



In Memoriam: Remembering Professor Hun-Ki Min (1928–2021)

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On March 6, 2021, the news that Dr. Hun-Ki Min, Professor Emeritus at Seoul National University College of Medicine (SNUCM), passed away deeply saddened all of us. Professor

Min, whose compassion and thoughtfulness left a vivid impression in the minds of his students and followers, was the earliest pioneer of endocrinology in Korea, and was a tremendous luminary in the context of Korean medical societies as a whole, as well as in the field of endocrinology. Professor Min contributed to the advancement of internal medicine (endocrinology, in particular) and fostered many outstanding successors.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the history of endocrinology in Korea began with Professor Min. Born in Seoul in 1928, he studied at and graduated from SNUCM in 1951. After graduating from medical school, he participated in the Korean War as a military officer on the front lines. When he returned as a teaching assistant in the Department of Internal Medicine at SNUCM in 1954, Korean medicine was like a desolate no-man's-land. When Professor Min received *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine* (second edition) sent by his younger brother, who was studying abroad in the United States in the mid-1950s, he said that he was very much impressed by the novelty and enormity of Western medicine. At that time, domestic medicine was mainly focused on infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, typhus, and parasitic infestations. As such, endocrinology must have been a shock to him, considering that diabetes—one of the most common diseases at the moment—was extremely rare back in those days. Thanks to the textbook, Professor Min

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became fascinated by endocrinology, and he devoted himself to cultivating endocrinology in Korea from scratch after the Korean War. He was then formally trained as an endocrinologist at the University of Minnesota from 1959 to 1960 as a clinical fellow through the Minnesota Project. After he returned to Seoul, he dedicated himself to fostering a modern clinically-oriented medical system in Korea.

After being appointed as a full-time instructor in the Department of Internal Medicine at SNUCM in 1961, he contributed to the development of endocrinology and internal medicine for over 30 years. From July 1975 to July 1982, he served as the Head Professor of the Department of Internal Medicine at SNUCM and the Director of the Department of Internal Medicine at Seoul National University Hospital. Of note, from 1970 to 1979, he served as the chief physician of the late President Chung Hee Park. He contributed to the establishment of the Korean Endocrine Society and the Korean Diabetes Association and served as president of both. In addition, he contributed to many domestic and international academic societies, serving as a board member of the International Diabetes Federation, Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Western Pacific District of the International Diabetes Federation, and an editorial board member of *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice*. In recognition of his achievements, he was decorated with the Order of Civil Merit, Moran Medal in 1984, awarded the Dong-A Medical Culture Award in 1991, and served as a senior member of the National Academy of Medicine of Korea and a lifetime member of the Korean Academy of Science and Technology.

When treating patients throughout his career as a physician, Professor Min objectively and systematically observed symptoms and signs, and then logically diagnosed and treated patients. In this process, he compared clinical symptoms and signs with laboratory findings based on physiology, especially endocrine physiology. In addition, when seeing patients in his outpatient clinic, he always kept the latest editions of medical textbooks next to him to make sure of the most appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Some people might think that his behavior in his clinic was somewhat odd for a master clinician. However,

his thorough and meticulous clinical attitude greatly impressed his students, exemplifying the characteristics of the master clinician who was faithful to the basics. He frequently said, "The joy of learning and its practice is endless." He was passionate about diagnosing and treating patients, as well as conducting clinical research. He discovered many of the first cases of rare endocrine diseases in Korea despite the lack of appropriate testing facilities. A representative example of this was the discovery of primary aldosteronism in the late 1960s. The anecdote in which a patient with primary aldosteronism was accurately diagnosed and underwent surgery despite an underserved clinical environment, in which the diagnosis could not be assisted by hormonal tests or advanced imaging methods, remains a legend among his students. He laid the foundation for endocrinology in Korea by publishing the clinical features of several rare endocrine diseases, including more than 100 cases of adrenal tumors.

Professor Min showed a passion not only for medical research and treatment, but also for the education of younger students. He spent considerable time preparing lectures for students, always reading the latest textbooks and journal articles. He held an endocrinology research meeting every week, instructing his students on logical reasoning. In addition, he published *Clinical Endocrinology*, the first endocrinology textbook in Korea, in which he organized the basics and clinical knowledge of endocrinology to help many Korean doctors understand endocrinology and endocrine diseases. Many of the leading endocrinology experts in Korea are the direct disciples of Professor Min. Moreover, Professor Min taught that it is important to provide compassion as well as medical treatment to patients, saying that doctors should first view patients not only as mere medical cases, but as human beings who feel pain and fear. He lived a compassionate and righteous life. As such, he taught the importance of working for others than oneself, being happy with the people around oneself, and overcoming social injustice to reach high ideals.

Professor Min, a pioneer and a historical figure of endocrinology in Korea, will remain an eternal teacher who gives wisdom and lessons to many of his followers. May he rest in peace.