Father of cancer research wins top award

Seven other scientists here also recognised at the ceremony.

Prof Soo – who still heads the cancer centre – helped to create the Duke-National University of Singapore (NUS) Graduate Medical School, the second medical school here after the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

He said before the ceremony: “I hope to create more institutions and programmes to encourage young people here to be involved in biomedical research.”

In the works are at least 10 programmes in the next two years for prospective doctors here.

But it is not all work and no play for the practising surgeon, who is married and has a 22-year-old son. An avid angler, he goes on a trip once a year with friends to Australia to fish.

Seven other scientists here were also recognised at the ceremony.

Two teams of scientists received the President’s Science Award, given for basic research that leads to breakthroughs.

A team of four scientists from the Genome Institute of Singapore got the nod for their work in stem cells which can grow into different types of cells.

They are looking at how stem cells can be used to repair damaged organs and to study the development of diseases.

Led by Harvard Medical School associate professor Lim Jing, the team’s other members are Dr Lawrence Stanton, Dr Paul Robson and Dr Ng Huck Hui.

NUS School of Computing professors Ooi Beng Chin and Tan Kian Lee were honoured for designing a new database system that makes it easier and safer for different groups to share data.

A new kit that can detect even minuscule amounts of cancer cells earned Professor Lim Cheow Tock, a bioengineering specialist at NUS, the President’s Technology Award, given for research that leads to new medical technology.

Mr Lim Hng Kiang lauded the winners and said Singapore has established itself as a centre for medical innovation.

He noted that the number of research and development (R&D) jobs here has increased fivefold in the last two decades to 40,000 now. Singapore also spent $6.5 billion, more than 2 per cent of the gross domestic product, on R&D last year. Almost two-thirds of this came from private firms.

Mr Lim said: “We are witnessing the shift of global demand (for research) to Asia, and Singapore is well-placed to capitalise on this shift.”

Congratulations to the winners, President Tony Tan Keng Yam wrote yesterday on his Facebook page that he is confident we can continue building on our science and technology capabilities to make Singapore “Asia’s innovation capital”.

Photo: SAMUEL HE