

In Memoriam: Waun Ki Hong



(August 13, 1942 - January 2, 2019)

Waun Ki Hong, MD, a Past President of the AACR, a Fellow of the AACR Academy, and a renowned medical oncologist, physician-scientist, and mentor, died Jan. 2, 2019, at age 76.

Dr. Hong was born in South Korea in 1942. He earned his medical degree from Yonsei University School of Medicine in 1967, then served in the South Korean Air Force as a flight surgeon during the Vietnam War. After completing his military service, he began an internship at Bronx/Lebanon Hospital in New York City, and then did his residency at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Boston.

Dr. Hong served a two-year medical oncology fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, then returned to the VA Medical Center as Chief of Medical Oncology. During his nine-year tenure, he helped establish the hospital's oncology training program. He would go on to train and mentor hundreds of young physician-scientists, both in the United States and in other countries. At least 60 of his trainees came from South Korea and went on to become chairs or directors of cancer centers in their home country.

In 1984, Dr. Hong joined MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston as chief of the Section of Thoracic Head and Neck Oncology. He would go on to become head of the Division of Cancer Medicine from 2001 until he retired in 2014. He also held the Samsung Distinguished University Chair in Cancer Medicine.

Among his numerous contributions to cancer research and treatment, Dr. Hong helped change the standard of care for head and neck cancer. He led clinical trials which showed that chemotherapy and radiotherapy was an effective alternative to laryngectomy for cancer of the larynx. That discovery dramatically improved the quality of life for patients with this disease and helped lay a foundation for organ preservation in numerous cancer types.

Dr. Hong's work also helped establish the concept of chemoprevention—using available treatments to prevent cancer from occurring in high-risk patients. He was the principal investigator of several clinical trials, including the Biomarker-Based Approaches of Targeted Therapy for Lung Cancer Elimination (BATTLE), which provided the foundation for personalized targeted therapy for lung cancer.

“He had legendary scientific integrity,” said longtime colleague and friend Daniel D. Karp, MD, medical director of the Department of Clinical Translational Research Center at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. “His data were impeccable, lending tremendous authority to his clinical trials. His work in cancer research was his passion, his love, and his hobby.”

Dr. Karp said Dr. Hong's enthusiasm for cancer research, his encyclopedic memory, and his love of mentoring combined to create a powerful legacy at MD Anderson and beyond. Colleagues on Thursday lauded his humanity, kindness, and generosity with his time and scientific knowledge.

Dr. Hong devoted countless hours of service to local and national organizations. He served on major science and policy committees for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the National Cancer Institute, and the President's Cancer Panel.

Dr. Hong became an active member of the AACR in 1982 and took on increasingly prominent leadership positions throughout his tenure. He served on the Board of Directors from 1996 to 1999 and was appointed Annual Meeting Program Committee Chair in 1999.

Dr. Hong was elected AACR President for the 2001-2002 term. During his presidency, he worked diligently to foster the field of cancer prevention, especially precision cancer prevention, and to advance the field of translational cancer medicine.

Throughout his time as an AACR member, Dr. Hong participated in more than 25 AACR committees, task forces, and scientific working groups. He was also a member of the Stand Up To Cancer Scientific Advisory Committee. He was an associate editor of *Cancer Research* from 1993-2002, deputy editor and senior editor for clinical trials and prevention for *Clinical Cancer Research* from 1996-2005, and held

editorial positions at *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, *Cancer Prevention Research*, and *Cancer Discovery*. Meanwhile, he wrote or contributed to more than 700 peer-reviewed scientific publications.

Among countless distinguished honors, Dr. Hong received the AACR-Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award in 1993, the AACR Joseph H. Burchenal Award in 2000, the David A. Karnofsky Award from the American Society of Clinical Oncology in 2000, the Gold Medal of Paris from the International Congress on Anti-Cancer Treatment in 2001, the AACR-Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation Award for Excellence in Cancer Prevention Research in 2003, and the American Cancer Society Medal of Honor Award in 2012. He was a member of the National Academy of Medicine, a Fellow of the American College of Physicians, and held an American Cancer Society Clinical Research Professorship, a lifetime honor presented in recognition of his distinguished career.

Dr. Hong was elected an Inaugural Fellow of the AACR Academy in 2013 and was honored with the AACR Margaret Foti Award for Leadership and Extraordinary Achievement in Cancer Research in 2016.

As a tribute to Dr. Hong's extraordinary contributions to cancer research, care, and prevention, in 2016 the AACR established the AACR Waun Ki Hong Award for Outstanding Achievement in Translational and Clinical Cancer Research. The award, which includes a lecture at the AACR Annual Meeting, is given each year to a young investigator who has conducted significant translational or clinical cancer research anywhere in the world.

"The American Association for Cancer Research is deeply saddened by the loss of Dr. Waun Ki Hong," said Margaret Foti, PhD, MD (hc), chief executive officer of the AACR. "His seminal research catalyzed several breakthroughs in cancer medicine and cancer prevention that improved treatment and survival for many patients, and it will leave a lasting legacy.

"Dr. Hong's dedication to mentoring clinical and postdoctoral fellows, his visionary leadership in cancer research at the national and international level, and his exceptional dedication to the AACR made him a true champion of the field," Foti continued. "He was my dear friend, and in his memory and honor, we will work even harder to realize the goal of saving more lives from cancer."

Services for Dr. Hong will be held Jan. 12, 2019, in Newport Beach, California.