

# Dr Tony Tan and Dr Pay Lu Lu

We spoke to husband and wife doctors, Dr Tony Tan, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Tony Tan Women and Fetal Clinic, and Dr Pay Lu Lu, Consultant Anaesthetist, PLL Anaesthesia Clinic, about working together, having babies, and their marriage of true minds.



**MyAlvernia:** How did you two meet?

**Dr Tan:** We were from different junior colleges and first met in medical school when we became classmates. It was during our first year of medical school in 1987 that we started to date. We then went on to work closely in the same clinical group for the last three and a half years of medical school.

**MyAlvernia:** Was it a long courtship?

**Dr Pay:** We both got married in 1997 after 10 years of dating! At the time, we were both young medical trainees in our chosen specialties – Tony was in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH) and I was in Anaesthesia at Changi General Hospital.

**MyAlvernia:** When did you start working together?

**Dr Pay:** Tony had wanted to specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology since he was a third-year medical student. I had initially wanted to be a GP until I did a polyclinic posting and realised that it was not my

cup of tea. Then my best friend was doing anaesthesia and loved it, and told me to give it a try. I did and there was no turning back. Till today, I still love what I do.

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*Dr Tony Tan*

**Dr Tan:** I also had a role to play in Lu Lu deciding to subspecialise in obstetric anaesthesia at KKH. The reason at that time was simple – we could then share one car to go to work!

**MyAlvernia:** We understand that you often work together. What is it like working alongside your husband?

**Dr Pay:** We have worked together for 20 years now. We know each other’s habits inside out. He is the only surgeon who is very accommodating to my schedule.

**MyAlvernia:** Dr Tan, what are the pros and cons of working with your wife?

**Dr Tan:** My wife knows everything. There are only advantages to having a wife who is also the regular anaesthetist, no cons. I know that because my wife told me so.

**MyAlvernia:** A well-trained husband and a well-trained doctor!

**Dr Tan:** On a more serious note, we are able to update each other of the recent advances in our own fields, and align our practices with the known best practices. We are so familiar with one another that subtle movements like an upwards glance whilst I am operating would let her know that I am worried about blood loss or something. She would quickly run



more intravenous fluids or set up another intravenous plug for possible use for fluid resuscitation.

We also know that we have each other’s back in all emergencies. Once, I was urgently called in the wee hours of the morning by the labour ward to attend to a colleague’s patient who had just been admitted with very poor heartbeat tracing of the foetus. She had to have a Caesarean section done as soon as possible. My wife was already partially woken by my ringing phone and my loud conversation with the labour ward nurse. We both jumped out of bed quickly, changed and drove immediately to the hospital. During the car ride, we had already established a plan for the emergency Caesarean section. I dropped her off quickly while I parked. When I reached the operating theatre, the anaesthesia was already in progress. By the time I scrubbed up, I was ready to perform the Caesarean section. Fortunately, both mother and child did well after the Caesarean section.

**Dr Pay:** The only con is that we both tend to wake up when one of our phones rings in the middle of the night.

**MyAlvernia:** Do you ever have professional differences of opinion?

**Dr Tan:** Occasionally. And when we do, we review the latest evidence on the issue at hand and try and convince the other person of our point of view. If we still disagree, I will take the call if it is an obstetric or gynaecologic issue, and Lu Lu makes the final decision if it is an anaesthetic issue.



**MyAlvernia:** When you were pregnant, Dr Pay, did you receive special treatment from your husband?

**Dr Pay:** No, he certainly did not fuss over me. In fact, we were very junior at that time and hospitalisation for pregnancy care was not covered by the hospital. To save money, I was admitted to a subsidised ward and he joked that I could be discharged directly from the labour ward two hours after delivery!

**MyAlvernia:** Is that how you remember it, Dr Tan?

**Dr Tan:** I was quite relaxed about the whole pregnancy. However during the delivery, there was an episode where the baby’s heart beat was showing some signs of stress. I have to admit that I felt quite stressed then.

**MyAlvernia:** From your professional points-of-view, do you have any advice or words of encouragement for women contemplating motherhood?

**Dr Tan:** If women are contemplating whether to get pregnant earlier or later, earlier is almost always better. As many complications of pregnancy grow with increased age of the mother, getting pregnant earlier tends to reduce most risks of pregnancies. That said, the joy and relief of the parents after the birth of a healthy baby, regardless of the ease or difficulty of the pregnancy and delivery, is clearly well worth the sacrifices that they have put in to have their baby.

**MyAlvernia:** It must be immensely satisfying to help to deliver a healthy baby. What is that like for you both?

**Dr Tan:** We share the joy and relief of the parents. At Caesarean sections, Lu Lu would be busy snapping photos of the baby with the mum and dad. As Lu Lu is into photography, she is able to capture the joy of the moment of the family pretty well.

**MyAlvernia:** How do you attain a work-life balance?

**Dr Pay:** We have shared hobbies. We love to travel. We do meditation and Pilates together, and like to take walks in the evenings around our estate.

**MyAlvernia:** Do you consciously separate your professional and personal lives?

**Dr Tan:** No, we don’t. There’s no need to unless we are dealing with patients. We really enjoy our work and we enjoy each other’s company.

**MyAlvernia:** And we really enjoyed the conversation. Thank you, both.

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