

Memorial Gathering for Professor Tsuneji Nagai

Opening speech by Yuichi Sugiyama Yuichi Sugiyama

Oct 4th 2025 Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan

Good afternoon, distinguished guests, colleagues, and dear friends.
Thank you very much for gathering here today in memory of Professor Tsuneji Nagai, despite your busy schedules. I am Yuichi Sugiyama, and it is my honor to serve as the chair of this memorial gathering.

1. On the Passing of Professor Nagai

On June 6th of this year, Professor Tsuneji Nagai passed away.
To those of us who knew him in life, the news of his passing brought profound sorrow beyond words.
Today, we are blessed with the opportunity—gathered here with so many of you—to remember him together, reflect on his achievements, and celebrate his character. For this I offer my heartfelt appreciation.

2. Professor Nagai's Achievements

If we could display the first slide, please.
Here is a summary of Professor Nagai's achievements; more details are in your program booklet.
After graduating from the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Tokyo in 1956, he completed his doctoral course at the same university in 1961, and then joined the Department of Pharmaceutics at the University of Tokyo as an assistant Professor.

My first encounter with Professor Nagai was when I was assigned to the pharmaceuticals laboratory as a fourth-year undergraduate student. I still vividly recall the strong impression made by his commanding voice and the clarity of his lectures.

In 1971, at the relatively young age of 38, he was appointed Professor of Pharmaceutics at Hoshi College of Pharmacy.

Later, in 1985, he founded the Japanese Society of Pharmaceutics and served as its first president. In 1986, he became the first Japanese recipient of the Høst-Madsen Medal from the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP). That same year, he established the precursor to what is now the Nagai Memorial Foundation for International Pharmaceutical Exchange, dedicating himself to the promotion of international research exchange.

As a leading figure in drug delivery systems (DDS) research, he contributed to the development of the Japanese DDS Society, and he also served as the first president of the Cyclodextrin Society. Furthermore, from 2001 to 2004 he served as President of Hoshi College of Pharmacy.

From 1996 to 1998, he served as President of the Controlled Release Society (CRS). At the 1997 Stockholm meeting of CRS, the opening ceremony—modeled after the Nobel Prize ceremony—saw Professor Nagai descend a spiral staircase to deliver the presidential address, in front of a full house. That moment continues to remain vivid in my memory, and has been a source of inspiration for my own path as a researcher.

In 1999 he was honored with the Medal with Purple Ribbon. Notably, he was awarded honorary doctorates and professorships by six universities around the world, including University of London and University of Leiden, attestations to his high international standing.

3. Founding of the Nagai Foundation and Its Contributions

I would like to share a bit more about the foundation he established.

Professor Nagai founded the Nagai Memorial Foundation for International Pharmaceutical Exchange, which has served as a strong pillar of support for many young researchers in the field of pharmaceutical sciences, helping them to spread their wings on the global stage.

Countless researchers, aided by grants from this foundation, have flourished overseas. Such extensive international exchange would not have been realized without his vision and proactive spirit.

Recently, I have been entrusted with the role of Chairman of the foundation, to follow his legacy. Though it is a solemn responsibility, I pledge to commit myself wholeheartedly, drawing on his words and example at every step.

4. Personal Encounters and Mentorship of Young Researchers

If I might ask you to show Slide 2.

After I became a professor in the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Tokyo in 1991, I had the privilege of receiving Professor Nagai's guidance for over 35 years.

On the left of the slide is a photograph with Dr. Kamal Midha, former FIP president, taken at a FIP meeting in Sydney; on the right is a photograph with Professor Nicholas Bodor in Florida.

Professor Nagai and Professor Bodor organized the "Retrometabolic Conference" roughly every two years in various cities worldwide for nearly twenty years, an initiative that brought together many researchers.

May I have the next slide, Slide 3.

This shows a photograph from what was called the “NM Conference” (named from Nagai and Midha), a brainstorming meeting in which the two would converse in depth about what pharmaceutical researchers ought to do, and how to live a meaningful life. The first of these was held in Bermuda, where I was also invited. Distinguished scholars such as Benet, Rowland, Breimer, Amidon, and Crommelin gathered—about eight in total—and spoke of their ideas candidly. It was a gathering that cleansed one’s heart.

