

2010 Longwoods Scholar Dr. Davy C.H. Cheng

Morgan Holmes

Launched in 2010 in conjunction with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, the Longwoods Scholar program honours leaders in Canada's healthcare sector who are at the forefront of research, practice and policy.

By all accounts, 2010 has been a momentous year for Dr. Davy Cheng. And that's really saying something given that the man in question has, for well over a decade, been publicly recognized as one of Canada's – indeed, the world's – most accomplished clinical researchers and healthcare administrators.

The year 2010 began with a personal celebration for this global expert in cardiac anesthesia and critical care, perioperative blood management and evidence-based clinical practice: this year is the 40th anniversary of Cheng's arrival in Canada. "Growing up in Hong Kong," he recalls, "I knew many people who moved to the United States or Great Britain, either to attend university or to settle permanently. Gazing back now, 1970 is a distant memory, but I've never regretted my decision to study and settle in Canada."

On the career front, in March 2010 Cheng was selected to receive the University of Western Ontario's top award for academics: the Distinguished University Professorship Award. In the official profile that accompanied the announcement, Cheng's "vision, leadership, teaching and research" were cited as having "advanced academic anesthesia not only at Western, but also nationally and internationally." Just three months later, Cheng was also selected to receive the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society Research Recognition Award for his major contributions to anesthesia research in Canada.

Most recently, in July 2010, Cheng became the inaugural Longwoods scholar. "We are immensely proud that Davy Cheng accepted our invitation," says Longwoods publisher Anton Hart. "With his research expertise and administrative prowess, Dr. Cheng fully embodies the knowledge, skills and values the Longwoods Scholar program was designed to honour and support."



Photo Credit: Kathy Stuart, Medical Photographer, London Health Sciences Centre.

A Passion for Patient Care

Cheng traces his interest in anesthesia back to his days as a medical student (1979–1983) in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. It was then that he first realized "what a truly marvellous profession anesthesia is." In Cheng's view, "There aren't too many other areas of medicine that provide instant clinical feedback and allow one to care for infants who are taking their first breaths all the way to patients who are 90 and require a hip or heart valve replacement."

Delving further into his philosophy of care, Cheng remarks that "patients' well-being is at the core of everything for which I strive. I probably inherited that perspective from my grandfather, who was a general practitioner, and my mother, who was a nurse. Early on in my life, both of them instilled in me a regard for caring for *the people* who are directly affected by our work."

This sturdy patient focus is the foundation of Cheng's clinical research and practice. On that score, one of Cheng's most impactful and lauded medical innovations has been his instrumental role in landmark studies on fast-track cardiac anesthesia

and surgery recovery. This research has led directly to changes in peri-operative anesthesia care and post-operative recovery for cardiac surgical patients the world over. By decreasing the length of intensive care unit and hospital stays and by lowering the rate of post-operative complications, fast-track cardiac anesthesia and recovery has resulted in significant reductions in patient morbidity and much-improved resource utilization.

A Scholar and Leader

Today, Davy Cheng wears two professional hats. As a scholar, he is a distinguished university professor in and the chair of the Department of Anesthesia and Perioperative Medicine at Western's Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry. As a healthcare leader, he is chief of the Department of Anesthesia and Perioperative Medicine at the London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC) and London's St Joseph's Health Care (SJHC).

Only nine years ago, Cheng was working in Toronto's University Health Network (UHN) as the medical director of the Cardiovascular Surgery Intensive Care Unit Cardiac Program. At the time, he was also the Toronto General Hospital's director of cardiac anesthesia and intensive care and deputy anesthesiologist-in-chief. Among his many accomplishments at UHN, Cheng was instrumental in the establishment of the R. Fraser Elliott Research chair in cardiac anesthesia.

In 2001, however, Cheng was recruited to Western and LHSC/SJHC by Mr. Tony Dagnone (then president and chief executive officer [CEO] of LHSC), Mr. Cliff Nordal (then president and CEO of SJHC) and Dr. Carol Herbert (then dean of Western's medical school). "The time and the place were right for what I wanted to achieve," Cheng recalls. "I was confident that in London I would have an unmatched opportunity and support to advance my administrative skills and to apply evidence-based research knowledge to patients. I was also keen to use my new executive position to further healthcare delivery within the context of a major academic health sciences centre, and to promote innovative health science and healthcare policy shifts at the institutional, provincial, national and international levels."

As the rest of this profile illustrates, Cheng's ambitions were met with resounding success.

