



ON THE PULSE

- NUS-CAMBRIDGE Inaugural Joint Symposium
- White Coat Ceremony

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

- Professor Saw Seang-Mei Vice-Dean (Research)

KOPI-TALK

- Hair for Hope Satellite Event at NUHS

MY STORY

- Congratulations NHS-CHP Group!
- Outstanding All-Round Achievement
- Hope for Young Lives

VOICE OF ALUMNI

- Interview Series with Power98
- Today's Doctors, Yesterday's Students

IN LIGHTER VEIN

- New Year's Resolution
- Quote of the Day
- White Coat Humour



Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine

Medicine

A publication of The Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine • Issue 4 / November 2012

Dean's Message



Hello Everyone!

Warmest greetings from the School of Medicine!

We started the new Academic Year 2012/2013 in August and welcomed 300

medical freshmen of Class 2017, our largest class ever. The White Coat Ceremony on 13 August, attended by the freshmen and their parents, celebrated the start of their journey to become the doctors of tomorrow. In the next five years in the School, they will receive the best education we can give and also build strong relationships with their colleagues, friends, seniors and teachers, all of which will serve them in good stead after they graduate.

The inaugural NUS-Cambridge Joint Symposium was held at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine's Clinical Research Centre Auditorium in August 2012. The symposium brought together leading researchers and clinician scientists from the School of Clinical Medicine, University of Cambridge and our medical school in the fields of metabolic medicine and infection and immunity. We expect the discussions to lead on to more research and collaboration between the two Schools.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Chiong Yee Keow for receiving the Lee Hsien Loong Award for Outstanding All-Round Achievement 2012. Dr Chiong was recognised not only for her significant contributions to the community, but also for her excellent academic achievements and is held as a role model for her peers and students in the School. Our congratulations also to the 2012 Neighbourhood Health Screening Group for their outstanding achievement in winning the Young Scientist(s) Award in the Health Services and Systems Research at the 2012 SingHealth Annual Scientific Congress, as well as being recognised at other international conferences, winning accolades such as Best Oral Presentation (Gynecological Cancer) at the 10th Scientific Congress of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynecology in June as well as the 10 Best Posters at the ASEAN Federation of Cardiology Congress in July. My heartiest congratulations to Team Medicine for coming in overall second in the NUS Inter-Faculty Games 2012/2013 held in September 2012. Our sportsmen and sportswomen triumphed in handball, basketball, swimming, international chess and squash. Beyond their studies, our students distinguished themselves in the areas of arts & culture, sports, and public service. We are proud of all of them!

As part of our Alumni Engagement efforts, we will be inviting our Alumni to share about their days as an undergraduate and how they have contributed in serving the community. For this issue, we are delighted to welcome back Dr Chua Yang from the Class of 1992, an Obstetrics and Gynaecology specialist. Our first radio collaboration with Power 98 gave an opportunity for us to invite several of our Alumni to share health tips and knowledge with the public. I look forward to more of our Alumni staying in touch with the School and to developing stronger ties.

2012 has been a very memorable and milestone year for our Medical School. The opening of the Centre for Translational Medicine (CeTM), our new flagship building for education and research heralds a new era in the rich history of our School. My personal thanks to all staff, faculty, students and alumni, who have all contributed to the achievements and success of the School of Medicine.

Allow me this opportunity to wish each and every one of you the very best for this festive season, and here's to a great New Year in 2013!

Yeoh Khay Guan

Dean

Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine

NUS-CAMBRIDGE Inaugural Joint Symposium

The inaugural NUS-Cambridge Joint Symposium was held at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine Clinical Research Centre Auditorium on 2 August 2012. The Fats and Bugs Symposium brings together leading researchers and clinician scientists from the School of Clinical Medicine, University of Cambridge; and the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore.

The symposium successfully acted as a platform to foster greater discussion on novel therapies and collaborative work between the two schools.



1 Professor John Wong, Vice Provost of Academic Medicine giving the Opening Address
2 Associate Professor Yeoh Khay Guan, Dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine giving his Welcome Address
3 Tour at CeTM after the Symposium 4 Professor Sir Patrick Sissons, Regius Professor of Physic and Director of Cambridge University Health Partners; School of Clinical Medicine, University of Cambridge, giving his Keynote Lecture on "Pathogenesis of a persistent DNA virus: cytomegalovirus latency, immunity and evasion"
5 A group shot!



