

# Annual lectures to honour pioneer surgeon

By Julie Kee

HE WAS "a man who never spared anybody; on the other hand, he never spared himself", said an admirer of surgeon Yahya Cohen.

Dr Yahya Cohen, a pioneer surgeon here, was well known for being a tough task-master, said his friends and former colleagues. But they also knew that it was due to his total dedication to his profession.

Now, eight years after his retirement, the Chapter of Surgeons has decided to honour Dr Cohen, 75, for his outstanding contributions to surgery by setting up an annual Yahya Cohen Lecture.

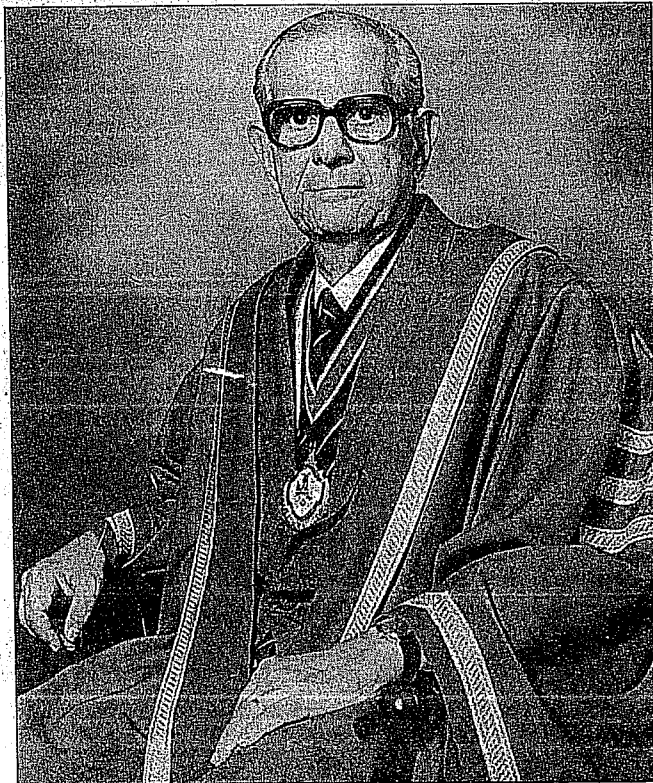
The lectureship, open to all Fellows and Members of the Chapter of Surgeons, will be awarded to the main author of the best scientific paper published in the preceding year.

The inaugural lecture will be held on Nov 11 at 2 pm during the 29th Annual Combined Surgical Meeting.

Born in Singapore of Jewish parents, Dr Cohen decided as a young boy to make surgery a career.

In 1947, he graduated from the King Edward VII College of Medicine. In 1948, he won the Queen's Scholarship to do his postgraduate studies in Britain.

He spent the next 40 years caring for patients, educating medical students and working



Dr Yahya Cohen, when he was Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore, a post he held from 1968 to 1970.

with several medical associations.

He was senior surgeon at the Singapore General Hospital from 1960 to 1972, president of the Singapore Medical Association from 1961 to 1962, the first Chairman of the Committee of Surgery of the

School of Postgraduate Medical Studies, University of Singapore, from 1969 to 1977, and President of the Singapore Medical Council in 1972.

Dr Cohen told The Straits Times he was touched by the decision to set up the lecture.

He said: "I didn't expect it.

I feel very honoured."

Obviously uncomfortable with all the attention, he added: "Please do not make me out to be a great man. I am just an ordinary person interested in my work."

Dr V.K. Pillay, 66, an orthopaedic surgeon who mooted the idea of the lecture two years ago, said of the professor: "Once, I saw him literally rap a surgeon's knuckles with a pair of surgical forceps when he felt he was not sufficiently alert."

Yet, Dr Pillay, who has known Dr Cohen for more than 40 years, said that he was kind and warm. "If you were remiss in your duties, you'd had it. But if your family was ill, he would go out of his way to look after them."

Professor Raj Nambiar, 60, Dr Cohen's assistant from 1964 to 1972, also vouched for his dedication.

Prof Nambiar, now senior surgeon at the Singapore General Hospital, said: "He would make himself available day or night for his patients. When he had to be woken up in the middle of the night, he never questioned the person who disturbed him."

Prof Cohen's wife, Nina, 64, added this: "In all our 29 years of marriage, we hardly spent a Sunday morning together because he was always working.

"He would always say: 'The patient is ill on Sundays. The patient has no holiday.'"