The history of the APFCB

By Dr Tan It Koon, PhD, MCB, CChem FRSC, FSNIC, FACB, FRCPath, PPA, PBM

Founding and Past APFCB President. Recipient of the Inaugural APFCB Distinguished Service Award, former Executive Board Member of IFCC, Former Member of WHO Expert Advisory Panel on Health Laboratory Services, Founding and Past President of Singapore Association of Clinical Biochemists, former Head of Clinical Biochemistry, Department of Pathology, Singapore General Hospital and simultaneously Head of the National Reference Laboratory for Investigation of Inherited Metabolic Disorders, Ministry of Health of Singapore, Emeritus Consultant of the Asia-Pacific Scientific Advisory Board of Becton Dickinson.

The idea of forming a regional federation was first mooted when several clinical biochemists from Australia, Japan and Singapore (including Professor David Curnow, Dr Robert Edwards, Professor Kiyoshi Miyai and Dr Tan It Koon) met in a hotel room during the 1975 International Congress of Clinical Chemistry in Toronto, Canada. At the end of 1977, some members of the Australian Association of Clinical Biochemists (AACB) prepared a document for discussion entitled "A Regional Clinical Biochemistry Group in South-East Asia?" This was sent to clinical biochemists from a number of countries. At the same time, a decision to hold the first regional congress in 1979 in Singapore was made. The small group of Singapore clinical biochemists which numbered only about 14 at that time took the bold step to establish the Singapore Association of Clinical Biochemists (SACB) in 1978 and jointly organised the First South-East Asian & Pacific Congress of Clinical Biochemistry with the AACB. Dr Tan It Koon (SACB President) and Dr Meg Breidal (AACB President) were requested to co-chair the Organising Committee. Dr Peter Garcia-Webb was asked to serve as scientific subcommittee chairman and Dr Ron Bowyer would assist with publicity. Dr Edward Jacob would look after the Industrial Exhibition and Dr Aw Swee Eng would be responsible for publications related to the Congress. The 1979 Congress was a great success and generated a great deal of enthusiasm and interest in making the congress a regular one for the region. A daily newspaper was produced for free distribution to participants during the Congress. A Proceeding of the Congress was published several months after the Congress. These became regular features of subsequent congresses. On the first day of the First Congress, replies to the document on possibility of forming a regional group prepared earlier by the AACB were discussed at a meeting attended by 25 clinical biochemists from 13 countries. The meeting suggested the formation of a working group of 5 people to produce a discussion document outlining the formation of an Asian & Pacific Federation of Clinical Biochemistry and a steering committee. This document was discussed at a meeting during the Congress on 17 October 1979 attended by clinical biochemists from 16 countries and resulted in the appointment of a Steering Committee (chaired by Dr Tan It Koon) which was charged with the responsibility of writing a draft constitution to be considered at the Second Congress. It was decided that regular regional congress should be held once in every 3 years and business meetings and election of office bearers would be held at the time of the Congress. From the second congress onwards, the congress name would be changed to Asian-Pacific Congress of Clinical Biochemistry (APCCB). The office bearers (or Executive Committee Members) would be supported by the organisers of the APCCB. The SACB was requested to host the Second Congress in Singapore and Dr Tan It Koon would continue to chair the Congress Organising Committee. For the Second Congress a post-congress 3-day training course in Clinical Biochemistry was held. Some plenary/symposium speakers served as lecturers. This event attracted some 90 participants. Similar pre- and post- congress courses or workshops have since become a regular feature of the APCCBs. From the first Congress, Regional Service Awards have been given to clinical biochemists from the region in recognition of the merit of their presentations. The Awards have been helpful in encouraging and supporting regional participation.

At the 2nd APCCB in Singapore in September 1982, the Steering Committee for the establishment of a regional federation presented a draft constitution for discussion. At the end of the meeting, the constitution was adopted and the Asian & Pacific Federation of Clinical Biochemistry (APFCB) was formally established. At the time of formation, there were five Member Associations from the following countries: Australia, India, Indonesia (established after the first Congress), Japan and Singapore. The Second Congress stimulated the formation of two new national/area associations which became new Member Associations of the APFCB: Taipei (China) and Hong Kong. At the 3rd APCCB in Bali, the newly formed Korean Society of Clinical Chemistry applied for APFCB Membership and became a Member Association in 1986. The China Federation of Clinical Chemistry (Beijing, China) applied for Membership in 1988 and became a Member Association in early July 1989. From 1998, a different name was adopted by the association in China - Chinese Society of Clinical Chemistry. Much later, the name was further changed to Chinese Society of Laboratory Medicine. In 1990, the Thailand Association and New Zealand Association of Clinical Biochemists joined the Federation. A few years later the New Zealand Association decided to become a branch of the Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists and ceased to be a Member Association. In early April 1991, the APFCB welcomed the Malaysian Association and Vietnamese Association of Clinical Biochemists as new Member Associations.

Besides the organisation of regular APCCBs, the APFCB has been promoting a variety of scientific/educational activities through several committees. The Quality Control Working Group has been active in the organisation of external assessment programs, workshops and courses. A very successful project in Vietnam which lasted for several
years was coordinated by Mr Les Watkinson from the AACB. The APFCB has been able to obtain sponsorships for the organisation of symposiums or workshops on total quality assurance at APCCBs and other regional meetings.

