

# MEDICAL Grapevine

**Innovative  
corneal inlay**

Drop your  
reading glasses

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**GP medical  
emergencies**

Be quick  
and accurate

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**Soup to  
warm and fill**

A bowl to  
support the BCF

Precision  
is his expertise

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**Dr Lee Sao Bing**





**f**ueled by his eagerness to learn more and be the best he can be, Dr Lee Sao Bing was determined to learn the most advanced technologies in his field and gain the latest knowledge in refractive surgery. Upon finishing his specialist training in Ophthalmology in Singapore, Dr Lee went further to sub-specialise in Cornea and Refractive Surgery in Ophthalmology. His dedication to his profession as an ophthalmologist earned him the title of Head of Cornea Services at the National University Hospital Eye Surgery Centre.

# Dr Lee Sao Bing

**Precision is his expertise**



Dr Lee's continuous learning and numerous researches lead him to his current expertise – LASIK surgery, which aims to improve the focusing power of the eyes. It was Dr Lee's expertise in LASIK as well as in correcting myopia and presbyopia that paved the way for him to join Shinagawa LASIK Centre, Japan's primary LASIK centre.

When Shinagawa LASIK Centre decided to branch out to Singapore, they tapped on Dr Lee to become the Lead Surgeon and Clinical Director. Known for thoroughness and dedication to improve his patients' eye condition, he was invaluable to the centre's foremost overseas venture.

**MG:** Kindly elaborate more on the career path that led you to become the Clinical Director of the Shinagawa LASIK Centre.

**Dr Lee:** LASIK surgeries are performed on the cornea and it is natural for cornea specialists to be very well versed with LASIK. Shinagawa LASIK Centre, being a dedicated LASIK Centre, required a Cornea specialist for the role of Lead Surgeon and Clinical Director, and to spearhead the setting up of the centre's first overseas practice.

**MG:** Please tell us more about the Shinagawa LASIK Centre.

**Dr Lee:** Shinagawa LASIK Centre in Singapore is its first overseas practice and it is dedicated to providing the Shinagawa Standard of Care: modern LASIK equipment and technology using the IntraLase (Blade-free) Method™ and the Wavelight Allegretto laser. It provides high safety standards and quality of care; excellent scientific analysis and results optimisation to provide the best visual outcome. The Centre currently has three surgeons in total, with me as the Clinical Director.

**MG:** Does technology play a huge role in your practice? How?

**Dr Lee:** Yes, LASIK is very dependant on technology. The IntraLase laser is a femtosecond laser used to create the LASIK flap. Although femtosecond technology is relatively new, the IntraLase laser is already into its 5th generation, that is, improvements are made once every few years. Likewise for the excimer laser used to reshape the cornea in LASIK, these lasers are getting faster and faster, initially starting at 50Hz to the 400 Hz laser that we use in Shinagawa LASIK Centre.

**MG:** What are the rapidly evolving areas in ophthalmology right now and where may they lead to?

**Dr Lee:** Ophthalmology is a very technology driven field. The treatment methods for treating cataract, glaucoma and retina problems are improving all the time with new medications, new machines for cataract surgery and new lens implants that can help the eye see better.

### See through with fervor

Enjoying the study of Human Biology in secondary school and junior college, it was almost predictable that Dr Lee would tread towards the path of Medicine. Looking back now, Dr Lee shares, "I found it fascinating that the body had so many parts that worked in tandem and even more fascinating at how medication and surgery can change processes in the body. So the decision for me to become a doctor was a very natural one, as I turned an academic interest into a professional passion!"

With numerous specialties to choose from, Dr Lee's fascination with the eyes directed him to zoom in on ophthalmology. As he learned more about the eyes, the conditions that affect the external part of this intriguing organ caught his attention drawing him to sub-specialise in Cornea and Refractive Surgery. It doesn't stop there, as Dr Lee continues to improve his skill and knowledge up to this date. Finding satisfaction in his patients' eyes fuels his passion to do more.

It looks as if Dr Lee's enthusiastic diligence is paying off. Aside from his flourishing career, he has won numerous academic awards including four Young Investigator Outstanding Awards over a period of four consecutive years.

**MG:** What inspired you to sub-specialise in Cornea and Refractive Surgery?

**Dr Lee:** Although the eye is a small part of the entire human body, it has many different parts and there are at least six different sub-specialties that an Ophthalmologist can sub-specialise in. The sub-specialty of Cornea and Refractive Surgery involves the study of problems such as dry eyes, allergic eye diseases, infection, inflammation and treatment modalities that include prescribing eye drops, oral medications and performing surgery such as cornea transplants. I found this plethora of diseases of the external part of the eye and its various treatment modalities captivating.

