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Ex-surgery head of HKU sentenced for misconduct and false accounting

19 April 2012

A former Head of Department of Surgery of The University of Hong Kong (HKU), charged by the ICAC, was today (Thursday) sentenced at the District Court for misconduct in misusing HKU funds to hire a domestic helper and covering up a subordinate's embezzlement, as well as false accounting in relation to overseas travelling expenses.

John Wong, 71, was ordered by Judge Susana D'Almada Remedios to perform 240 hours of community service, and repay HKU about \$478,000 being part of the Staff Provident Fund to which June Chan Sau-hung, then an Administrative Assistant, was not entitled.

In sentencing, the judge said what the defendant had done was a serious breach of duty.

The judge added that a community service order was imposed on the defendant after taking into account various factors, including his old age, his contribution to the society, as well as his above repayment to HKU and a tax repayment to the Inland Revenue Department.

The defendant was earlier found guilty of four charges - two of misconduct in public office, and two of false accounting.

The case arose from a corruption complaint. Subsequent ICAC enquiries revealed the above offences.

The court heard that at the material times, the defendant was the Head of Department of Surgery of HKU.

In 1995, the department established the Skills Development Centre (SDC) to provide medical training to all surgical specialties, medical students, interns, nurses and doctors. Various courses offered by the SDC included Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS).

In January 2005, the defendant set up Unisurgical Limited (Unisurgical), of which he was the sole shareholder cum director. Unisurgical was not a charitable organisation and enjoyed no tax exemption.

The court heard that between January 29, 2002 and January 30, 2007, the defendant directed a total of over \$730,000 from the two respective bank accounts of the SDC and the ATLS to be used as payments for hiring a domestic helper cum driver.

Between late 2006 and December 23, 2008, the defendant failed to report to HKU that Chan had stolen money totalling over \$2.6 million from the bank account of the SDC.

Instead, the defendant lent money to Chan to pay back the bank account to cover up the theft offences; and allowed her to resign from HKU without being investigated and/or disciplined, so as to receive from HKU the full payments of the Staff Provident Fund totalling over \$690,000.

The court heard that on November 20, 2006 and November 14, 2007, the defendant falsified respective entries in the Directors' Report and Accounts of Unisurgical for the year ended March 31, 2006 and March 31, 2007, purporting to show that over \$690,000 and over \$74,000 had been incurred as overseas travelling expenses respectively.

As a result, Unisurgical underpaid its taxes by more than \$124,000, the court was told.

HKU had rendered full assistance to the ICAC in the investigation.

The prosecution was today represented by Senior Counsel Wong Man-kit and Public Prosecutor Claudia Ng, assisted by ICAC officer Zoe Lau.

[Back to Index](#)