

'Sars hero' to take top job at medical school in Singapore

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A former Chinese University president and gastroenterologist hailed as an "Asian hero" during the Sars epidemic in 2003 has been appointed as the medical dean of Singapore's Nanyang Technological University and will move to the city state next year.

Joseph Sung Jao-yiu, 60, took the helm of Chinese University as its president and vice-chancellor in 2010, after years spent in teaching and research, before deciding to step down in 2017.



Joseph Sung is "sad and excited" to move. Photo: Winson Wong

The gastroenterology scientist, who called Hong Kong his "sweet home forever" in a social media post yesterday, said he was both sad and excited about the move, but added he did not view it as truly leaving Hong Kong, as his family would be staying in the city.

Sung, who served as associate dean of Chinese University's medical faculty before becoming president, had remained with the faculty as a professor, and currently serves as director of two key research entities, including the institute of digestive disease.

He was best known outside Hong Kong as the lead doctor during the city's fight against severe acute respiratory syndrome in

2003, for which *Time* magazine dubbed him an "Asian hero".

During his time as president of Chinese University, Sung was popular among students, especially after he visited protest scenes during the 2014 Occupy movement to engage in talks with young demonstrators. He repeated that last November, when he visited the university's campus to talk with protesters during the height of months of social unrest.

"My friends, it is with sadness and excitement that I disclose my plan to you ... that I will be taking up a new job at the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore as Dean of Medicine and Senior Vice-President starting March 2021, turning a new page in my life," Sung wrote on his Facebook page.

"Now I have to say goodbye to all my friends at home, Hong Kong. I do not consider myself leaving Hong Kong, as my family and my mother are still living here. Singapore is only three hours away by flight, and I have asked my wife to save some dinner for me," he said.

"[But] my excitement stems from having this great opportunity to help developing a young medical school and coordinating life science research at a vibrant university, a top institute not only in Asia, but also in the global league."

He also noted he was proud of the health care workers who had led Hong Kong through Sars and were still fighting the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In a statement yesterday, a spokeswoman from Nanyang Technological University confirmed Sung would formally begin his tenure on April 1, adding that he was unanimously recommended after a global search by an advisory committee.