During their term as Chairman and Secretary of the Education Committee Professor T Kanno from the Japan Society of Clinical Chemistry and Mr Michael Staley of AACB conducted a survey and produced a list of resource laboratories which performed a variety of specialised investigations. Subsequently, Prof SL Ch'ng (Chairman of Education Committee for 1995-1998) and Prof FX Budhianto Suhadi (Chairman of Scientific Committee for 1995-1998) collaborated with Dr Tan It Koon in the organisation of several pre- and post-congress workshops/symposiums as well as a Visiting Lectureship Program covering four countries in ASEAN. Another Visiting Lectureship Program covering four countries was organised by Prof Leslie Lai (Chairman of the Education Committee for 1998–2001) in early 1999. Prof Christopher W K Lam and his colleagues from Hong Kong and A/Prof Sunil Sethi (Chairman of the Scientific Committee for 1998–2001) embarked on a Cholesterol Standardisation Program for the region. All records of business meetings and activities of the APFCB and its Member Associations have been documented in the newsletter - the APFCB News, which was started in 1983 and has since been regularly published by an Editorial Committee, once or twice a year. Dr Tan It Koon served as the Chairman of the Editorial Committee for about 20 years before passing the responsibility to Mr Joseph Lopez.

Since the first version of the History of APFCB was first written by Dr Tan It Koon, the first 4 of the following national Associations have become Members of APFCB and the 5th to 7th have become Affiliate Members, a new category of membership:
1. Pakistan Society of Chemical Pathologists (PSCP)
2. Philippine Association of Medical Technologists (PAMET)
3. Association for Clinical Biochemistry, Sri Lanka (ACBSL)
4. Nepal Association for Medical Laboratory Sciences (NAMLS)
5. Chinese Association for Clinical Laboratory Management (CACLM)
6. Association of Medical Biochemists of India (AMBI)
7. Macao Laboratory Medicine Association (MLMA)

APFCB Executive Committee

1982 - 1985
President: Dr Tan It Koon
Vice-President: Prof Kiyoshi Miyai
Secretary: Dr Peter Garcia-Webb
Treasurer: Dr K P Sinha

1985 - 1988
President: Dr Tan It Koon
Vice-President: Prof Kiyoshi Miyai
Secretary: Dr Peter Garcia-Webb
Treasurer: Dr K P Sinha

1988 - 1991
President: Prof Kiyoshi Miyai
Vice-President: Prof Stanford Ting
Immediate-Past President: Dr Tan It Koon
Secretary: Mr T D Geary
Treasurer: Prof R Swaminathan

1991 - 1994
President: T D Geary
Vice President: Prof FX Budhianto Suhadi
Immediate-Past President: Prof Kiyoshi Miyai
Secretary: Dr Tan It Koon
Treasurer: Dr Jin Q Kim

1994 - 1998
President: Dr Tan It Koon
Vice-President: Prof N Amino
Immediate-Past President: Mr T D Geary
Secretary: Prof Chris W K Lam
Treasurer: Dr Andi Wijaya

1998 – 2001
President: Dr Peter Garcia-Webb
Vice-President: Prof Chris W K Lam
Immediate-Past President: Dr Tan It Koon
Secretary: Mr Joseph B Lopez
Treasurer: A/Prof Yoshihisa Itoh

2001–2004
President: Prof Chris W K Lam
Vice-President: Prof Yoshihisa Itoh
Immediate-Past President: Dr Tan It Koon
Secretary: Mr Joseph B Lopez
Treasurer: Dr T Malati

2004–2007
President: President: Mr Joseph B Lopez
Vice-President: Prof Leslie C Lai
Immediate-Past President: Prof Chris W Lam
Secretary: Dr Elizabeth A Frank
Treasurer: Prof Yoshihisa Itoh

APFCB Executive Board

2007-2010
President: Mr Joseph B Lopez
Vice President: Prof Leslie C Lai
Immediate Past President: Prof Chris W Lam
Secretary: Dr Elizabeth A Frank
Treasurer: Prof Sunil Sethi

Name change of APFCB to Asia Pacific Federation for Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine in 2010

2010-2013
President: Prof Leslie C Lai
Vice President: Prof Sunil Sethi
Immediate Past President: Mr Joseph B Lopez
Secretary: Dra Endang Hoyaranda
Treasurer: Dr Elizabeth A Frank

2013-2016
President: Prof Leslie C Lai
Vice President: Prof Sunil Sethi
Immediate Past President: Mr Joseph B Lopez
Secretary: Dra Endang Hoyaranda
Treasurer: Dr Elizabeth A Frank

Asian-Pacific Congresses of Clinical Biochemistry (name changed to APFCB Congress in 2010)
1979 Singapore
1982 Singapore
1985 Bali, Indonesia
1988 Hong Kong
1991 Kobe, Japan
1993 Melbourne, Australia (Joint Congress with the IFCC XVth ICC)
1995 Bangkok, Thailand
1998 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2001 New Delhi, India
2004 Perth, Australia
2007 Beijing, China
2010 Seoul, Korea
2013 Bali, Indonesia
2016 Taipei
2019 Jaipur, India