



Munho Lee, MD, PhD, 1922–2004

Munho Lee, MD, PhD, professor emeritus of the College of Medicine, Seoul National University, died on December 5, 2004. He was an internationally recognized leader and pioneer in nuclear medicine in Korea.

Lee graduated from Kyungsoo University (the forerunner to Seoul National University) and became a postgraduate assistant in 1946. In 1953, having finished training in internal medicine, he became an instructor at the Seoul National University. During this period of Korea's postwar reconstruction, he traveled to Germany for additional graduate training under the supervision of Professor Heilmeyer at Freiburg University. Although Lee received his doctorate in hematology, at Heilmeyer's recommendation he also became familiar with the field of nuclear medicine. Interested in the clinical utilization of radioisotopes, Lee went beyond the usual limited range of 1950s nuclear medicine applications and in Germany worked with investigators studying ^{131}I , ^{51}Cr , and ^{59}Fe .

After returning to his home country in 1957, Lee became a prominent figure in Korean academic medicine. Although no previous models existed in Korea, the young assistant professor established the country's first radioisotope clinic in the College of Medicine of Seoul National University. With the help of the International Atomic Energy Agency and individuals and organizations from the United States, Lee and his associates would go on to build four nuclear medicine laboratories complete with donated scanners, scintillation counters, and uptake systems. With these facilities in place, Lee initiated and founded the Korean Society of Nuclear Medicine in 1961, just 1 year after the founding of the Japanese Society of Nuclear Medicine.

Lee introduced radioiodine treatment for Graves' disease and thyroid cancer to Korea and was perceived by many in the public to have almost magical powers. He immersed himself in research as well as organizational and administrative work. During research on the effects of ^{59}Fe on hookworm-induced anemia, he served as a volunteer subject. His own area of expertise was in the diagnosis and treatment of thyroid disease, but Lee also taught hematology and oncology. He revived the Cancer Research Institute at Seoul National University and was a pioneer in the study of Korean hemorrhagic fever. Under his supervision, the clinical schemata of Korean hemorrhagic fever were established on a solid background. At his university he was also a founder of nephrology and rheumatology, relatively new fields at that time in Korea.

In 1975, Lee won the Academic Award from the Korean Academy of Science. Both in the eyes of the public and international science, he had become a leader through

his work in setting high scientific and medical standards for Korea. He continued to devote significant effort to enhance the medical and scientific environment. Among many such efforts, he was one of the founders of the World Federation of Nuclear Medicine and Biology (WFNMB).

During his extraordinary 22-year leadership as president of the Korean Academy of Medicine (1972–1994), he continued to foster development in the field of nuclear medicine. During these same two decades, nuclear medicine practitioners in Korea, like their colleagues in the rest of the world, were confronted with the need to implement rapidly changing and cutting-edge electronic technologies, new radiochemistry systems, and new imaging modalities, including PET. In this environment of rapid modernization, Lee successfully lobbied for his country to host the third Asia and Oceania Congress of Nuclear Medicine. He presided over the event in 1984, the first international medical congress to be held in Korea.

As an international pioneer, he served as a role model and leader for many members of a younger generation of nuclear medicine specialists. Lee retired from Seoul National University in 1988 and left a rich legacy. He had looked forward to observing and participating in Seoul at the 2006 congress of the WFNMB, an organization now presided over by one of his followers, Dr. Myung-Chul Lee.

As a direct result of Dr. Munho Lee's organizing efforts and contributions, the Korean Society of Nuclear Medicine has grown rapidly and matured. A specialty board of nuclear medicine was established in 1995. Today, Korea has 130 departments or divisions of nuclear medicine and 45 PET or PET/CT machines in clinical settings. More than 500,000 nuclear medicine imaging studies and 12 million radioimmunoassay tests are performed annually, as well as approximately 9,000 radionuclide treatments. As a result of emphasis on scientific advancement, attendees from Korea presented 106 papers at the 2004 SNM Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA.

Although age called him away, it is certain that Dr. Lee's soul will continue to follow the progress of the Korean Society of Nuclear Medicine and the WFNMB.



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