

SURGICAL ONCOLOGY SOCIETY OF THE PHILIPPINES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN (as told by its founding father - Prof. Adriano Laudico)

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I was filled with excitement on the appointed day and time that I will get to talk with the revered founder of our society - Prof. Adriano V. Laudico. I suddenly remembered when I was still a struggling resident and I get to hear him lecture on topics basically in surgical oncology in the annual meetings of the Philippine College of Surgeons, it certainly helped in my desire to train and focus my practice in cancer surgery. He became its president in 1993 - coming out of the University of the Philippines - Philippine General Hospital where he also was a Vice Chair of the Department of Surgery. *“Just call me on my landline any time after lunch...”* his text message read a day before our scheduled interview. How I wished I could have done it face to face with the man who founded our society and gave home to surgeons like me whose interest is in the diagnosis and treatment of cancers needing surgery, but the pandemic won't allow me to do so. At exactly 2pm I called him on my cellphone. *“I told you to call me on my landline...”* he said, and after telling him that I have to call him on the cellular network because I'm in Mindanao he said ok and I immediately asked him *“so sir, how did the SOSP started?”* He retorted, with his usual firm voice... *“wait, let us put it all first in perspective, because you won't understand why the SOSP was created if you will not know the events and situations that led to the formation of the society...”* So I braced myself to listen and write the things he's about to tell me.

“I have no plans of putting up the SOSF years before it was born. I felt that the Philippine College of Surgeons through its Committee on Cancer was more than enough to address the needs of surgeons dealing with cancer, besides during those times - the only thing we do with solid tumors is to operate on them, the wider the margin the better...” However in the 60’s and early 70’s some surgeons who went to train outside the country started to come back and started focused practice in cancer surgery. They were the pioneers. The first one was Dr. Luciano SJ Sotto who was a gynecologist out of the Roswell Park Cancer Center who came back in the early 60s and established the section of Gynecologic Malignancy in UP PGH and eventually a fellowship program the led to the birth of SGOP in 1984. Dr. George Eufemio and Augusto Sarmiento also came back and joined Dr. Laudico in both the PCS and in training future general surgeons both in PGH and other training hospitals who eventually will be the future leaders of surgery and surgical oncology in the country. Other pioneers like Dr. Agapito Tuazon and Dr. Glicerio Bustamante also returned and became pioneers in their own institutions. Dr. Deogracias Custodio was the first medical oncologist to return to the country and started his practice at the Makati Medical Center and partnered with Dr. Laudico’s group at the UP-PGH where they eventually established the Section of Medical Oncology where they were eventually joined by Dr. Antonio Villalon who was both a Medical Oncologist and Radiation Oncologist out of training in Australia. In the 80s Dr. Samuel Ang returned from the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and went to his alma mater STUH to practice surgical oncology and was the first to give systemic treatment as well. Prominent young surgeons in the 70s and 80s like Dr. Edgardo Cortes, Dr. Arturo dela Pena, Dr. Nelson Cabaluna went

for further training in the US and Japan after finishing their general surgery in the country. The surgical oncology fellowship program at the UP-PGH was then established in 1986 which started producing locally trained surgical oncologists. Dr. Mark Richard Kho returned also and went to join the UP-PGH -with its now established surgical oncology program - from his fellowship training in the City of Hope Cancer Center. Many of these surgeons gained knowledge in the emerging adjuvant treatment at that time and introduced it in the country. There were also others whose name he can't recall who were also pioneers in Radiation Oncology, Medical Oncology and other disciplines that started to loosely shape the approach to treatment of cancer in the country. *"But one thing I can tell you, Rhoel, it was the surgeon who started it all in the country as far as cancer is concerned."* This wasn't surprising because even in the United States it was the surgeon as well through the Ewing Society which eventually became the Society of Surgical Oncology who pioneered not just the surgical management but even the adjuvant treatment of solid tumors.

