A Tribute to Dr. Freddie H. Fu: Remembering A “Good Friend”

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Introduction

The orthopaedic community is deeply saddened by the loss of renowned orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Freddie H. Fu, on September 24. A relentless and irreconcilable disease has taken the “good friend” from us at the very early age of 70, when he was dwelling at the highest summit of the mountain of success he built with his own hands.

Freddie was definitely a legend, but he has never been inaccessible. Apart from thousands of people he treated or restored to a higher degree of sportive performance, he built countless number of personal relationships with friends, fellows, students, and people from every possible area of the community. He never ceased to connect himself to the society and made everyone feel endeared to him, as a reason why many is mourning today and not only the orthopaedic community.

Fondness in Turkish Orthopaedic Community

The architect of the beautiful relationship between Dr. Fu and the Turkish orthopaedic community is certainly Professor Veli Lök. Today, first author is one of more than thirty Turkish orthopaedic surgeons, who owe the privilege of sharing a moment with legendary Dr. Fu, to the visionary and international personality of Professor Lök.

More and more Turkish fellows and observers followed each other to reinforce the invaluable connection between Dr. Fu and our community. The bound become so strong that Dr. Fu himself visited many times our country for medical and social occasions. The foundation of the Freddie Fu Fan Club (FFFC) in 2004 by his former fellows was a particular occasion where he quoted as “one of the unforgettable moments of his life”. Dr. Fu not only contributed to the education of Turkish orthopaedic surgeons personally, but also promoted and supported the members of our society in academic and social platforms as a true ambassador of our country. For this reason, on behalf of the Turkish orthopaedic community; Turkish Society of Orthopaedics and Traumatology (TOTBID); Turkish Association of Orthopaedics and Traumatology (TOTDER), and Turkish Society of Sports Traumatology, Arthroscopy and Knee Surgery (TUSYAD); we, as his former fellows have composed this obituary to be published in our official international journal, with a cordial intention to glorify his monumental legacy.

An Amazing Life Story

Dr. Freddie Fu was born in Hong Kong in 1950 and as early as the 18th year of his life, he travelled to the United States to chase after his dreams. Long after first author’s visit in Pittsburgh University, as a foreigner half a planet away from home, he can tell that the empathy and the hospitality of Dr. Fu lays in the fact that he as well, was once a young man from far lands. He embraced and took care of each one of us, as his own youth.

When it comes to Dr. Fu’s story, you can find no shade under the bright sun. Dr. Freddie Fu received an undergraduate degree in biology in 1974 at Dartmouth College and Dartmouth Medical School before earning his medical degree at the University of Pittsburgh in 1977. He was deeply impressed by Dr. Albert Ferguson Jr, of whom he mentions as “inimitable” and...


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indicates as the reason for him to “land” in orthopaedics. He continued his studies at the Pittsburgh University, namely the “Pitt”, before completing his residency in orthopaedic surgery and subsequently a fellowship in orthopaedic research, a motif that confirms his astonishing academic production. He expanded his horizons to Europe, for an internship in general surgery at Brown University and an international fellowship at the Hannover Trauma Centre in Germany. Afterwards, he returned where he considered “home” for joining the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine faculty in 1982 as an assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery and director of sports medicine. He became clinical vice chairman of the department of orthopaedic surgery in 1990 and successfully excelled in executive vice chairmanship in 1994.

Freddie H. Fu was definitely a social man with brilliant social skills. He was present within ISAKOS since its creation in 1995 and served as the society’s president from 2009-2011. He always included sporting activity in his life and considered sports as a platform of social enrichment. He founded the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine’s sports medicine program in 1986 and in the late 1990s; Dr. Fu contributed to the development of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Rooney Sports Complex for establishing training facilities to his sports medicine programs. In 2018 UPMC renamed its operations as “the Freddie Fu Sports Medicine Center”. He became head team physician for the University of Pittsburgh Athletic Department and helped to build Pittsburgh marathon.

Freddie Fu was entitled as David Silver Professor and the chairman of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. In 2011, he received the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons’ (AAOS) Diversity Award. Very recently, in 2021 he gave Michael Freeman Honorary Lecture during the EFORT Congress with his presentation titled “Is the Latest Always the Greatest?” Dr. Freddie Fu was indeed very concerned about the uncurbed involvement of the industry into the orthopaedic practice. “There are 100 things that have come and gone in orthopaedics, so don’t get overly excited before something has stood the test of time.” he quoted in an interview in 2019. We are certain that his ideas will definitely stand the test of time.