White Coat Ceremony – Class of 2017



Clockwise from top:

Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, Class of 2017 • The Class of 2017 reciting the Medical Student's Pledge • Messages of encouragement and blessings from proud parents, friends and caring seniors.



Close to 600 proud parents attended the White Coat Ceremony at the University Cultural Centre on 13 August, witnessing 300 medical freshmen of class 2017 don their white coats. It was a solemn occasion and a moment of honour as the freshmen took the Medical Students' Pledge in unison. Phase II and Phase IV medical students also came together to welcome the freshmen with dance and musical performances. In addition, messages of encouragement and blessings by family and friends of the freshmen were written on specially designed commemorative pillar wraps to mark the memorable occasion.

Gracing this year's White Coat Ceremony was Dr Tan Lai Yong, from the Class of 1985. Dr Tan is recognised for his efforts all over Asia. He was featured on Channel News Asia's "Asians of the Year" in 2009 and was recently conferred the SMA lectureship, an award for distinguished persons who have made significant contributions to the medicine and the community. Dr Tan continues his active contribution to the Singaporean society by actively volunteering his services at

local organisations such as HealthServe. Prior to returning to Singapore in 2010, he was at Xishuangbanna in Yunnan, where he established a barefoot doctors programme to give farmers basic medical training and cared for orphans, disabled children and leprosy affected.

The White Coat is recognised as a symbol of the medical profession, and the donning of the White Coat has been widely adopted as a rite of passage into medical schools all over the world. This traditional robing ceremony was brought into Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in 2008, and has since gained recognition from clinicians nationwide as the induction ceremony for freshmen.



Arun and The Chinese People (Phase II & IV students) preparing for their performance to welcome the freshmen.

Professor Saw Seang-Mei

Vice-Dean (Research)

Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine



Professor Saw Seang-Mei led a team of researchers who have discovered the genes associated with high myopia. The prevalence of myopia is one of the highest in the world with a staggering 65 per cent of Primary Six pupils and 83 per cent of National Servicemen suffering from the condition. When children have short-sightedness at a younger age, they have a greater likelihood of developing severe myopia later on, which can lead to potential complications resulting in blindness.

With this finding, a test can be developed to facilitate the selection of children with genetic dispositions for high myopia who may benefit from interventions to prevent the rapid progression of myopia to high myopia. Possible interventions to slow the progression of myopia include low-dose atropine eye drops and multi-zone spectacles or contact lenses.

Why did you choose to go into the medical profession?

I was in the science stream in school and was actively involved in the school's math and science society. Also, I had always been interested in health. And I thought it would be interesting and meaningful to be able to apply my knowledge to help people. So, I chose to do medicine. After my medical degree, I went on to do my PhD in epidemiology.

What made you choose to go into research?

Instead of helping a few patients as a doctor, as a researcher, the work that I do can help millions of people, not just in Singapore but all over the world. Our research is not just confined to Singapore – we do combined research with the World Health Organisation and other countries, not just regionally but also internationally. The results of our studies influence health policies and health education to improve the lives of people by preventing, if not delaying the onset or progression of diseases.

What are the challenges working in research?

It is intensely competitive in research. You always have to be one step ahead of everyone else and think of the latest studies that you can do. You have to learn to accept failure and not be discouraged by it. If you're passionate about doing research, the excitement of new discoveries keeps you going.

What is the satisfaction?

The satisfaction comes from knowing that through research, we make a difference in the lives of people not just in Singapore but all over the world. Take myopia for example. We have found that spending more time outdoors can prevent if not slow down the progression of myopia. This is because the light level outside making your vision sharper. Preventive measures can be taken from when the children are young by getting them to play outside more. To do this, we are working with the Health Promotion Board, National Parks Board and the Singapore Sports Council to organise programmes and activities for families.

What are the attributes necessary to be a researcher?

You must take risks and be resilient. Failure is part and parcel of doing research, and you have to be able to take failure in your stride. A good researcher must also be able to think out of the box in order to make new discoveries.

