

Nomination for the WFOT Honorary Fellow Award – Prof. Nathan Vytialingam
Dean, School of Occupational Therapy, University of Perdana
Dip. COT (Lond), Grad Dip Hlth Sc (W.Aust), Mapp Sc (Health) (W.Aust)

Citation

Professor Nathan Vytialingam graduated with a Diploma in Occupational Therapy from the London School of Occupational Therapy in the UK in 1976 and was awarded a Kellogg Fellowship to pursue his Master's degree in 1983/84 in Australia. With nearly 40 years of experience in occupational therapy, he started working as an occupational therapist in the 1970s and has worked in clinical settings in the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore and Malaysia. He was a pioneer in setting up occupational therapy departments in Kuala Lumpur, mainly in physical rehabilitation.

Nathan has been instrumental in organising numerous conferences and congresses with the medical profession, especially with doctors and is held in high esteem within the medical profession for his contributions around occupational and physical rehabilitation.

He has been involved with Malaysian occupational therapy education programmes from their beginning as both a lecturer and examiner. He also pioneered the area of hand rehabilitation and was instrumental in forming the Malaysian Society of Hand Surgery, in which the surgeons and therapists were full members. Nathan lobbied tirelessly for the contribution of therapists to be given equal rating to the hand surgeons.

He was instrumental organising the first congress in hand surgery in Malaysia (1993) with renowned speakers from the US such as David Green and Evelin Mackin and Judy Colditz.

However Nathan's influence has reached beyond Malaysia and in the 1990's he was instrumental in organising the first Singapore-Malaysia Symposium in the 1990s, which is still held today and is successfully run by both countries.

Since 1990, he has contributed to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists as a delegate and was elected from 1994 to 1998 as the 2nd Vice President of the WFOT. During his term as the Vice President he travelled regionally, promoting occupational therapy as far as Nepal and influenced Thailand and South Korea among others to become full members of WFOT by providing guidance.

In 1995, he organised the first Asia Pacific Congress of Occupational Therapy in Kuala Lumpur which was a resounding success. This sparked the development of regional conferences throughout the region and led to the development of the Asia Pacific Regional group. Nathan is a past president of the Asia Pacific Occupational Therapy Regional Group and advisor to the Malaysian Healthy Ageing Society (MHAS). He was part of the team that organised the 1st World Congress on Healthy Ageing and most recently organised the 1st ASEAN Congress on Healthy Ageing. He has been influential in bringing awareness around healthy ageing and has successfully managed to convince the government in this area.

Nathan proved that occupational therapists can work successfully in private practice and ran a highly successful practice however moved into academia. He has worked in academic institutions such as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia. He is currently the Dean of the School of Occupational Therapy at Perdana University and has worked tirelessly to upgrade the university programme to bachelor's degree level.

In January 2005, he was asked to go to Sri Lanka after the Indian Ocean tsunami to investigate the feasibility of setting up rehabilitation services and to provide advice to the people in Kalmunai. He was the only therapist with the group of other medical clinicians.

Professor Vytialingam believes that the occupational therapy profession can succeed through an education that is thorough, up-to-date and culture-oriented.

And a final quote from the Malaysian Occupational Therapists Association – “Without fail, he has contributed tremendously locally and regionally, and the Malaysian Occupational Therapists Association would like to nominate him for his many contributions these last forty years by honouring him as a fellow. He is looked up to by many of the younger therapists for his warm and helpful nature and his willingness to provide tremendous support to develop the field.”