

## PROFESSOR EARL R. OWEN – IN MEMORIAM



This is editorial letter 16, which I submit to you as your Editor-in-Chief of *International Surgery*, the flagship Journal of the International College of Surgeons. *International Surgery* has had ten Editors-in-Chief since establishment of the Journal and I am the 11<sup>th</sup> Editor-in-Chief.

This editorial letter is dedicated to the memory of Professor Earl R. Owen, who passed away peacefully on May 22, 2014, in Sydney, Australia. He was a world famous surgeon who, with his superb academic achievements, made numerous scientific contributions to the advancement of world surgery, and who was a true humanitarian. While it is very sad for me to communicate this memoriam, it is my deep honor to do so, to remember him, as he was my greatest friend and mentor.

I first came to know Professor Owen way back in 1979 when, as a pioneer in microsurgery, he ran a course on the subject that I attended. He taught me how to perform gynecological pelvic microsurgery when I was then working at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia. The achievements of Professor Owen are innumerable, outstanding, and extremely difficult to emulate. He is remembered for his pioneering work in producing the world's first hand transplant using his microsurgical techniques in Lyon, France, 1998. This was followed in 2000 with the first double hand transplantation.

In a sense, it all began in 1969, when Professor Owen designed the first microscopic tools for surgery and founded the International Microsurgical Society. He was the first to replant an index finger successfully in 1970 and performed the first successful micro-reversal of a vasectomy in 1971, and the first successful micro-reversal of a woman's tubal sterilization in 1972. He was a true pioneer. In my last editorial letter in *International Surgery* issue 99.3, I quoted Albert Einstein "One cannot help but

be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality." Professor Owen is quoted in reference to performing microsurgery "I love doing it. It's meticulous and it brings me in contact with the Almighty, because I see living tissues in close-up."

Professor Owen was a distinguished Fellow in the International College of Surgeons. He served as World President of the International College of Surgeons 1996–1998. Following his World Presidency, he remained fully active and committed to the College and was dedicated to the continual improvement of the College. Professor Owen and his work and leadership served as a superb example of what a Fellow in the College should be. As part of the College, and in his life in general, he was a magnanimous humanitarian. He organized surgical teams to Shanghai and Beijing and taught microsurgery. He did the same in Malaysia and other countries. He fully endorsed and supported the World Health Organization and its programs. He believed that the International College of Surgeons and the World Health Organization share a common philosophy and mission around the world. He was a very talented pianist and overall musician and made time to lecture in many universities and to some of the most major symphony orchestras.

A wonderful man who perhaps was disappointed that he was not granted more time to accomplish even more as a surgeon and as a humanitarian. The world of surgery has lost a pioneering leader and the International College of Surgeons has lost a truly great friend. Professor Earl R. Owen will always be remembered by me and all.

Professor Christopher Chen  
Editor-in-Chief  
*International Surgery*