Hair for Hope Satellite Event at NUHS



I have been a volunteer with the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF) since 2007. The annual Hair for Hope event always creates a buzz for the CCF family as it is a major public event and the only public event of CCF which helps to raise funds for all the good works of the foundation. A play-personnel for CCF @ NUHS and having been part of the organising committee of the CCF Camp for the beneficiaries in 2010, I have many positive personal experiences working with the CCF family. Bearing witness to the positive impacts of CCF's programmes in building a community of support for patients of childhood cancer and their families, I believe strongly in its cause.

Although I have not been directly involved in the organisation of previous Hair for Hope events, I would always be passively infected with the pre-event excitement and jitters felt by members of the CCF family. When two of my classmates, Reshvinder Bhullar and Yvonne Ng,

approached me with their idea of raising funds and helping out at Hair for Hope 2012, I perked up at the idea of a Hair for Hope satellite event @ NUHS immediately. There was so much potential in it! We were really excited about the awareness we can help to create at NUHS, as well as the support we can rally from healthcare professionals, medical students and the warm-hearted NUHS community.

We set out contacting CCF and got in touch with Jean Angus from NUHS. Jean was amazing – her efficiency and organisation skills saw the event through successfully, without a glitch. I helped to publicize the event and took charge of gathering more student helpers. Being a mid-weekday event, I was initially apprehensive that we could find sufficient medical students with 6am-6pm schedules to help out with our event. However, the response we received was truly heart-warming as there was overwhelming support from my classmates, some of whom reshuffled their schedules to ensure their availability at the event. I would like to thank Jolie Hwee, Marianne DeRosa and Bernard Tan for travelling all the way back here from their respective hospitals during their breaks to help out. Special mention also goes to Navina Thirumoorthy, the lawyer who volunteered to be our emcee for the event!

This year is special to me. It is the first year I am directly involved in Hair for Hope after five years with CCF. It was a pleasure working with NUHS and having my classmates Shaun Nathan and Lim Jiaxu being amongst the shaves – who were really sporting and gave us, their classmates, the permission to shave their heads!

There is a poem on life with the last few verses that says:

*"But most of all, it's about using Your
Life to touch
or poison other people's hearts in such
a way
that it could have never occurred alone.*

*You, and only you,
choose the way those hearts
are affected,
and those choices are what life's
all about."*

I am glad that this event gave me the opportunity to meet many people who chose to touch other people's hearts in a beautiful way – the shavees, donors, hairdressers, the emcee and Jean, as well as all the assistance we have received from the kind people of NUHS and my wonderful classmates from NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

Contributed by:

Wang Feifan

(Class of Graduation 2013)

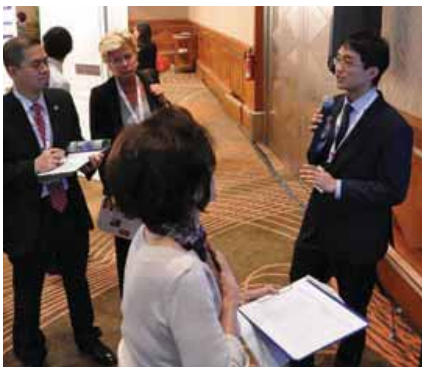
Main Student Liaison for the event



Congratulations NHS-CHP Group!

We will like to congratulate the 2012 Neighbourhood Health Screening-Community Health Project (NHS-CHP) Group for their outstanding achievement in winning the Young Scientist(s) Award in the Health Services and Systems Research at the 2012 SingHealth Annual Scientific Congress. NHS' research efforts were also recognized at other international conferences, winning accolades such as Best Oral Presentation (Gynecological Cancer) at the 10th Scientific Congress of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynecology in June as well as the 10 Best Posters at the ASEAN Federation of Cardiology Congress in July.

We speak with Wee Liang En, Research Head of the Group, on their achievements.



What is the greatest challenge the team faced when executing this project?

The biggest challenge would be getting community buy-in. We needed the support of the community and that was not easy due to numerous barriers between the medical students and residents. Apart from the language, cultural and education barriers, there was also a need to establish trust. Some of the residents were initially skeptical of our intentions as they thought that we were trying to sell them products. In such communities, the fear of getting cheated is quite high as many of them have fallen victim to such scams before. Thus, it took quite some time to establish rapport with the residents and both the grassroots organisations and community centres were instrumental in assisting us to achieve this.

What is your role in the team?