Research Excellence

"Few people I know can remotely match what Davy has accomplished in the past 20 years," says Dr. Vincent Chan, president of the American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine and professor of anesthesia at University of Toronto. "His achievements are simply extraordinary and his research in anesthesia is indisputable." Dr. Douglas Boyd, professor of clinical surgery and director of robotics and biosurgery at the University of California, Davis, says, "Dr. Cheng is unique in that he is esteemed not only among his peers in anesthesia, but also among physicians practising both cardiac surgery and

critical care." A quick and partial survey of Cheng's scholarly accomplishments reveals the truth of these claims.

To date, Cheng's research has led to over 124 peer-reviewed scientific papers and more than 44 chapters/books and online educational modules. The handbook *Perioperative Care in Cardiac Anesthesia and Surgery*, which he edited with Dr. Tirone David, professor and chief of cardiac surgery at the University Health Network, appeared in 2006 and has been well received by cardiac centres around the world (including in a Chinese edition). Cheng has also shared his expertise as a visiting professor in over 80 universities and cardiac centres across Canada and the globe, and in 2007 he was elected to serve as the Canadian member on the board of trustees of the International Anesthesia Research Society, the world's oldest and most prestigious anesthesia society. That same year, Cheng was also elected as a fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (FCAHS), an honour that recognizes his immense contributions to the promotion of health science.

"The name Davy Cheng is ubiquitous in our field, and his reputation for exemplary science is unparalleled," notes Dr. Hilary Grocott, professor of anesthesia and surgery at the University of Manitoba. To this glowing summary, Dr. Carol Herbert adds, Cheng's "knowledge-transfer efforts and translational clinical research have significantly improved the perioperative cardiac anesthesia and surgical care of patients in Canada and around the world."

Cheng's significant global contributions were recently recognized by the Chinese Society of Anesthesiology. In September 2009, at the 30th-anniversary meeting of the Chinese Society of Anesthesiology and the Chinese Medical Association, Cheng was selected as one of 10 international anesthesiologists – and the only Canadian – to receive an Outstanding Contribution Award for the development of anesthesiology in China.

Administrative Excellence

When Cheng arrived in London in September 2001, anesthesia was spread across three departments and two institutions (LHSC and SJHC). Largely as a result of Cheng's administrative vision and leadership, London now boasts a consolidated Department of Anesthesia and Perioperative Medicine that has risen to become one of the top academic anesthesiology departments not only in Canada but around the world. In 2007, Cheng was awarded the Joint Medical Advisory Committee Award at LHSC/SJHC for his outstanding leadership and contributions to the success of initiatives aligning the strategic directions of London's teaching hospitals aimed at improving patient care and outcomes.

When asked how he accomplished this major organizational feat, Cheng underscores the importance of a personal leadership style that is both positive and collaborative: "Whether I am directing a research project or managing my department, I strive to ensure that my colleagues clearly understand our objectives

and values, and I make a concerted effort to hear and respond to their concerns.”

That said, Cheng is the first to acknowledge that change management of the kind he executed is rarely smooth sailing “because there’s always a portion of resisters to change whom you need to convince.” Only by being “honest and open,” by “setting an example through my own performance” and by “holding everyone – including me – accountable,” Cheng reasons, was success possible.

Dr. George Djaiani of Toronto General Hospital’s Department of Anesthesia and Pain Management sums up his colleague’s ingredients for administrative success thus: “Davy surrounds himself with good people and gets them to do what they are best at, consequently adding great value to the team and department. He also helps others to think clearly and to make good decisions.” Cheng, says Djaiani, “is always approachable” and “always has time to listen,” yet he is also consistently “firm and convincing” in his decision-making.

As part of Cheng’s continuing quest to improve his leadership capacity, he recently completed the Advanced Health Leadership Program at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School. Building on earlier lessons learned at the Harvard School of Public Health, Cheng credits the Rotman experience with intensifying his understanding of the contributions of and obstacles faced by a broad spectrum of healthcare providers and policy makers.

Future Goals

Looking ahead to a future that is challenging but replete with potential, one of Cheng’s main goals is “to push forward evidence-based best practices that promote patients’ well-being.” But doing so, he contends, will require finding innovative ways to address the fiscally unsustainable nature of Canada’s healthcare system. “Our solutions need to emphasize meaningful patient outcomes and value,” Cheng remarks. “If we tackle the challenges of budgets and human resources with that in mind, we will find ways to resolve our local, provincial and national disparities. I am not naïve, but I am optimistic.”

As the inaugural Longwoods scholar, Cheng will have many opportunities to share his ideas and recommendations with healthcare policy makers and administrators across Canada. **HQ**

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