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Tajuk : Eye doctor comes home to serve after 15 years in UK

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OUR eyes play a crucial role in our perception of everything around us, but not everyone takes good care of their eyes possibly due to ignorance.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) recently engaged Prof Dr Lim Lik Thai, an eye specialist with double sub-specialist qualifications, to head its Department of Ophthalmology under the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

thesundaypost interviewed Kuching born and bred Dr Lim who recently returned home from the UK.

The ophthalmologist talked about how he got into this line of work and the challenges faced in the hope that more young people would be interested.

Tell us about yourself.

I hail from Kuching and studied in Kuching and Miri before attending medical school for my pre-clinical years at the International Medical University (IMU) in Kuala Lumpur. I then completed my clinical years and obtained my medical degree from Queen's University Belfast, UK. After completing my housemanship and a year of training in general medicine in Belfast, I moved to West of Scotland, with Glasgow as base, for my eye specialist training.

After completing it, including my first sub-specialty fellowship training in Glasgow. I moved

the UK, I returned to Malaysia, initially working privately for a short while in Kuala Lumpur before accepting the job of professor and head of Unimas' Department of Ophthalmology.

What made you decide to study ophthalmology?

I was in higher secondary school when I got my inspiration. During school break, I was sent to the home for the blind and visually-impaired in my hometown as a volunteer.

It was there that I got to see first hand the members who, although visually challenged, showed perseverance, dedication and courage to make an honest living without expecting handouts. It touched me to see them struggling and this was the moment the inspiration came to me to be an ophthalmologist (eye surgeon) so I can help people see better, upholding the motto 'Ut Omnes Videant' translated as 'So That All May See' of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists UK where I received my specialist training.

Since that moment, I wanted to be the best ophthalmologist I can be as making a difference to people's sight and lives is, in itself, a reward and blessing.

As I grew in seniority over the years, my teaching scope expanded from teaching undergraduate medical students to post-graduate students and junior specialist trainees - both medically and surgically. I hope that through the effort, many more doctors will benefit and they would, in turn, help more patients and propagate their skills and knowledge.

What made you decide to take up teaching at Unimas in addition to serving as a visiting ophthalmologist at the Eye Specialist Centre?

Ever since I landed in the UK over 15 years ago to continue my undergraduate medical education



with Prof Dr Lim Lik Thai

them by taking things in my stride, seeing each obstacle as an opportunity to improve and grow stronger, more dedicated and resilient.

Initially, I thought that being an eye surgeon was good enough, but I realised that more could be done during my early years of training when I wandered into the world of teaching medical students.

Medical students would approach me for tutorials and word soon got around that I gave free tutorials. Since then I received more and more requests for ophthalmology tutorials, igniting in me a passion to deliver the best ophthalmology education to my juniors.

Unimas which does not have its own teaching hospital is keen to explore avenues to provide better service to the community. It wants to be involved in research and collaboration with public and private institutions for a win-win situation.

Unimas also inked a memorandum of agreement (MoA) with Eye Specialist Centre (ESC) in April this year to open new channels to provide enhanced ophthalmology service, and create a platform to do collaborative research and training.

realised that contributing to ophthalmology not only involves clinical and surgical work, but also teaching and research.

I feel that being a clinician, surgeon and academician is my calling, and what better place to settle down and contribute than in Unimas, Sarawak's first government university medical school.

That is the reason I took up the job in Unimas Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. It is indeed an honour and privilege to serve the community through Unimas.

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Combo photo of Dr Lim performing cataract surgery (picture top) and checking the eyes of a patient (picture bottom) in Africa during a one-month stint in Africa in 2012. — Photos courtesy of Prof Dr Lim Lik Thai

surgery.

After my specialist training (including complex cataract surgery), I sub-specialised in glaucoma (did a sub-specialty fellowship in the UK) including dealing with complex glaucoma and related diseases, and after that sub-specialised in vitreo-retinal surgery and retina diseases, covering retina surgery and management of retinal diseases.

I chose the two sub-specialties which happen to be lacking in Sarawak. I hope to contribute

Do you think that there are more eye diseases today, especially among young children accustomed to playing with computer gadgets at the expense of outdoor activities?

There certainly does seem to be an increasing incidence of short-sightedness (myopia) among our younger population. Although some are inherited and progressive, other cases may be linked to lifestyle including the culture of looking at gadgets close up.