I coordinate the research objectives and goals of the Neighborhood Health Screening, which has as its aims
1) Service to the community through providing free health screening and
2) Conducting research to better understand the challenges that the needy in Singapore face with regards to accessing healthcare.

Of course this achievement would not have been possible without the team, including medical students from M3-M5, our mentors from the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (in particular A/Prof Gerald Koh) and most importantly, the strong community support that we have received from the various polyclinic clusters, grassroots organisations and community centres.

Are these projects/papers done as part of coursework or out of interest?

Interest.

Could you share the significance of these achievements?

I am happy for this recognition as the research work is still ongoing under a new batch of medical students. Hopefully, this recognition helps to open more doors, especially in terms of funding. Funding for this research was not easy to come by due to its niche area, although its results will have a huge impact on the needy population. We rely mainly on the contributions of volunteers and I hope that this award will serve as an encouragement to the juniors continuing with the project.

What is the most memorable moment during the course of doing this project?

The interactions with the residents. There was one occasion during Chinese New Year when we were doing house visits. One of the residents insisted on giving us angpao. It was not a lot of money, but for these people who were not well-off in the first place, a few dollars is still a sacrifice. We were very hesitant to accept at first, but as they were quite persistent, to turn down their kindness would not be very nice, thus we accepted in the end. These memories were the most memorable ones of all.

How did you feel after hearing that your team has won the Young Scientist(s) Award for the colorectal cancer presentation at the 2012 SingHealth Annual Scientific Congress?

I am happy that our work has received recognition from the rest of the scientific community as well as those working in health systems research. Not much work has been done on the challenges the needy faces in accessing healthcare and we hope our efforts help to bring publicity to the challenges they face, which at times can be quite substantial and significant.

Share something about your groupmates, the camaraderie and working relationships with them.

We have a very cohesive team and I feel proud that the team actually spans generations (from M3-M5s), allowing us to pass the learning from one batch to another. Although meeting up as a team was a challenge due to our tight schedules, we always managed to cross this hurdle. Without such a closely-knitted team, we would not have been able to achieve the same degree of success in both the service and research components of this project.

Do you have anything to say to the professors who have helped your group along the way?

This project would not have been possible without the professors. The support from the School of Public Health has been phenomenal, both in terms of funding and advice. In particular, A/Prof Gerald Koh has been with the team throughout and almost four years now, and really, it would not have been possible without his guidance.

Anything else to add for your peers?

I would encourage them to keep volunteering for the Neighbourhood Health Screening. We rely a lot on volunteers and without them the project would not have been so successful. It is also good to know that the results speak for themselves – that objectively, we can quantify the positive effects our research has on the residents.

Lastly, working with the needy, despite its many challenges, can still be immensely rewarding and fruitful.

Outstanding All-Round Achievement



Medical student Ms Chiong Yee Keow's service to the community ranged from throwing a party for sick children to organising public health screenings in Singapore and overseas.

For her significant contributions to the community, Ms Chiong, 25, from Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine received the Lee Hsien Loong Award for Outstanding All-Round Achievement 2012. She was also recognised for her excellent academic achievements and is held as a role model for her peers.

This award was implemented in 2010 for post-secondary students who have done well academically as well as made outstanding contributions to the community and demonstrated the spirit of innovation and enterprise.

In 2007, she was the Sponsorship Director of Project Sabai which was a humanitarian and medical mission trip to Cambodia. She helped conduct health screening and health education classes for the children in village schools.

Ms Chiong was the chairperson of the award-winning Neighbourhood Screening project in Taman Jurong in 2009 which has evolved from a multi-disease screening programme for low income Singaporeans living in rental flats in Taman Jurong to one with a comprehensive follow-up system addressing the

barriers for seeking healthcare. This was made possible with the collaboration with other agencies such as the Taman Jurong GRC, Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association, Singapore Cancer Society, Diabetic Society of Singapore, Health Promotion Board and National University Hospital.

Even after she stepped down from the project in 2010, Ms Chiong continued to mentor the new leadership which has taken over. The work on NHS was highlighted in Academic Medicine – Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges – which is one of the world's top journals in medical education.

For Children's Day in 2010, she played an active role in organising a party for the young patients at KK Women's and Children's Hospital with games, art and craft activities and presents.

