

T  
Q

TIMELY  
HEALTH  
INFORMATION  
& STYLE  
QUARTERLY

ISSUE  
4/4  
2018

MPAS  
AWARD 2017  
APEX AWARD  
2018  
AWARD OF  
EXCELLENCE



DR ALAN CHEUNG

# THE WARRIOR'S SURGEON

BEGIN EVERY JOURNEY  
WITH MONTBLANC

STEP THIS WAY

72 HOURS IN KOTA KINABALU

# THE WARRIOR'S SURGEON

Orthopaedic surgeon Dr Alan Cheung is a keen mixed martial artist. In this exclusive interview, he tells *THIS Quarterly* how the sport helped him through some dark days.

WORDS  
CHUA KIM BENG

PHOTOGRAPHY

EDDIE TEO

ART DIRECTION

REGINA WONG

STYLING

KAREN KWA & ZECK YIK

HAIR & MAKE-UP

SHA SHAMSI

LOCATION

EVOLVE MMA FAR EAST SQUARE, COURTESY  
OF CHATRI SITYODTONG AND EVOLVE MMA



“How perfectly suitable,” I thought when I heard that Dr Alan Cheung had chosen to be interviewed in 1880, a private club in Robertson Quay. Having visited the venue earlier this year, I knew the interior design was very masculine, with lots of dark wood and leather furniture and furnishings. This complemented very well what I had read about Dr Cheung: the consultant orthopaedic surgeon is not only a specialist in sports injuries, he is also an enthusiastic sportsman himself.

Meeting him in person confirmed my suspicions. The British-born and educated Dr Cheung cut a dashing figure in charcoal pants and a white long-sleeved shirt. From his physique, there was no doubt that he did indeed engage in mixed martial arts (MMA) as well as a gamut of other sports.

**MEDICAL MARTIAL ARTIST**

Dr Cheung practises martial arts at Evolve MMA. He took up the sport as a way to deal with the death of his father from stomach cancer. “My parents emigrated from Hong Kong to Cambridge, England, and ran a Chinese restaurant. My father worked very long hours to support the family. He had little time to discover and follow his passions,” he discloses. “His death taught me that life is very short; if you don’t pursue your dreams now, when are you going to pursue them?”

Practising mixed martial arts helped him overcome the grief of his father’s passing. “It gives me focus, drive and energy. It has given me opportunities to compete in martial arts tournaments

