women's Medical College. At first he led the cardiovascular surgery group, then, in 1981, founded the general thoracic and cardiovascular surgery group with young fellow surgeons, where surgery for thoracic deformities was developed.

After retirement at age 65, Dr. Wada founded the Juro Wada Commemorative Heart and Lung Institute, where his social and scientific contributions continued. Among those, he devoted himself enthusiastically to the establishment and promotion of the World Society of Cardio-Thoracic Surgeons. He received many, almost countless, awards, one of the most recent of which was bestowed in Athens, where he was named one of the seven wise men of cardiac surgery.

Dr. Wada is survived by his beloved wife, Shuko, and daughter, Mariko. He leaves an immense circle of friends around the world, and very many disciples in Sapporo and Tokyo.

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