

Dr. Philip Eng from S'pore shares expertise on respiratory diseases



Professor Philip Eng

Professor Philip Eng, one of Singapore's leading respiratory physicians and a Senior Consultant at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore was in Sri Lanka recently as a Guest Speaker at the 47th Annual Academic Sessions organised by the Ceylon College of Physicians. He spoke on respiratory diseases such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer. A graduate from the National University of Singapore in 1984, and later completing Masters of Medicine (Internal Medicine) in 1989, he then went on to do advance training in Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and the University of California, San Diego, both in USA. In 1997, Prof. Eng was appointed Head of the Department of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH). During his nine-year tenure at SGH, he has built one of the strongest departments in the region in respiratory and critical care medicine with strong linkages with chest radiology, thoracic surgery and thoracic oncology. Prof. Eng specialises in the evaluation and management of lung conditions including chronic cough, asthma, COPD, pneumonia, lung cancer, smoking cessation and pleural effusion. Prof. Eng's main interests are in lung cancer, bronchoscopy (both flexible and rigid), intensive care management and chest radiology. He has performed more than 400 rigid bronchoscopies, stents, NdYAG lasers and Argon Plasma photo-coagulation. Having treated patients for asthma, which he says is mostly misunderstood although it is considered one of the most common, Prof. Eng says that wheezing is not the only symptom of asthma since even chronic cough, chest pain are also symptoms of the disease. "Asthma is preventable but it is mainly based on controlling the disease by taking the prescribed medicine continuously as instructed by the physician while adopting a healthy life style," he says and adds that with proper medication asthma patients need not limit themselves; many professional athletes are asthma patients but it has not stopped them from performing. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a type of obstructive lung disease characterised by chronically poor air flow which typically worsens over time. The symptoms include shortness of breath, cough, debility and sputum production. Smoking is the most common cause of COPD, with a number of other factors such as air pollution and genetics playing a smaller role. Long-term exposure to these irritants causes an inflammatory response in the lungs resulting in narrowing of the small airways and breakdown of lung tissue known as emphysema. The diagnosis is based on poor airflow as measured by lung function tests. In contrast to asthma,

the airflow reduction does not improve significantly with the administration of medication. Prof. Eng states that he has seen a sharp rise in COPD but is a disease that takes a longer period of time to develop and unfortunately has terrible side effects mainly debility. He further adds that the World Health Organization has estimated that in 2020 COPD will be the fourth main disease for death in the world. Fortunately there are medicines to counteract the side effects of the disease but Prof. Eng adds that the root cause of COPD needs to be tackled that is quitting smoking and preventing air pollution. Lung cancer is another disease that creates concern which is mainly caused by smoking or passive smoking and Prof. Eng add that there is a sharp rise in this type of cancer which is a cause for concern. He adds that in most developed countries smoking has sharply declined but more must be done to create awareness regarding this disease. Prof. Eng says that proper medical treatment at the correct time can cure lung cancer and he advises that CT scans must be done on a regular basis to ensure early detection. Today, latest surgical techniques and modern anesthesia have made it easier to treat this disease. Prof. Eng adds that research points to certain types of molecular mutations in the lungs and some of such mutations or oncogenes as they are called are EGFR, KRAS, ALK and ROS1, which cause lung cancer. He says doctors are now using less chemotherapy and more oral drugs to fight this disease. “Dr. Philip Eng can be consulted at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore or other Parkway Hospitals in Singapore through The Parkway Patient Assistance Centre in Sri Lanka,” says Parkway Patients Assistance Centre in Sri Lanka Director Shuvo H.