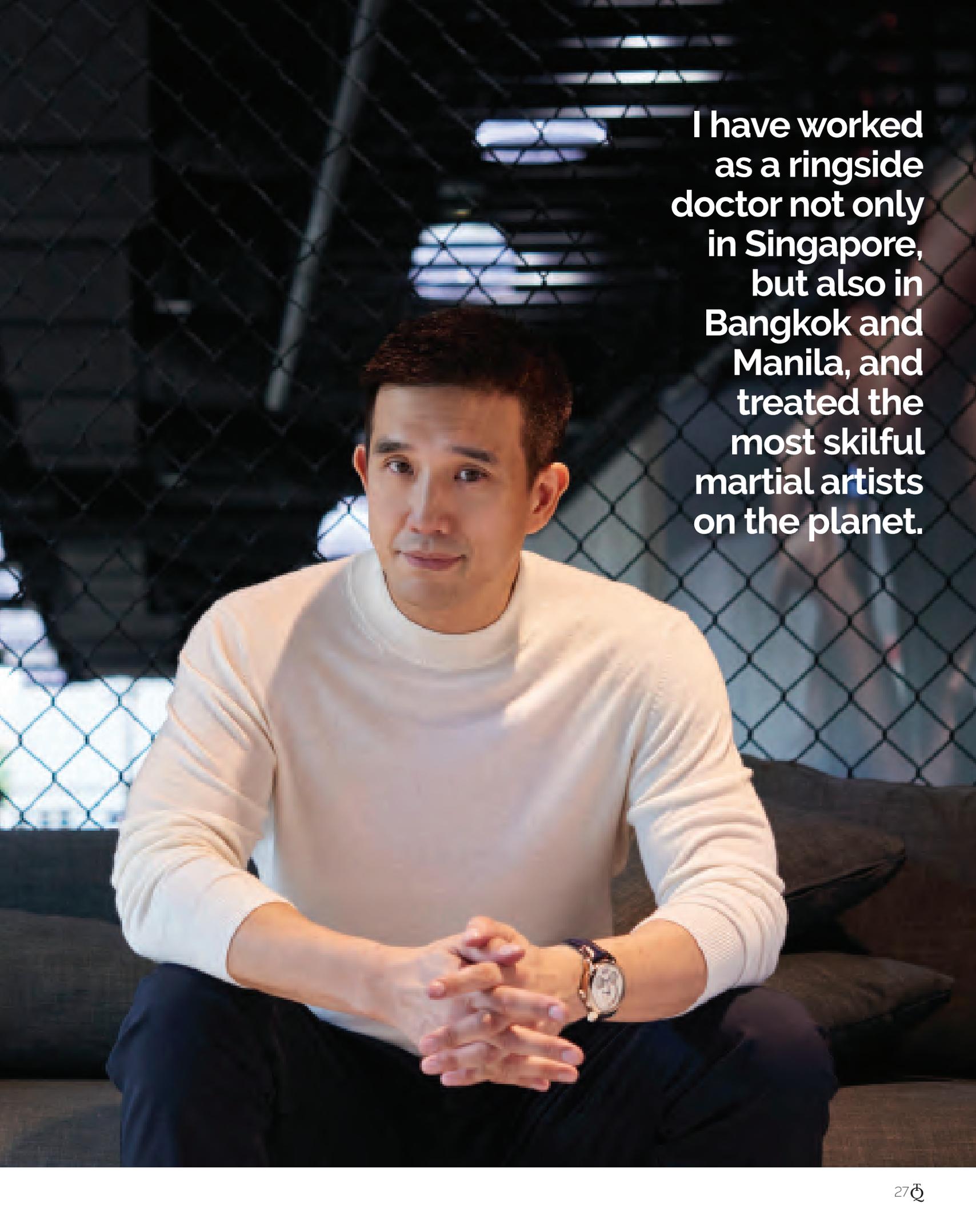
around the region. I have met many inspiring and motivated people within the Evolve and Singapore martial arts community. This complements my work well as a ringside doctor for ONE Championship,” he reveals. “Many people have a misconception about martial arts when they watch the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC). ONE Championship promotes Asian values of integrity, humility, honour and respect. I am extremely grateful to work alongside the team at ONE Championship, which is the largest global sports media company in Asia. I have worked as a ringside doctor not only in Singapore, but also in Bangkok and Manila, and treated the most skilful martial artists on the planet.”

**PUBLIC TO PRIVATE**

Before setting up his private practice, the International Orthopaedic Clinic, at Mount Elizabeth Novena Specialist Centre, Dr Cheung was a consultant at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital. Although he enjoyed serving patients from all sectors of the



SWEATER, PANTS AND LOAFERS, HUGO BOSS  
WATCH, MONTBLANC STAR LEGACY NICOLAS RIEUSSEC

A man with short dark hair, wearing a white turtleneck sweater and dark trousers, is sitting on a dark-colored couch. He is looking slightly to his left with a neutral expression. His hands are clasped together in his lap. He is wearing a watch on his left wrist. Behind him is a chain-link fence, and through the fence, some blurred lights and structures are visible, suggesting an outdoor or semi-outdoor setting at night or in low light.

**I have worked  
as a ringside  
doctor not only  
in Singapore,  
but also in  
Bangkok and  
Manila, and  
treated the  
most skilful  
martial artists  
on the planet.**



SHIRT, BLAZER AND PANTS,  
BRIONI  
LOAFERS, TOD'S  
POCKET SQUARE, BRIONI  
WATCH, MONTBLANC STAR  
LEGACY NICOLAS RIEUSSEC

community, he felt that he often did not have enough time to communicate with them. "I wanted more time to build a better relationship with patients; spend more time to explain things in detail, and help them understand their condition so that they could have a better experience," he says. "Essentially, I wanted to improve the quality of my consultation and provide a bespoke service for patients."

What does Dr Cheung mean by "bespoke service"? "I always try to find out what makes my patients tick. Do they play sports or have a particular job or lifestyle that I need to consider before I perform surgery?" he explains. "I also think a patient who understands the procedure and has everything explained to them in detail has realistic expectations, understands risk, and can make an informed decision." He adds that some patients can absorb all the information at once, but others need several consultations, which is not always easy in the public sector.