**MG:** What's most rewarding about being an eye specialist?

**Dr Lee:** There is something really fascinating about the eye: it is so small and yet so complex. In many fields of Medicine, one may

have to perform an X-ray or do several blood tests before a diagnosis can be made. But for the eye, diseases can be diagnosed by just looking at or into the eye. More importantly, many of these diseases are treatable, and patients can "see" their results as their vision gets better. A happy patient makes a happy doctor. It is indeed a very visual and very satisfying job.

**MG:** What do you enjoy the most in your practice?

**Dr Lee:** Seeing the elation of patients whose eyes have been restored to natural vision after LASIK, and sharing in their excitement as they experience visual freedom and spontaneity of life, without the inconvenience of having to wear glasses and contact lenses again. It gives me great satisfaction that I can help them achieve that.

**MG:** Who has the biggest influence on your career? Why?

**Dr Lee:** It was from my parents that I learned the importance of hard work and perseverance, as well as the value of having an honest work ethic and compassionate heart. In many ways this laid the critical foundations for the profession that I eventually took up, as medicine is not only a long journey that demands unwavering dedication to the cause but also the commitment to want to make a difference in someone else's life.

Learning those lessons was not easy, as my parents sometimes believed in "tough love" and were very strict with me when I was growing up. Something that I was obviously at times, not too happy with! But now that I have reached this stage in my career and am a parent myself. I often reflect back on those early lessons in life and fully appreciate those values that they instilled in me.

**MG:** Tell us more about your experience at the prestigious Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in the US. What were your main research interests?

**Dr Lee:** I went there on a National Medical Research Council fellowship to pursue a research fellowship in Cornea and External eye diseases. My main area of research there was studying how the cells of pterygial tissue were different from normal cells. Pterygium is a growth on the surface of the eye that encroaches onto the cornea surface. It is more common in people who are frequently exposed to the sunlight; it can be excised by surgery but can recur, drawing similarities with skin cancer.





**MG:** Are you currently involved in research? Tell us more about it.

**Dr Lee:** The research I do now is auditing my own surgical outcomes. There are many different types of refractive surgery with many different software modulations that can be used. Different patients will benefit from different kinds of surgery and auditing the surgeries help in confirming how the treatment method has helped the patient.

### Kaleidoscope world

As we took a peek into Dr Lee's extraordinary place under the sun, we were amazed to find out a world full of colour and interesting details. We were surprised to find that beneath his stellar career lays a vibrant personal life.

Dr Lee is able to keep his career, social and family life in a healthy balance. Although he has a demanding career, being happily married to a paediatrician and having two children (boys aged eight and four) keeps him on his toes as well. A self-confessed perfectionist, however, Dr Lee still finds areas in his life that needs more improvement.

**MG:** What's keeping you busy aside from your medical practice?

**Dr Lee:** The medical practice I have is rather busy. I spend time with my family when I am not at work. I like listening to music, playing the piano and watching movies.

**MG:** What's a typical weekend like?

**Dr Lee:** As I work on Saturday mornings, my weekends kick off having lunch with the family. The regular routine includes taking the kids for tennis lessons and regularly having dinner with my mum, brother and sister.

As my work is very intensive, I tend to really make the most of my weekends. Whether we are just doing regular family things like getting groceries, going swimming with the boys or just simply staying at home chilling out and catching up with friends and family, I make it a point to have as much fun as I can, as it is quality time that I really enjoy and always look forward to.

**MG:** How would you describe yourself?

**Dr Lee:** I like to think of myself as being meticulous and careful which works well in a profession where precision is of utmost importance. I also like to think of myself as approachable so that patients' feel comfortable with me. Chatty by nature, I always enjoy talking to my patients, and find it interesting to know a little more about the patient's work or family life. It also brings a more complete perspective as I treat the patient's eye, as I am able to understand their needs better and address any concerns that they may have.

**MG:** If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

**Dr Lee:** I think that there is always scope for change in a person both personally and professionally, especially when you are open and exposed to new experiences that make you look at things and life differently. As a professional, I think it is always important to keep up with advances. In Medicine and especially in the field of Refractive Surgery, it is important to keep up with changes in technology and to use them appropriately to help improve outcome for patients. If change means improvement, I'm always ready for it! **MG**