

## Doctor Felix Chan

Often the winners of a Vocational Excellence Award are in fields that require some explanation due to their highly specialised nature. But how does one condense and convey the enormous demands and vast scope of their profession into the few minutes we have available? Well, perhaps I can make Dr Felix Chan's career more accessible by starting with a format everyone can relate to.

Wanted: Gynaecological Oncologist. Job description: You will be one of 38 specialists in the whole of Australia working in this poorly-funded field of medicine; be on call seven days a week; have a case load with a high proportion of emergency patients; often see patients at an advanced stage of cancer, and therefore have to be able to cope with a physically and emotionally exhausting workload. Grim statistical patient survival rates; comparatively poor remuneration. Apply to Health Department.

Felix entered his profession after 15 years of study in general and specialist medicine, which might explain why there are so few surgeons in this field. He has attained a very high level of skill and, consequently, other specialists refer the more complicated cases to him as he has the ability to operate and save lives where others may not. Hence his caseload consists of a large number of high-risk, life-threatening patients.

To understand the effect of working in such a demanding vocation, consider that Felix is often required to do emergency ovarian cancer surgery on teenage girls and young women due to the lack of awareness of the disease among this age group and regularly assist at operations where blood loss during hysterectomies and childbirth could result in the woman's death. He once removed a 12-kilogram ovarian tumour from a 22-year old, who recovered and went on to have a baby from the one ovary Felix was able to save.

Pressure-cooker stuff! One could be forgiven for wanting to cut out at the end of a working day and put their feet up. But Felix is also devoted to the goals of raising funds and public awareness, of seeing better health outcomes for women in general, and those living in disadvantaged areas in particular.

For this reason, he spends a lot of his time in the public health system. He set up the first clinic for gynaecological oncology in Nepean and Liverpool Hospitals, and pioneered the use of laproscopic surgery, which is less invasive, less painful, has less risk of infection and offers faster recovery.

Presenting statistics and programs to you opens a window on what Felix does, but it is the human results they deliver that really tells the story. Improving and saving the lives of women with gynaecological cancers means that children have their mothers, mothers can raise their children, husbands have their wives...families are intact.

Ladies and gentlemen, Dr Felix Chan.