

Dr. Eng Meng Tan August 26, 1926 - March 9, 2024 La Jolla, California

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Dr. Eng Tan passed away on March 9, 2024, at the age of 97 at his home in La Jolla, California surrounded by his wife and two sons. He was born and raised in Malaysia and came to the United States where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts & Science degree in 1952 and a Doctor of Medicine degree in 1956 from Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD). After his MD, he continued medical training and became involved in medical research which took him to an internship in Medicine at Duke University (Durham, NC), residency in Medicine at Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, OH) and research in Immunology and Medicine under the supervision of Henry Kunkel at the Rockefeller University (New York, NY). He then served 2 years as an Assistant Professor at The Washington University School of Medicine prior to arriving at The Scripps in La Jolla California in 1967 where he became a Full Member of the Division of Allergy and Immunology in 1970. In 1977 he moved to the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center and then returned to La Jolla in 1982 as Director of the W.M. Keck Autoimmune Disease Center at The Scripps Research Institute where he remained for the rest of his career.

Dr. Tan had special relationships with his mentors. Eugene Stead, the Chair of Medicine at Duke, was his role model in patient care emphasizing care for the whole person and not just the illness they had. Charles Rammelkamp, the Chairman of Medicine at Case Western Reserve, was his role model of concern for the future directions of interns and

residents who had entrusted their future to his teaching and conduct. And Henry Kunkel, an outstanding immunologist, was a model of high standards of research and experimental approaches.

Dr. Tan clearly became an exemplar of what he had been taught through influencing the numerous career pathways of trainees from the United States, Germany, Japan, Sweden, Taiwan, Mexico, Canada, United Kingdom, Brazil, Israel, Australia, China, and other countries. His work was primarily focused on rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, systemic sclerosis (scleroderma), Sjögren Disease and later in his career autoimmune aspects of malignancy. Remarkably, his work sparked innovation in novel diagnostic biomarkers and technologies as well as classification of some conditions as autoimmune in nature, notably mixed connective tissue disease and others that are now known to exhibit ‘autoimmune’ aspects. The ability to make an earlier diagnosis from identification of autoantibodies and related biomarkers has extended the life expectancy and increased the quality of life of people living with lupus and other autoimmune diseases.

He published over 350 peer-reviewed research and review articles, as well as books and book chapters cited more than 67,000 times and attended by an h-index of 110. When asked in 2023 what he thought were his greatest achievements, he referred to two articles that bracketed his entire career of over half a century. The first was a manuscript published in 1966 on the seminal discovery of autoantibodies to the Smith (Sm) antigen, which revolutionized the diagnosis of lupus and launched his incredible career. The other was a 2016 review article on rheumatoid arthritis highlighting 60 years of research observations and providing insights on its etiology, pathology and potential treatments.

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He served in numerous national and international leadership roles including President of the American College of Rheumatology (1984-85), in the 1980s he was founding member and Chair of the International Union of Immunological Society's Autoantibody Standardization Committee, and a founding and active member of the Henry Kunkel Society. In the 1980s he also chaired advisory committees for the Arthritis Foundation and was co-author of revised criteria that included autoantibodies used in the classification of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus. He also served on advisory committees of the National Institutes of Health, World Health Organization, Department of Health and Human Services, and the American Lupus Society. Among the numerous awards he received in recognition of his career accomplishments, in 1989 he was the recipient of the Carol Nachman Prize for Rheumatology (awarded in Wiesbaden, Germany) and the National Arthritis Foundation Howley Prize (awarded in Phoenix, Arizona).

During his training, Dr Tan greatly respected and appreciated the guidance of mentors who shaped his values as a caring physician and a researcher with high standards who knows what next to do, and most important to him, mentorship itself. As a leader in the field and committed mentor, he passed along those values in his gentle and caring yet firm demeanor to nearly 100 physicians and scientists who trained or collaborated with him, always encouraging them to think independently and to perform careful and thorough experiments. In his days as Professor Emeritus at Scripps, he continued working with his former fellows in guiding their research, quoting English playwright Noël Coward about his continued love of work, "Work is fun. There is no fun like work!" Many of these trainees have become successful medical investigators with established laboratories and medical practices in countries around the world. Dr Tan leaves with us a remarkable continuing legacy.

Reviews of Eng Tan's incredible career were published in *The Rheumatologist* in 2011, <https://www.the-rheumatologist.org/article/he-taught-us-to-always-go-deeper/>, and in *Lupus*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0961203316664598>, the latter written by two of his appreciative mentees on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

Dr Tan enjoyed socializing and his presence at parties was heard from his infectious laugh. He had extensive knowledge in many other subjects including history, literature, poetry, classical music, and people found conversation with him interesting and enjoyable. He had an ear and curiosity for languages and was not reluctant to speak them. He won a contest at an international meeting for singing in German the Ode to Joy from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and delivered a lecture in Spanish upon receiving awards in Mexico and Spain. His favorite physical activity was tennis which he started as a young adult and introduced to his sons. In his advanced age he had much physical decline, yet his memory remained remarkably sharp. He often mentioned that his life philosophy was largely based on the profound wisdom of Niebuhr's serenity prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change what I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." He believed that achieving serenity even in the most difficult circumstances leads to happiness and contentment. And he held that showing kindness to others is a strength and the most important virtue a person can have.

Dr. Tan is survived by his loving wife of 62 years, Liselotte (Lisa). He is also survived by two sons, Philip (Alina) and Peter (Minh), four grandchildren, Kamila, Carson, Kasimir, and Brandon, brother Eng Seng Tan (Chun Sang Choy, "Jyau Jyau"), and sister Cheng Seh Tan Khoo (Teik Beng Khoo). He was preceded in death by seven other siblings and his grandson Xavier. The recent loss of Xavier helped to increase understanding, acceptance, kindness, and empathy in the family and with his extended family and friends – virtues that Dr. Tan highly valued.

If you wish to memorialize Dr. Tan with a donation, a donation in his name can be communicated to the Arthritis Foundation at <https://www.arthritis.org/ways-to-give>.

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