

**TRANSCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW WITH DR. CHARLES WIENER, DEAN, PERDANA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, MALAYSIA FOR UNIVERSAL NEWS / FOREIGN POLICY SE ASIA**

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**UNIVERSAL NEWS: It is anticipated that 70% of student demand will come from Asia by 2025. That being the case and this being the fastest-growing student market in the world, how do you feel Malaysia is preparing itself for this kind of demand?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** I can only comment on the medical world, because I am not familiar enough with the non-medical field. I think that our project represents the Malaysian Government's foresight that the worldwide phenomenon of the growth of graduate entry medical programs is proliferating, and that Malaysia would like to be part of both the foundation of that movement in this part of the world and also that it is a great option for Malaysian students to develop as leaders in medicine. I think the postgraduate model has a few advantages over the British undergraduate model, and I think that the Malaysian Government and the people who created Perdana understand that.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: As a region composed of so many different cultures and 1,500 languages, the obvious benefits are knowledge and having medical qualifications with higher standards. What do you think this will do regionally for the image of Malaysia?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** The world is getting much smaller at a very quick rate, so internationalization is as widespread in medical education as it is in everything else. For example, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education just opened an international office in Singapore and the American style of medical training is expected to proliferate throughout Asia. I think that Asia is the next big frontier for at least a significant component of American style postgraduate and specialty training and academic research institutions in Asia. I think there are good examples of that in Singapore, Qatar and Malaysia.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: How competitive do you think Malaysia is in comparison to countries such as Qatar?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** I think that Malaysia has a much broader base of an educated indigenous population. There are a lot of incredibly well-educated Malaysian kids out there who hopefully want to be leaders in academic medicine and raising the research, health and the education of this country. We have got a great infrastructure of highly educated English-speaking kids to service the pipeline. There is a commitment from the Government to enhance high-quality education and there is research going on in this country. The research is not widely recognized internationally, but it is locally recognized. So there is an infrastructure here that you can build on.

We are the first postgraduate program and we want to develop the first integrated medical center in Southeast Asia. Not even Singapore has one. The raw materials are here already; we do not need to import them.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: You want to produce high-quality medical professionals to go over the world. Malaysia wants to develop a hub and produce Malaysian medical leaders, together with the Malaysian Government. How do you think Perdana is going to make an impact?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** Right now there is no Malaysian university ranked in the top 100 to 150 medical universities. My goal is to have the Perdana University Graduate School of Medicine as Malaysia's first widely recognized international research and academic educational clinical institution. We are accepting our first class in September 2011 although we will not have our own clinical facilities until 2014, but we will have our own research program starting in September 2011. I have already got high-level researchers coming out here in July ready to hit the road running.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS:** **There is an element and certain snobbishness about the prestige of education. How long do you think it will take for the assessment of education to be such that the actual standards of your facilities are the most important factor? When do you think that Perdana will have that level where it becomes a world-renowned university?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** Good question. There is an intrinsic time lag for education. My program is at least four years, so I will not have my first graduate for at least another four years. Duke in the U.S. is graduating its first class this year, so I cannot graduate anyone. Even though my curriculum is the second place in the world that has a curriculum based on individuality which is the future of medical education, I cannot show any results for at least four years. Clinically, I am not going to have a facility until 2014 or 2015 and that is why research is so important. We can make a mark in research within two years by publishing world class journals and presenting unique places. That is why it is so important that we are establishing our research commission up front, because the timeline is about the same.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS:** **Do you think that Perdana will develop a brand faster, given the globalization of education?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** I think that is where the collaboration with Johns Hopkins is essential. The fact that we had a Perdana research retreat in Baltimore on April 18<sup>th</sup> and I had 25 to 30 Johns Hopkins professionals, department chairs, leading researchers, members of the National Academy of Sciences and they were listening to how they could interact with us with tremendous enthusiasm. I have an intrinsic lag with medical students and clinical facilities, but I have a perfectly primed pump for research. That is how we make our name quickly.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS:** **Because Malaysia is investing in human capital, it is very keen on producing actual patents. What would you say the equivalent is in the medical industry as far as producing more than reports?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** It is improving health. That is the easy one. We are going to focus on cervical cancer in this country; it is the second leading killer of women in Malaysia. It is clearly linked to infectious diseases and a vaccine that is proven to be efficacious at least in the West, and maybe elsewhere. There is inadequate screening for cervical cancer. Once you get cervical cancer in this country, the care you get is as good as anywhere in Southeast Asia, but more people are getting cervical cancer here than in other countries because other countries screen better and provide better education and have better diagnostics etc.