We were more than an hour already in our conversation and I am still waiting for him to tell me how the SOSP was born. I'm starting to get anxious seeing my phone with less than 30% battery already. Then finally he started saying... *"it was in 1992, I was the Vice president of the Philippine College of Surgeons when the idea of creating the SOSP occurred to me. I felt that the surgeons dedicated in the treatment of cancer must be organized and united...there were some conflicts arising in the way solid organs are being treated and over treated with some modalities and we have to correct it. We should be at the forefront. Surgery is the primary treatment and we are the primary physicians for cancer...the cancer patient needs our help and guidance"* Thus, in a meeting with some

of his colleagues and lieutenants at that time - the Surgical Oncology Society of the Philippines was officially born - first holding its office at the PCS building with no less than the executive secretary of the college Ms. Annette Tolentino as its de-facto secretary. The society was immediately recognized by the Philippine College of Surgeons as a specialty society. The founding officers were the following;

President - Adriano V. Laudico, MD

Vice-President - Jose S. Ramirez, MD

Secretary - Arturo S. Dela Pena, MD

Treasurer - Abelardo M. Prodigalidad, MD

Directors:

Edgardo R. Cortez, MD

Franklin P. Atencio, MD

Florentino C. Doble, MD

Antonio B. Sison, MD

In 1998, the SOSOP became an affiliate of the World Federation of Surgical Oncology Societies. In the same year, Dr. Laudico handed over the presidency to Dr. Edgardo R. Cortez who further strengthened the society as more members joined (including me). He was followed by Dr. Arturo S. Dela Pena in 2001, who saw the establishment of more fellowship programs in Surgical Oncology. Dr. Alex Erasmo became the fourth president of the Society in 2004, where the SOSOP continued to take part in PCS led activities particularly in cancer surgery.

In May of 2014 - Dr. Alex Erasmo together with 2 past presidents - Dr. Cortez and Dela Pena called for a meeting in Davao City during the

PCS midyear convention to reinvigorate the SOSP. Dr. Alex Tan hosted a dinner where an agreement to elect a new set of officers and revitalize the society was agreed upon. It was indeed a historic evening in a city down south that the rebirth of the SOSP was realized. A new set of officers - with Dr. Samuel D. Ang as president was elected and was inducted during the 2014 PCS Annual Clinical Congress.

President - Dr. Samuel D. Ang

Vice-President - Dr. Nelson Cabaluna

Secretary - Dr. Gemma Uy

Treasurer - Dr. Rodney Dofitas

Board of Directors:

Dr. Gerald Alcid

Dr. Jose Rhoel C. De Leon

Dr. Dakila Delos Angeles

Dr. Alex L. Tan

Immediately, the new board went to work. The Surgical Oncology curriculum was standardized, revised and updated. The accredited training programs were visited. A membership process and qualifications were updated as well.

In 2015, the SOSP held its first Annual Convention which is now a highly sought venue for updates and learning in Surgical Oncology. More fellowship programs were also established all over the country - currently numbering to eight (8) accredited fellowship programs spread across Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. In 2020, in the midst of the worldwide pandemic, the society became a boarded specialty with the creation of the Philippine Board of Surgical Oncology, Inc. with Dr. Gerald Alcid as its chairman. The board has successfully given its first certifying written

examination (Part1) last 2020. The society also started collaborating with other specialties in oncology both in its activities and training program believing that a multi-disciplinary approach specially in complicated cancer cases is optimal. Its president - Dr. Samuel D. Ang was also appointed by his excellency President Rodrigo R. Duterte to the newly created NICCA council that will lead and direct the countries cancer prevention and management.

Dr. Laudico continued sharing his thoughts with me, his vision of a rational and cost effective treatment of cancer for all in the country, his proposed researches the society can pursue and much more - some from the thoughts of a true blue surgeon I cannot write here. We were more than two hours on the phone already and my battery is almost out. He finally said...*"I hope the SOSOP remain to be steadfast, do not surrender the leadership that is inherently ours. It is not that we don't want an MDT approach...No! We believe in the MDT process, but we should be able to tell the team what the evidence is saying, our graduates must have that thorough knowledge of all aspects of treatment, both the primary and the adjuvant... we have to be rational, and more importantly - we should remember that we are treating a human being and when the time comes that the best we can offer is quality of life, we have to stand up for our patients and make sure that indeed their remaining life will be meaningful and of real quality..."*

When we finally hang up, I felt privileged to have known direct from our founding father not just how our society was formed, but more importantly why it was created. I am truly inspired to pursue the vision he has created for us. Onward to the future - Surgical Oncology Society of the Philippines - for the Filipino cancer patients!