In the program booklet you will find a message jointly from Dr. Kamal and his wife Neelam. I would like to share an excerpt in Japanese with you now:

“There is one unforgettable moment. After swimming together in Bermuda, we spent quiet time on a rock on which Professor Nagai had stood—it came to be called ‘Nagai Rock’ by us. What began with jokes and laughter, eventually became a symbol of his strength, presence, and his unwavering role in our lives. Even in complex circumstances, he exhibited clarity; in times of confusion, he brought serenity; and he always bore himself with dignity.”

When I first read this message, my heart was stirred. I felt deeply that no words capture Professor Nagai more precisely and warmly than this.

5. His Character and Personal Qualities

Professor Nagai was a man of deep humanity who cared for those around him, yet he never compromised on excellence in his research or teaching. The combination of warmth and rigor is what I believe most symbolized his personality.

At international conferences, his humanity stood out even more. In

corridors he would often chat with someone—but he would not stop at simple exchange of business cards. He would say, “Let’s do something together,” sketch out a possible path, and by the next morning he would already be emailing the relevant parties. That speed, that attentiveness and care, led to many fruitful collaborations and personal exchanges.

Allow me to share one anecdote from around 1999. At about 8 p.m., Professor Nagai—then attending a FIP conference overseas—placed an international call to me. At that time, there was no tool like LINE, so I was somewhat surprised to answer the call. He said:

“Sugiyama, I am now talking with the members of the science section. You know Dr. Benet, who is the current chair of the FIP science section, right? His term ends after the millennium meeting in San Francisco in 2000. They are discussing his successor; many members are saying, ‘We want Sugiyama to take it on.’ If you agree, then Drs. Benet, Rowland, Breimer, Crommelin, and Midha and myself (Dr. Nagai)—all of us—will support you. Please discuss with your family and let me know within a few days.”

At the time, I lacked confidence and did not feel I had the strength to succeed Dr. Benet. But I felt deep joy that Professor Nagai was pushing me so strongly, and I sent a reply accepting the role just two days later. In retrospect, that was one of the great turning points in my life. I learned, through experience, that unless you take a bold leap you gain nothing.

If I may ask for Slide 4.

The top photo was taken during a Danube cruise with Professor Nagai and his wife in Nice after the FIP meeting in 2002. The lower photo is from the 2000 FIP meeting in Vienna, relaxing at the opera house. The Danube cruise, in a relatively small boat, was a time of great tranquility. I recall that

during such times Professor Nagai never spoke of work—he simply enjoyed nature, people, and the surroundings, offering an aura of acceptance and peace.

On a personal note, having lost my father when I was young, Professor Nagai sometimes stood in my mind as a father figure. His dignity and capacity to embrace—his ever-reliable presence—became, for me, the very image of a “father.” The unwavering support and the fact that he *was* such a person continue to live on in my memories, spirit, and the stories we pass on.

6. To Ms. Kiyoko, His Beloved Wife

At this point, I would like to speak briefly of Kiyoko, who supported Professor Nagai through many years.

When he suffered a cerebral infarction in 2011, during his recovery and rehabilitation, and later when he attended domestic and international conferences in a wheelchair, Kiyoko stood by him without fail. The way the two of you continued your work together through the foundation deeply moved us all.

At times you accompanied his temperament, at times you reproached, at times you gently received him—your presence itself showed the depth of your bond and love. That the fourteen years following his stroke were as meaningful and full as they were is, I believe, entirely thanks to your support.

Also, being yourself a scientist in the information sciences, Kiyoko supported him even in his communications and online meeting environment—an expression of your attentive care. Because you fully understood him, he was able to make those years so rich.

Kiyoko, I pray that from now on you may take care of your health and enjoy your own life at your pace. We, who loved Professor Nagai, stand ready to support you always.

7. Closing

Today, at this memorial gathering, I rejoice in having had the chance to look back together with all of you on Professor Nagai's university research and education, his domestic and international scholarly activities, and the many contributions through the foundation to research and education. Going forward, we shall carry forward the "steadfastness of conviction" that he taught us, and pass it on to future generations.

Finally, it is my solemn prayer that Professor Tsuneji Nagai may rest in peace. We here pledge to continue walking the path into the world he built—together with all those present today.

Professor Tsuneji Nagai—guided by your teachings, we will live each day with care and purpose.

To you all: thank you very much for listening to me until the end.