

OBITUARY

Katsuya Nobuhara, MD, 1933-2022

Katsuya Nobuhara, MD, died peacefully on March 13, 2022 at the age of eighty-eight. He was treating patients per usual practice until the day before his passing. It is with profound sadness—with his family, friends, and community—that we announce his sudden death. The field of orthopedic shoulder surgery has lost one of its renowned pioneers, and his students have lost a great leader, mentor, and innovator.

Dr. Nobuhara was born in Hyogo prefecture, Japan, in 1933. He graduated from Kobe Medical College in 1958. His formal training in orthopaedic surgery began the following year at the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at his alma mater, and it was there that his interest in shoulder surgery began when one of his colleagues recommended *The Shoulder and Environs* by J.E. Bateman. In 1963, Dr. Nobuhara studied abroad at the Swedish Hospital in Seattle, WA. His mentor, Dr. John F. LeCocq, was a heartfelt man who went to Southeast Asia in connection with the hospital ship HOPE's humanitarian visits. One of Dr. LeCocq's missions to foster an educational development for young physicians in Asia would be relayed to Dr. Nobuhara in the following years.

When Dr. Nobuhara founded and became the director of Nobuhara Hospital in Tatsuno, Japan in 1970, the only way for orthopedic surgeons in Asian countries to study shoulder surgery was to attend shoulder societies in the United States or Europe and read books that were published in English. It was Dr. Nobuhara who paved the way for orthopedic surgeons in Asia who were interested in shoulder surgery to overcome their financial and language barriers to study the shoulder. Over the last 50 years, over one hundred exchange students across nine Asian countries and nine non-Asian countries have studied at Nobuhara Hospital. In 1993, a committee of 19 representatives from 11 regions in Asia founded the Asian Shoulder Association and was chaired by Dr. Nobuhara. The first Academic Congress of the Asian Shoulder Association (ACASA) was held in Taipei in 1994 with Dr. Jiunn-Jer Wu of Taiwan as chairman. At that time, Dr. Nobuhara said that "we should never just think for the good of our own country—it is important that we always grow together with our Asian colleagues." His vision of transnational dialog and education continues to enrich the field of shoulder surgery and will inspire surgeons for generations to come.

In the specialized field of shoulder surgery, one famous book by Dr. Nobuhara entitled *The Shoulder: Its Function and Clinical Aspects*¹⁾ is considered by many orthopaedic surgeons across the world as a bible of shoulder surgery. This landmark

book is the culmination of Dr. Nobuhara's many years of research and treatment of shoulder joint disease. Although the text is easy to understand and almost gives the illusion of reading a story, the content of the book is deep. Many avid readers of this classic book experience new discoveries on every rereading as they mature as shoulder surgeons. This book elucidates the etiology of shoulder joint disease from a biomechanical perspective, provides supporting data for clinical diagnosis and treatment choices, and acts like a lighthouse to guide his students out of their darkness. *The Shoulder: Its Function and Clinical Aspect* received the 2004 British Medical Association Outstanding Book Award.

Dr. Nobuhara is famous for devising the glenoid osteotomy technique²⁾ to treat loose shoulders. It is a beautiful operative technique that is performed with a small skin incision without the use of any metal fixation material. Many of his students fell in love with this surgical technique and worked countless hours to learn from his craft. In addition, Dr. Nobuhara defined one of the shoulder sports disorders now known as the rotator interval lesion,³⁾ later proposing the rotator interval repair to treat the disease. This is also a very beautiful surgical technique that is performed with a small skin incision. Despite Dr. Nobuhara's tremendous accomplishments, he was always a modest person and never chose to bear his name on any of the diseases he discovered or technique he created.

In addition to shoulder surgery, Dr. Nobuhara's lifework also includes the historical research of Akechi Mitsuhide. Akechi Mitsuhide was a samurai general during the Sengoku period of feudal Japan. Dr. Nobuhara became interested in the life of Akechi Mitsuhide as a high school student and amassed a collection of historical artifacts over the years, which led to the creation of three books: *Traveling with Akechi Mitsuhide: Reproducing the Dramatic Life of a Samurai Through Historical Documents*, *Akechi Mitsuhide*, and *The Revised Akechi Mitsuhide*. These books have guided many history scholars and enthusiasts to study the life of Akechi Mitsuhide through the lens of primary historical source materials.

Dr. Nobuhara's hobbies included playing Dixieland jazz (King Cresol Jazz Band: KCJB) and collecting Hotei statues. In Dixieland jazz performances, he was in charge of saxophone and clarinet. Despite the demanding work at his hospital, he went on to release a CD and travel across the United States on a performance tour. In collecting Hotei statues, his collection was so large that he needed to build a dedicated warehouse and eventually publish a book entitled the *Various Poses of Hotei*. Affectionately known as the "Laughing Buddha" in the West, Hotei was a Chinese monk during the period of the Tang dynasty (618-907) who is often depicted with a pot-belly and large

linen bag. Dr. Nobuhara named one of the Hotei statues with a raised arm “the zero-position Hotei.” He never forgot his wonderful sense of humor.

Dr. Nobuhara will be remembered for his gentle smile, humor, wealth of knowledge and creativity, high level of diagnosis and treatment, and his clear love and respect for his profession, colleagues, friends, and family. His students—now numbering more than 300 surgeons—all wanted more time to discuss shoulder injuries and diseases with him. With the sudden passing of Dr. Nobuhara, we are still overwhelmed by our deep sorrow, and we will miss him very much.

Y. Hata

Reference

1. Nobuhara K: *The Shoulder—Its Functional and Clinical Aspects—*World Scientific Pub. Co. Singapore. 2003.
2. Nobuhara K, et al: Glenoid osteotomy for loose shoulder. *Surgery of the shoulder.* 100-103, BC Decker, Philadelphia, 1984.
3. Nobuhara K, Ikeda H: The Rotator Interval Lesion. *Clin Orthop* 223: 44-50, 1987.