In 2011, she was on the executive committee for the Longitudinal Patient Experience Programme which was initiated by the faculty and the students to inculcate a culture of empathy for patients. Under this programme, Year 1 medical student volunteers follow up with a patient in the community for a year, encourage healthy lifestyle habits with the guidance of clinicians and seniors to enhance on-the-ground learning and peer teaching. The aim was to allow students to interact with patients and understand diseases from their point of view.

Our heartiest congratulations to Ms Chiong on her outstanding achievement!

Hope for Young Lives

Backed by gifts, paediatric leukaemia expert Professor Allen Yeoh, Department of Paediatrics, NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, and his team are delivering cure rates that are on par with the world's best. His mantra: optimal treatment for optimal result.



Nineteen-year-old Ben Ho was at the cusp of a new life – he was a month away from joining the National University of Singapore (NUS) – when he was struck by shattering news: he had leukaemia. Overnight, Ben, who had been looking forward to the challenges of student life, was facing far graver challenges. But help was at hand and on campus. Through family friends, Ben met paediatric cancer specialist Associate Professor Allen Yeoh from the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM). Prof Yeoh, who is one of the brains behind the National University Hospital's (NUH) 85 percent cure rate for childhood leukaemia, took on Ben as his first adult patient. NUH is the principal teaching hospital of YLLSoM. Prof Yeoh is Senior Consultant at University Children's Medical Institute's Division of Paediatric Haematology-Oncology at the NUH. This year, a healthy Ben graduated from NUS' School of Design and Environment, one of Prof Yeoh and his team's many success stories.

Compared with cure rates outside Singapore, which range from less than 10 percent in Vietnam to up to 60 percent in some of the best hospitals in India, NUH's 85 percent cure rate rivals the best hospitals worldwide. Prof Yeoh, whose area of speciality is Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL), the most common type of children's cancer, and Acute Myeloid Leukaemia, describes his success strategy as "doing more with less".

Prof Yeoh says, "We can improve treatment by giving the optimal intensity of therapy; for the majority of patients this means less treatment." Instead of treating patients with a uniform dose of chemotherapy, which comes with long-term side effects, he tailors the treatment to the severity of the disease. With the help of molecular markers developed by his team, he is

able to detect, after initial treatment, the presence of up to one leukaemia cell in 10,000 normal cells. Previously, conventional microscopes could only identify five leukaemia cells among 100 normal cells. With this minimal residual disease (MRD) methodology, the team is able to predict the risk of relapse and deliver the optimal intensity of treatment required. "For those with less than one in 10,000 normal cells after the first month of therapy, the survival rate is 90 percent and their treatment can be decelerated while maintaining the high cure rate," says Prof Yeoh. For those with a poorer prognosis, Prof Yeoh intensifies chemotherapy, which has doubled the cure rate for this high-risk segment of patients as well.

Prof Yeoh says that the department's success has depended to a great extent on the support of organisations like the Lee Foundation, Children's Cancer Foundation and Viva Foundation, whose seed funding allowed him to, as he says, "catch the winds" of progress in biomedical research in Singapore. Philanthropic funding such as these enabled him to build infrastructure and manpower, which is crucial to monitoring patients over the years and building data for his research. The Lee Foundation and Children's Cancer Foundation also support the annual St Jude-Viva Forum in Paediatric Oncology, which brings together world leaders in the field to share the latest information and disseminate findings. The forum is organised by the Viva Foundation for Children with Cancer, St Jude Children's Research Hospital in the US, NUS and NUH.

Prof Yeoh and YLLSoM have long been at the vanguard of paediatric leukaemia treatment. His mentor, Prof Quah Thuan Chong, Department of Paediatrics, YLLSoM, was among the

first in Asia to replace the traditional routine radiation therapy to the brain and testes, which affected children's IQ and left males sterile, with high doses of chemotherapy. The cure rate jumped from 50 to 75 percent in trials that ran from 1988 to 1996. From 1997 to 2010, Prof Yeoh and his team collaborated on studies with hospitals in Hong Kong (1997-2002) and Malaysia (2003- date), raising the cure rate to 80 percent.

Prof Yeoh also came up with the idea of using the gene chip, which "eavesdrops" on messages coming out of DNA to identify the various subtypes of ALL, allowing for further fine-tuning and customising of treatment. The utility of the gene chip, which was developed in collaboration with St Jude Children's Research Hospital, won Prof Yeoh the American Society of Haematology Merit Award in 2001 and the Singapore Youth Award in 2003.

