

OBITUARY

Ichiro Kanazawa, MD, PhD, 1941–2016

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On 20 January 2016, Dr Ichiro Kanazawa, honorary member of Japanese Society of Human Genetics, as well as Professor Emeritus of University of Tokyo and President Emeritus of National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry, passed away at age 74. I would like to express my sincere condolences on his passing with deep appreciations for his significant academic contributions and his dedication to Japanese Society of Human Genetics.

Dr Kanazawa was born in Tokyo. He was educated at Hibiya High School and graduated from the University of Tokyo, Faculty of Medicine in 1967. He then joined the Department of Neurology at the University of Tokyo, studied as a visiting researcher at the Department of Pharmacology at University of Cambridge, and served at Tsukuba University as Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor of the Department of Neurology. In 1991, he was appointed as Professor of the Department of

Neurology at the University of Tokyo. He also held the position of the Director of the University of Tokyo Hospital. After his retirement from the University of Tokyo in 2002, he served as Director General of National Institute of Neuroscience, President of National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry, and President of International University of Health and Welfare Graduate School.

From 2002, for 10 years, he served as the medical director of the Imperial Household Agency, during which period he supervised the royal family's medical care, including Empress's speech disorder, Emperor's heart bypass surgery and prostate surgery, Princess Masako's health condition and Princess Kiko's delivery in 2006. He was also President of Science Council of Japan, and had a key role as Academy Chair for five nations in G8 Summit held in Toya Lake, Hokkaido in 2008.

Dr Kanazawa's service included participation in many academic organizations. He served as Chairman of the Japanese Society of Neurology and Chairman of the Japanese Society of Internal Medicine. He also helped organize various academic meetings for our society, notably as Chair of the 49th Annual Meeting of the Japan Society of Human Genetics in 2004 and as honorary Congress President of the 13th International Congress of Human Genetics in 2016 (ICHG2016). Meanwhile, he received numerous prestigious awards and honors including the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold and Silver Star (Zuiho-jukosho).

He was also a distinguished researcher in the field of neuroscience, noted especially for his work on clinical studies of basal ganglia and cerebellar disorders, genetics of neurological diseases and identification of neurotransmitters in the central nervous system. His research focus included the analysis of neurotransmitter substance P and its decrease in Huntington's disease, and he made tremendous contributions to

genetic studies of Huntington's disease in Japan.

Despite all his outstanding achievements, Dr Kanazawa was open, friendly, humble and fair, always welcoming us when we wanted to talk to him. I met Dr Kanazawa during my early years of training at the Department of Neurology, the University of Tokyo in 1991, and since then, he was a mentor throughout my career. I had been working on the project to identify the Fukuyama muscular dystrophy gene by using homozygosity mapping when he joined the Department. Eager to tell him about my project, I barged into his office without an appointment after the regular late-afternoon conference. He seemed incredibly busy, saying if I could see him at some later time, but then he said that I looked so eager to be heard, and put his work aside to discuss about my project. I also remember that he accompanied me to visit Dr Yusuke Nakamura before I went to study at his lab in the Department of Biochemistry at Cancer Institute as a research student. I learnt what it meant to be polite and respectful from him, and since then, I try to do the same whenever the members in my department are transitioned to new positions.

One of the blunders I made during my years with him was when I arranged his welcome party at a famous British-style Indian restaurant in Akasaka right after he joined our department. We were served a huge platter of tandoori chicken, but Dr Kanazawa seemed to have little appetite. Later I found that he was not a big chicken eater, and his favorite food was anko (sweet bean paste).

Dr Kanazawa was a truly inspirational figure, and I could hardly come up with anyone else who could devote his career both to patients and to medical science with such passion, determination and a sense of balance. He was a 'Giant' in every sense of the word. His passing marks the loss of another remarkable clinician and neuroscientist in

Japan, leaving a huge hole in the fields of clinical neurology and neuroscience. There are still so many things I wish I could learn from him, and he will be greatly missed.

Dr Kanazawa, I am sure that you are now free from all earthly burdens and relaxing in heaven. Also, I would like to express my most sincere condolences to his family and his students. May his soul rest in peace. Gassho.

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