

MIND
your
BODY

The Pro

MYB speaks to health professionals in this weekly column

Facial works

Dr Ho Kok Sen, 37, an oral and maxillofacial surgeon with the Specialist Dental Group at Mount Elizabeth Hospital, tells **POON CHIAN HUI** why he enjoys putting people's faces back together

I decided to specialise in oral-maxillofacial surgery because...

I get to disassemble and reassemble stuff – something I've enjoyed since I was a child when I spent hours on my planes and WWII soldier models. When I did not have enough money to buy new ones, I would take the existing models apart and put them back together again.

Similarly, in the oral cavity, I get to take out broken or decayed teeth and replace them with dental implants. In the facial region, I get to move the jaws around and put them together to give new form and function. I also get to fix jaw segments together when patients fracture them during a road traffic accident or a fall.

The jaws are fascinating because...

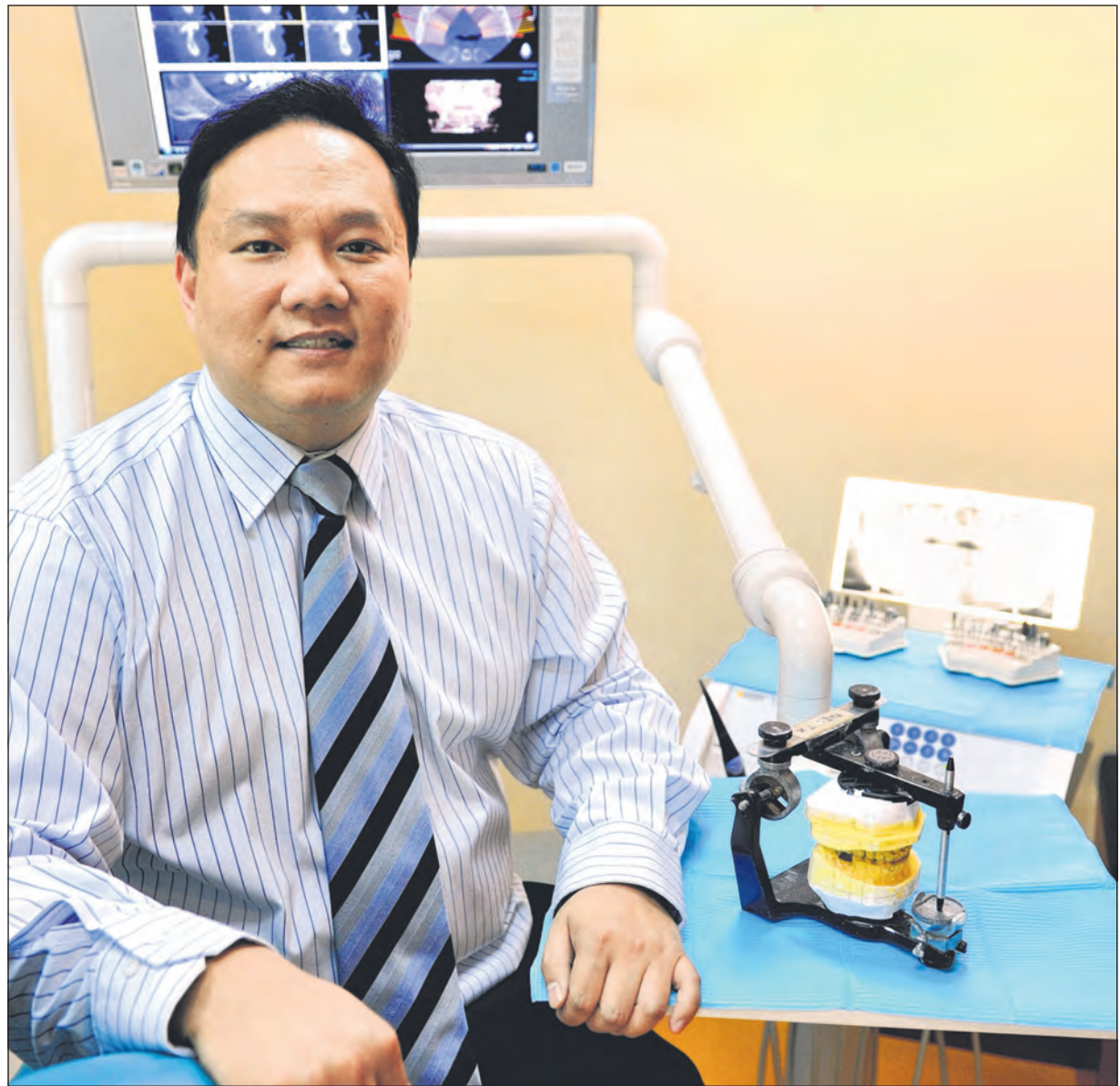
They give form and function to the face. People in the fashion industry talk about jaw lines. People in the food industry talk about jaw strength. However, jaws without teeth give you neither any form nor function. So, maintaining a good set of teeth sets the stage for a fabulous smile and nice jaw line.

If I were to give an analogy for what I do, I would be a...

Handyman. I piece things together to fix people's teeth so they function again. I also make sure things are working as they should be.

I have come across all types of cases...

They range from a child with a thumb-tack stuck in his tongue to big jaw cysts requiring removal and reconstruction. I have also had cases where patients came straight from the airport to the hospital due to airway obstruction caused by the swelling due to an infected tooth. I also take care of impacted wisdom teeth, place dental implants and perform jaw surgery.



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A typical day for me would be...

I wake up at 7am to play with my two-year-old daughter before she heads to playschool and I spend some time with my six-month-old son before I leave for work, which starts at 8.30am.

The day is divided between consultations and surgery. I also teach dental undergraduates and graduate dentists at the National University of Singapore.

I usually head home at 6pm to spend time with my children and wife, 33, an obstetrician and gynaecologist at KK Women's and Children's Hospital. I may work some nights at the Accident & Emergency department of the Parkway Group Hospitals, such as Gleneagles Hospital.

I love patients who are...

Appreciative of what I try to do for them. Many of my patients have become my friends. The doctor-patient relationship is not about authority – it is forged on mutual respect and understanding.

Patients who get my goat are...

Those who have genuine dental needs but forgo the opportunity to have treatment that could improve their health and lifestyle.

One little known fact about wisdom tooth surgery is...

It can be a painless procedure and post-surgery recovery can be smooth and pain-free too.

You can eat after surgery and, in fact, we encourage our patients to consume cold beverages and desserts because they are more soothing to the oral cavity and oral wounds.

As the surgical site as well as the lips and/or tongue may still be feeling numb from the anaesthesia administered, consuming warm or hot foods may pose risks of burning or irritation to the areas concerned.

Things that put a smile on my face are...

When a patient's smile is restored successfully and I can see the change in his confidence and attitude at subsequent visits.

It breaks my heart when...

Patients do not know that there are solutions available for virtually any debilitating dental condition, thanks to technological advances.

I would not trade places for the world because...

I enjoy the assembling work that comes with this career. What's more, I get to see the tremendous positive impact my work can have on a person's life.

My best tip...

Remove your wisdom teeth before they start to give you problems. Prevention is better than cure. Take care of your teeth well and they will be with you longer.