Currently, the team is looking to further improve cure rates for high-risk patients and increased customisation of treatment. They are currently working with National Medical Research Council (NMRC) StAR investigator, Prof Dario Campana from Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine on engineering natural killer cells in the body to destroy cancer cells. Natural killer cells are our body's first line of defence against cancer. Prof Campana's laboratory can re-engineer natural killer cells to seek out the residual cancer cells and destroy them. The prestigious StAR Investigator Award is jointly offered by NMRC and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) to recognise and support investigators with outstanding qualifications in translational and clinical research.

Contributed by:
NUS Development Office

Interview Series with Power 98

In conjunction with the 2012 Public Health Screening which was held on 6 and 7 October at Toa Payoh HDB Hub, our Alumni provided health tips on radio for topics ranging from geriatrics, cardiology, cancer, rheumatology and endocrinology. For those who managed to tune in, we thank you for your support and feedback. For the doctors who have participated, we thank you for your spontaneity in making this event a success.

CLASS OF GRADUATION	ALUMNI	SPECIALISATION	DATE OF INTERVIEW SEGMENT	WEEK HEALTH TIPS ARE AIRED	TOPICS
1983	Dr Chan Kin Ming	Geriatric	30 Aug 12	27-31 Aug 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition and diet • Exercise and graceful ageing • Psychological aspects of ageing • Adequate treatment of medical illnesses
1997	Dr Raymond Wong	Cardiology	6 Sep 12	3-7 Sep 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cigarette smoking and its risks • Coronary artery disease • Healthy eating • Mind and Heart • Misconception About Hypertension: It Isn't a Big Deal
1993	Dr Lisa Wong	Gynaecological Oncology	13 Sep 12	10-14 Sep 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of pap smear screening • HPV vaccination • Abnormal bleeding • Bleeding after menopause • Ovarian cancer
1985	Dr Gwee Kok Ann	Gastroenterology	20 Sep 12	17-21 Sep 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep deprivation and the harm it brings • Eating before bedtime and the harm it brings • Benefits of a full breakfast in the morning • Keep active after a meal
1996	Dr Donald Poon	Cancer	27 Sep 12	24-28 Sep 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diet and exercise • Colorectal cancer screening • Symptoms and family history
1991	Dr Lau Tang Ching	Rheumatology	4 Oct 12	1-5 Oct 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to prevent fractures • Importance of adhering to treatments • Usage of medication • Healthy lifestyle measures
1983	Dr Chan Kin Ming	Geriatric	11 Oct 12	8-12 Oct 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dementia • Importance of adequate rest • Build strong bones to prevent osteoporosis • Quit smoking
1990	Dr Ho Su Chin	Endocrinology	18 Oct 12	15-19 Oct 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thyroid disease & thyroid cancer • Symptoms • Treatments • Health screenings

From the desk of TODAY'S DOCTORS, YESTERDAY'S STUDENTS



In the first of many series as part of our alumni engagement efforts, we interview Dr Chua Yang (Class of 1992), Director and Specialist Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at A Clinic For Women.

Have you always aspired to be a doctor?

Yes! Truth be told, I wanted to be a doctor since I was three years old! My uncle was a vet and when I was young and precocious, I wanted to one-up him and be a doctor to humans! As I grew older, I continued to discover what being a doctor meant and my passion to pursue this career grew.

What factors / incidents led to your decision to embark on your medical journey?

When I was young, I used to be an avid reader of medical thrillers. It amazed me how the doctor, specifically a surgeon, could hold the fate of someone's life in his/her hands. Figuring out why a person gets sick or how to make that person well again was akin to solving a crime or mystery and that is a fascinating process.

Reminisce the good old days as an undergraduate.

Really! With medical school in my time, there was not much of social life outside of lectures, tutorials, clinics, rounds and catching up on studying and writing reports in the library! I played tennis for Inter-Year and Inter-Faculty games so these practices helped me keep fit. I was also part of a piano performance club on campus which held performances on several occasions.

Describe your most memorable time at NUS.

