

Obituary: Kenichiro Sugita, M.D., 1932–1994 A Renaissance Man

Dr. Kenichiro Sugita passed away on the 5th September, 1994, following an 8-month battle against gastric cancer. He was only 61, about 20 years younger than the average age in Japan. He was an excellent neurosurgeon as well as a great teacher. Moreover, he was loved, by many people whom he met, an exceptionally likeable human being. He left a wife, Yasuko Sugita, M.D., two sons, Kotaro, a computer engineer, Ryotaro, a young neurosurgeon and a daughter, Noriko who is now the mother of a one-year-old boy.

Dr. Sugita, the son of a well known ophthalmologist, was born and grew up in Nagoya, Japan. During his junior high school days, not long after World War II, he attended a medical school festival. Seated in the front row of the theatre, the curious boy watched a film depicting surgery for pituitary adenoma done by Professor Makoto Saitoh, one of the neurosurgical pioneers in Japan. He was greatly impressed by the movie and thus decided on a career in neurosurgery. While attending medical school, he found time to become a cellist in the Nagoya University Orchestra and also to become a member of the tennis team. Further, he devoted himself to experiments in neurophysiology, which often lasted from morning till midnight. The basic knowledge he obtained during these experiments in neurophysiology became the focus for the development of his scientific mind.

He graduated from Nagoya University's School of Medicine in 1957. During his residency in Surgery

from 1960 to 1963, he went to Freiburg, Germany, to study neurosurgery under Professor Traugott Riechert. At that time he became acquainted with many famous neuroscientists including Dr. R. Hassler, Dr.

F. Munding, Dr. W. Umbach. During his stay in Germany, he enhanced his understanding of Western Culture by visiting many churches and museums. He especially loved visiting the romanesque churches in France, such as those in Autun, Veselay and Cluny. Among the many museums he visited, he was most fascinated by the Uffizi Museum in Florence, where he learned about the essence of the Renaissance.

After returning to Nagoya University, he devoted himself to the improvement of stereotactic surgery and he developed a new stereotactic apparatus of his own design. He operated on many patients with Parkinson's disease

by sub-ventrolateral thalamotomy and on patients with intractable pain by centre-median (CM) thalamotomy. In 1967-8 he played an important role in founding the Department of Neurosurgery at Nagoya University. There he instituted microneurosurgery and continued to devise new equipment including aneurysm clips, an operating microscope having two side-arms for the assistants, each with a stereoscopic view, a head frame and retractor system, a silver dissector, a tumour hook, a tapered brain retractor, etc.

Dr. Sugita was requested to come to Shinshu University's School of Medicine as the Professor and Director of the Department of Neurosurgery in 1978



and he remained there for ten years until 1988. During this time he established the Sugita style operating theatre which included an operating microscope controlled by foot-pedals on the operator's chair, a table with a head frame system, nurse platform, stereoscopic video system, navigation system, all of which, listed above, were his own design. He also was surrounded by a simply wonderful surgical team. In addition for three years, between 1982 and 1984, he devoted most mornings and evenings to writing the well known "Microneurosurgical Atlas". At the time he said he could write only one fourth of what he really wanted to write.

Many foreign guests enjoyed this "Mecca" of neurosurgery along with the atmosphere to be found in the beautiful country side around the suburbs of the city of Matsumoto. In 1988 Dr. Sugita returned to his Alma Mater as the Professor and Director of the Department of Neurosurgery, Nagoya University.

Dr. Sugita's clinical interest was extensive, including stereotaxy, neuro-ophthalmology and surgery for aneurysms, arteriovenous malformations, brain tumours such as acoustic neurinomas, meningiomas and craniopharyngiomas. During every operation, he was always thinking how he could do better to improve the result. Furthermore, he wanted to make these improvements in such a way that they could be utilized by every surgeon, not only by the experts.

His talent for engineering helped him. He insisted on the importance of teamwork during operation. During his operation, two assistants were always working with stereoscopic view. He said "I have six hands simultaneously besides several pieces of neurosurgical equipment attached to self-retaining retractors". His style of surgery offered young neurosurgeons many opportunities to learn.

Dr. Sugita devoted himself to the education of young neurosurgeons not only from Japan but also from outside Japan. He established a "Sugita Scholarship" financed by the royalties from his neurosurgical instruments. He had helped more than 50 young neurosurgeons, from all over the world, to study, including those from North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Many of them are now doing important work in their own countries.

Dr. Sugita loved many sports which helped him to make friends. He played golf and had a handicap of 11. He played tennis energetically and he loved to play baseball which helped him build up a strong neurosurgical team. In winter, he enjoyed skiing in

virgin snow and recently, in summer, he started scuba diving, both sports brought him to scenic wonderlands. He initiated several neurosurgical meetings involving sports; the Shinshu workshop (tennis) and the Hakuba Seminar which was named after his favourite ski resort. He also established a close friendship between Japanese and French neurosurgeons. Every other year, a group of Japanese neurosurgical skiers had been joining a "Winter Meeting" of the French Neurological Society. He was training this year for the meeting; however, his disease was confirmed only two days before he was to have attended the joint meeting in Val d'Isere.

Dr. Sugita also started "Shinshu Seminar" for neurosurgical nurses. Each year every summer, over 250 nurses got together and presented their results of year-long studies about improvements in the case of neurosurgical patients. Many neurosurgeons also took part in these presentations. They are helpful by reporting on cases and giving lectures. Dr. Sugita always thought that nurses were just as important as young neurosurgeons for the patients welfare, both during and after surgery.

Since July 1993 Dr. Sugita was extremely busy as the Director of the Nagoya University Hospital which had just begun to build its new Hospital. We, the staff and all our associates, deeply regret not having obliged him to take time for his own medical check-up.

Dr. Sugita was loved by everyone due to his frank character with so fair and open a mind as regards political intrigue. For his achievements in neurosurgery he was awarded the Olivecrona Lecture of the Karolinska Institute in 1984 and the Heritage Lecture of the Canadian Neurological and Neurosurgical Society in 1987. He is greatly missed by his many friends and former residents, colleagues, neurosurgeons, and paramedics throughout the world. He lived his life very energetically and rapidly, perhaps three times that of the average person. He had been dreaming of building a "Hospital ship" to visit Asian countries such as India, Thailand, Indonesia, etc. on which he, along with his pupil neurosurgeons, could operate on patients from these countries. He also wanted to write a sequel to his "Microneurosurgical Atlas". Unfortunately, now all these dreams cannot be realized; however, Dr. Sugita will always live in the hearts of many many people who loved him dearly.