Groundbreaking Research in Sports Medicine

Dr. Freddie Fu repaired the sports injuries of countless patients including lead athletes and ballet dancers. He operated the famous ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov and five-time Tour de France winner Miguel Indurain. As a sportsman himself, cycling more than 150 km a week and a dedicated hiker, he was able to develop empathy with his patients comforting them in the way of returning to their previous levels of performances. He sponsored a professional team of cycling namely the Freddie Fu Cycling Team of the Allegheny Cycling Association.

Dr. Fu was the developer of many surgical techniques that we are using in our daily practice. In 2008 UPMC attracted 200 orthopaedic surgeons and sports medicine specialist from all around the world for a summit to share his breakthrough technique for ligament reconstruction. He quoted as “This technique will provide better rotational control” for describing his double bundle anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction. He authored many biomechanical studies on the shoulder and knee joints with Dr. Jon Warner, many of which were awarded and provided the foundation for the renowned research: “Anatomic Anterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction: A Changing Paradigm”. He focused on the proprioceptive function of the ACL and studied the increased incidence of ACL tears in female athletes.
A deep investigation into Freddie Fu’s life justifies before long, his success as a researcher and a man of science. In a constant pursuit of improving ACL reconstruction surgery, Dr. Fu quickly realized that he needed to go out of his operating theatre and travel back in history and evolution. He went deep into the anatomical studies of fossils, early hominids and approached Dr. Owen Lovejoy for exchanging opinions during the breakthrough reconstruction of Lucy, the 3.2-million-year-old upright walking human skeletal remains discovered in Ethiopia 40 years ago. He filled the missing pieces while conducting surgery on a Pittsburgh Zoo mandrill monkey who was complaining of knee pain. These studies of a highest diversity paved the way of his famous “double-bundle” reconstruction technique.

Anterior cruciate ligament was incontrovertibly a passion for Dr. Fu. Even his description for ACL teaches a lot for us who “claim” treating adequately this intriguing structure: “Physicians have looked at the ACL like meat in a supermarket. But the real ACL is like a pounding heart...it’s a really active, beautiful structure.”

A recent study in the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* reports that Freddie H. Fu is the top author publishing on the ACL, with 378 articles accounting for 2% of all articles published on the subject. The authors found that Dr. Fu had published 13 articles of the top-100 cited papers on ACL reconstruction, which is a higher number than any other author in the area. His articles were cited more than 60,000 times, which can be referred as nothing but “respectable”.

A Teacher

Freddie Fu was an indulgent and enthusiastic teacher of an incredible number of former students, fellows, and observers. His vision elucidated the ACL surgery to the best practice and helped surgeons all around the world to perfectonate their own practice. Some of us were blessed with the opportunity to watch him perform, to ask him questions in person and watch the masterpiece from the first rank. Nevertheless, since he elegantly engraved in our architecture, the philosophy of spreading the knowledge and the experience, we shared the treasure and dispersed his legacy to the next generations. Thus, in time Dr. Fu had a global community of his followers who run relays to ameliorate the treatment of sports injuries.

It is hard to remain restrained while hearing Dr. Fu’s former students all around the world sharing tributes to him, eliminating any doubt about the depth and value of his monumental legacy especially as a teacher.

A Social Man

Dr. Fu has always been more than meets the eye, more than a dedicated surgeon. He played lead guitar in a rock band as a teenager, participated in basketball and swimming. At Dartmouth, he played on the school’s champion ping-pong team, served on the Chinese and International student associations. His taste in art was profound and was an enthusiastic supporter of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre and the Pittsburgh Symphony.

Dr. Fu is also acknowledged as a humanitarian and benefactor of many local causes. In 2016, Pittsburgh City Council recognized his community engagements, apart from his endeavors in medicine, education, and research, declaring September 13 as “Dr. Freddie Fu Day” in the city. In his Presidential Address of the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine in 2009, he beautifully underlined that the way of making the world a better place is to give back to his community: “It doesn’t need to involve lots of money and can be very simple” he quotes.

While saying farewell to a beloved friend, we are not aware that our loss is more than we can sadly discern, presently. Freddie Fu was not just a successful surgeon with an extraordinary personality. If we cannot enlarge our perception to recognize the loss of the humanity itself, his legacy could not remain farther than echoing in every other conversation. Freddie Fu was a school of philosophy as in the antique Greece, was a system of logic, a teaching on its own. As former fellows of this admirable school, we promise you and to his respectable memory that we will transmit the code to the future generations. In this way, his bright light will never fade away.

References