

Five questions for...

Professor Lim Chwee Teck, 46, is principal investigator at the Mechanobiology Institute at the National University of Singapore. He developed a kit that can detect minuscule amounts of cancer cells.



This earned him the President's Technology Award, given for research that leads to new medical technology, last year.

■ *What is a typical day in the office like for you?*

There will be lectures, tutorials, research discussions with students and collaborators in the labs and hospitals as well as committee meetings.

Substantial time is also spent writing research papers and grant proposals.

■ *What is the next big exciting project for you?*

My research involves designing and developing microfluidic biochips to detect and diagnose human diseases.

We are now focusing on further developing a lab-on-chip device that allows

several laboratory tests to be performed on a single chip. It's like squeezing a whole lab onto such a small chip. This chip can then be easily used in a clinical setting or even be sent to a village in a developing country where resources are scarce.

■ *What is the biggest misconception people have about your field of work?*

People always relate mechanical engineers to cars, airplanes or washing machines. So my friends are always puzzled when I tell them I am working on human diseases such as cancer and malaria.

But we have demonstrated that mechanics can help us to not only better understand how diseases arise when cells start to change their mechanical properties, but also to detect and diagnose diseases.

■ *What is the best part of your job?*

The opportunity to interact, work with and learn from both local and overseas researchers of other disciplines such as biology and medicine, and the opportunity to mould and train the next generation of engineers and researchers.

■ *Where and how do you see yourself in the next five years?*

I hope to continue what I am doing now but with more of my research technologies being put to good use in the hospitals or clinics.