We know that if we screen more people for cervical cancer, if we vaccinate more people against HPV and if we screen more people for HPV, we will reduce the deaths from cervical cancer 20 years down the line. We are looking at coming up with an effective vaccine and even a candidate vaccine that

can help Malaysia and the entire Southeast Asia region. We are also looking at diabetes. Our Vice Dean of Research is a woman who has a vision to use new techniques and science teams to tackle these problems rather than just having single projects. We are taking the genes society approach to education and research by tackling the program comprehensively.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: I know you are a huge fan of individual thinking (more of a hands-on approach) when it comes to becoming a doctor and being a good doctor. Everything in between becomes very important.**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** This is where Hopkins is helpful. Johns Hopkins was the first medical school in the US to take on many of the values we are taking on. As a result of that, US medical education changed. One of the things that made Hopkins great was that they always asked their students to think broadly and develop into leaders in whatever community they defined. It could be a small community in a rural area, but we want to be identified as a leader. Hopkins did not have the advantage of a heritage of high standards in 1893 but I have that advantage because I am affiliated with Hopkins. So Perdana has that advantage of having high standards since day one. That is how we are going to push students to take on a broader responsibility in society here to develop into leaders.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: You said that “Hopkins revolutionized how we teach physicians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this is a portal of entry where we can change the model in a country that has asked for our advice and collaboration”. That does sum up why a number of international institutions come to this region. What are the fundamental changes you are making in the model that differentiate it from Hopkins in Baltimore?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** I think that the fundamental change we are making in Malaysia is that we are taking kids that have some life experience and they have entered the advanced education environment and who still want to be physicians. Maybe they did not initially realize that they wanted to be physicians but they still have the opportunity to be physicians. There is a huge difference in terms of the mindset, the maturity and the ambitions of someone who is 21 versus someone who is 18, and we are taking advantage of that. This allows us to take a whole group of Malaysian and international students (but mostly Malaysian students) who did not think about medicine in that context, but who now have that opportunity available.

We start off with a very advanced and rigorous curriculum from day one. We are going to be very careful about whom we choose; we are going to choose kids who we think are going to succeed in our model. If you look at the questions in our application, it asks what our leadership aspirations are, what you want to do and how you think you can change the world. Other than grades, we look at this carefully and choose kids who want to do that. We hopefully nurture them.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: I know that you have a huge background within medicine and you studied at Hammersmith Hospital in London in the 1980s. You said that in order to be a good doctor, you need some life experience and you have to possess a breadth of knowledge. What has had the greatest impact on your career?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** That is a tough question. There are too many answers to that question. I think the personal moment that made me realize how important what we do is when one of my

residents who I trained died. It was sudden; she was well one day and then she was dead in 30 hours. I was close to her. I saw how people responded and it made me realize what we do after meeting the patient's family and being a director. That was the most important moment. In the last page of the Hopkins medicine magazine, there is an article written about me. That made me realize that you can have an exponential impact. It does not matter whether you are a clinician, educator or researcher. We have the power to touch an incredible amount of people and inspire people to do the right thing. Prior to that, it would have to be mentorship and working with other people.

I decided to leave Baltimore when we were presented with the option of potentially transforming another group of students in this country. It is a great country.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: What final message would you like to send to our readers on behalf of the University? What would you most like to communicate?**

**DR. CHARLES WIENER:** I think what we are trying to do with Pugsan and the collaboration with Johns Hopkins is to improve the health of the world. This part of the world is right for the development of internationally-recognized research, education and clinical care and we think that we have the potential to set an example for the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region and beyond in terms of making the most of human capital and all the great people who are in this region. We want to be at the forefront of that, rather than being in the middle.

**UNIVERSAL NEWS: Thank you very much.**