An expert in various robotic surgery systems, Dr Cheung asserts that starting a private practice was also vital to his professional growth. "I wanted to pursue robotic surgery, and opportunities for that were limited where I was," he reveals. Having more control over his schedule allows him to pursue his sports-related passions, including providing ringside and

pitchside medical services to ONE Championship and international rugby organisations.

### **PERFORMING ROBOTIC SURGERY**

Why is it important to Dr Cheung to have access to robotic surgery? "Robotics and artificial intelligence are the major technologies that are going to massively change the world and medicine in future," he shares. "I really enjoy using robotics for surgery; so far, I have had excellent results."

The main advantages of robotic surgery, he clarifies, are increased precision and reproducibility of good results. "Robots can guide you to within tenths of a millimetre or degree," he offers. It is also very safe. "You can place the saw or burr exactly where you want, and tool doesn't go out of the pre-set safety zone, avoiding damage to important nerves and blood vessels."

However, Dr Cheung qualifies that different patients can have different experiences of the same operation. "Pain is usually the patient's worst fear. Response to pain varies due to anxiety, pain threshold, and expectations," he suggests. "As well as making pain control my priority following surgery, before the operation I also try to explain everything well, calm their fears, and involve family members to reinforce the message."

Surgery, he says, is just a small part of the healing



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Dr Alan Cheung is the first American College of Sports Medicine-certified ringside doctor in Southeast Asia.

**Robotics and artificial intelligence are the major technologies that are going to massively change the world and medicine in future.**



T-SHIRT, JACKET, PANTS AND SNEAKERS, HUGO BOSS BAG, MONTBLANC SFUMATO

process. It is a team effort involving nursing and clinic staff, anaesthetists, physiotherapists, allied health professionals and, most importantly, the patients themselves. "At the International Orthopaedic Clinic, I am fortunate and blessed to work with excellent friends and colleagues."

#### TREATING SPORTS INJURIES

Another focus of the International Orthopaedic Clinic is sports injuries. This is a logical extension of Dr Cheung's own interest in sports. He has seen many patients, young and old, from amateurs to world champions, with all sorts of injuries sustained in football, rugby, cycling, martial arts, and many other activities.

"As a sportsman who has played a variety of sports and recovered from bilateral shoulder dislocations, and various knee and ankle injuries, I can understand where my patients are coming from. This helps me empathise and build trust, and I can discuss injury management and recovery in an intelligent way," he reasons.

Another facet of his practice is pitchside medicine. He has provided medical cover for internationally

---

#### SYSTEMS EXPERT

Dr Alan Cheung is one of the few orthopaedic surgeons in Singapore to be trained in three robotic systems:

- Makoplasty
- Navio
- Robodoc

televised events, such as the Singapore HSBC Rugby Sevens, and Super Rugby. This stems from his early passion playing rugby while growing up in Cambridge. "Dealing with rugby injuries is similar to martial arts injuries. My experience as a surgeon managing trauma has prepared me well for this. Pitchside medicine also involves safely transferring patients off the field, and managing head injuries and concussion. The Singapore Rugby Union has an excellent medical setup; working with it has taught me the importance of preparation and working as part of a well-trained team — it is not a one-man show."

#### **SPECIALISING IN ORTHOPAEDICS**

Dr Cheung toyed with the idea of pursuing geology and polar exploration as a career. He eventually chose medicine after working as a nursing assistant during the school holidays — he was inspired by the hard work and dedication of the doctors and nursing staff in caring for aged and sick patients. "They showed me that medicine should be, first and foremost, a caring profession."

But once he started medical training, there was no doubt he would be a surgeon. "I knew from day one of medical school I wanted to be a surgeon. Anatomy was my favourite subject, and I was dexterous and determined enough to make the cut," he asserts. But he wasn't sure what type of surgery to specialise in until he worked at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in

England. "The enthusiastic and inspirational teaching there helped me decide to become an orthopaedic surgeon."

Dr Cheung came to Singapore about four years ago, when his parents retired to Hong Kong. "I wanted to work in a region with closer links to my Chinese background, yet be able to practise Western medicine in a modern setting." Dr Cheung has indeed settled well in the Lion City. [📍](#)

**I knew from day one of medical school I wanted to be a surgeon. Anatomy was my favourite subject, and I was determined enough to make the cut.**

