



IN MEMORIAM

Mark E. Wong, DDS, FACD, FACS*Professor with Tenure and Former Bernard and Gloria P. Katz Chair*

On behalf of the Katz Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, it is with profound sadness that I share that Dr. Mark E. Wong passed away peacefully on September 4, 2026, surrounded by his family. His loss is felt deeply throughout our department and across the national and international oral and maxillofacial surgery community.

For nearly four decades, Dr. Wong was an integral part of UTHealth Houston and one of the most respected leaders in oral and maxillofacial surgery. He directed our residency training program from 1996 through April 2025. After becoming acting chair in 2000, he served as chair of the department from 2001 until August 1, 2026. Under his leadership, the department grew tremendously in size, clinical scope, educational excellence, research, and national and international influence.

Dr. Wong's service extended across the profession. He served as president of the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, the American Academy of Craniomaxillofacial Surgeons, the International Board for the Certification of Specialists in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, and the Osteo Science Foundation. He was an accomplished reconstructive surgeon, educator, and translational scientist whose research advanced bone tissue engineering and regeneration of the temporomandibular joint. For nearly 30 years, he also trained and mentored oral and maxillofacial surgeons in the United States Armed Forces and the Canadian Armed Forces.

His many recognitions included the AAOMS Robert V. Walker Distinguished Service Award, the ADEA Gies Award in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, and the Canadian Forces Medallion for Distinguished Service. He was named a 2026 Honorary Alumnus of the UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry and had been selected to receive the 2026 AAOMS Research Recognition Award. The Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Foundation further honored his legacy through the establishment of the Mark E. Wong Research Fellowship.

Those achievements, however, tell only part of his story.

I first met Dr. Wong in 2002, when I was a dental student extern with an earnest but still unformed interest in tissue engineering. He listened to my ideas, encouraged me to think bigger, and ultimately created an educational path that had never previously existed at our institution. That first encounter captured the man I would come to know over the next 24 years. He recognized possibility in people, invested in them without reservation, and quietly created the conditions that allowed them to succeed.

Dr. Wong held all of us to high standards because he believed in the importance of preparation, excellence, and responsibility to our patients. To generations of residents, he was an exacting and unforgettable teacher. Yet behind that professional intensity was a remarkably warm, generous, and joyful person. He was the department chair who attended nearly every one of my weekly research meetings throughout my PhD, opened his home to residents who were on call and away from their families during the holidays, and could make even a short conversation in an airport lounge feel meaningful. He loved people, conversation, laughter, discovery, and the opportunity to help others find their way.

His kindness was never reserved for people with titles or prestige. Dr. Wong often told me that the truest measure of character is how we treat people who may not seem obviously "important" to our work, particularly when no one is watching. He lived that principle. His generosity extended just as readily to staff as it did to faculty, residents, and patients. He noticed when someone was struggling and often went quietly far beyond what was expected to help, without seeking recognition or credit.

Even during his illness, Dr. Wong continued to give. He remained deeply engaged in mentoring others, planning for the department's future, preserving its institutional knowledge, and ensuring a thoughtful leadership transition. He could easily have turned inward, but he continued to serve his family, his department, and his profession with extraordinary courage, grace, and generosity until the very end.

Dr. Wong was the greatest man I have ever had the privilege of knowing. That judgment is not based on his titles, awards, publications, or positions of authority. The outpouring of messages and well wishes from colleagues, friends, and acquaintances around the world makes clear that he touched each of us in ways both large and small, through the wisdom he shared so freely, the patience he showed as a teacher, and the quiet integrity with which he carried himself in every role. He gave generously of his time and knowledge, never expecting anything in return beyond the hope that we would carry his example forward. His greatest and most enduring legacy lives within all of us who benefited from his mentorship, friendship, and example.

Above all, Dr. Wong loved his family, and the Wong family was also an inseparable part of the life of our department. At our gatherings, Marlene, Denise, Lindsay, and Matthew were always there, sharing in the conversation, laughter, and fellowship. When the children were younger, they even accompanied Dr. Wong to our Saturday morning rounds at the Veterans Affairs Hospital, watching movies in the back while rounds took place and greeting everyone afterward. Through these countless interactions, generations of residents, faculty, and staff came to know and care for them. The close-knit family spirit that defined the Wongs was the same spirit Dr. Wong extended to our department. Marlene and the children are woven into its fabric and will always remain part of our departmental family. Please keep Marlene, Denise, Lindsay, and Matthew in your thoughts and prayers during this extraordinarily difficult time.

Details regarding a Celebration of Life honoring Dr. Wong will be shared as they become available.

With profound sadness and gratitude,

Simon Young, DDS, MD, PhD, FACS

Professor and Bernard and Gloria P. Katz Chair
Katz Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
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