During my third year in medical school, I did an elective attachment for a month in a surgical department in Napier Hospital, New Zealand. I had many opportunities to assist and scrub up for a variety of surgeries. The chief surgeon I was interning with was extremely encouraging of my surgical instincts and steadiness of hands and that left me even more convinced of my surgical path.

A few years later as a Medical Officer, I took another month out to work in Galmi Hospital in Niger, Africa. At this mission hospital, there was a small shelf of medical books and surgical

atlases. For any surgeries planned, even if it were something outside of experience, one was expected to read up and study it and then carry on with surgery while being guarded by general surgical principles. This was such an eye opener!

The experience taught me to be really grounded in surgical principles, to understand the anatomy and not to fear the unknown. If a surgeon were to work at a problem steadily and to respect all tissues alike, most surgical problems can be chiseled away slowly but surely. It was there that I did my first C-section under local anaesthesia because the mother had been bleeding from a placenta praevia for 3 days before reaching the hospital. She simply did not have any blood pressure for any other form of anaesthesia. In that area where HIV incidence was as high as 40%, blood transfusion was also not an option. It was a particularly joyful day for me when I watch her walk out of the hospital, having recuperated from the blood loss.

You were nominated by Singapore Women's Weekly for the Great Women of Our Time Award 2011 and shared something very apt during the interview. You said, "I believe that when I return from providing primary healthcare in such rural areas, I'm also a better doctor to my patients here". Please share with us how community service projects such as the Himalayan Women's Health Project in 2010 at Ladakh helped to change your perspective of life and at the same time, make one a better doctor.

I first visited Nubra Valley in Ladakh with a team of doctors and dental surgeons in 2009. During the trip, I discovered that, like many developing countries without a systematic screening program, cervical cancer was the leading cause of cancer deaths. This was unacceptable to me as cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers in women!

Thus, the Himalayan Women's Health Project was conceived and its first goal was to bring screening and treatment of pre-cancers to the women there.

In 2010, I went back to Nubra Valley with a colleague, Dr Quek Swee Chong, to start this programme. We saw about 200 patients and treated about 25 pre-cancers thus potentially saving these 25 women from getting cervical cancer. Part of the program also involved educating the local healthcare workers and all the women who came to see us about this disease. The education and awareness programme continued and by 2011, when we next return to the area, there were about 1500 patients waiting to see us!

In August this year, I made my fourth trip back to Nubra Valley. The focus of this trip was at the most remote of the 65 villages nearest to the Pakistani border comprising mainly the Muslim population. It was a real joy to have these women venture out of their village, for the first time for many of them, to seek medical advice and attention.

A secondary focus of the project is to help women prevent perinatal mortality. In this very harsh environment, the 65 villages are spread across a vast area with only one sub-district hospital with a limited ability to perform Caesarean sections. The plan would be to gather the local midwives, nurses or senior women in each of these villages and to empower them with better skills and abilities to handle certain birthing emergencies.

These days, going back to Ladakh is like returning to my second home. I meet women along the streets who have come to the medical camp previously and they would come up to hug me and welcome me back. I also see children growing taller over the four years. The local doctor, whom we worked closely with, is a dedicated young chap who has helped over the four years with logistics, translations and awareness education in between our trips. Without his tireless efforts, we would not be so successful in getting all the women to come forward to be screened in such a short time.

Briefly describe the types of screenings (for cervical cancer & PAP smear) women should undergo at their respective age groups.

It is important for a young girl to get the HPV vaccination before sexual exposure as it gives an 80% chance of not "catching" HPV from her eventual sexual partner(s). After sexual exposure, it is crucial to do regular PAP smears to allow

the early detection of pre-invasive diseases and cancer. Although a young person does respond to any vaccination better than an older person by mounting a stronger immune reaction, the effectiveness in the vaccination is also dependent on the number of sexual partners one has in the past before getting the vaccination.

Briefly describe the new project which was started in 2011 to provide basic healthcare for a very underprivileged community at Luambe, Zambia.

Together with a team of medical and dental surgeons, we set up a makeshift camp for the villagers. The women there have a high incidence of HIV infections and losing their spouses or children to AIDS is not rare. It is also common for girls to be married in their teens and for these undernourished, not fully developed girls to carry a baby, delivering them vaginally commonly result in birth trauma and complications like fistulas.

I had the opportunity to help one such young woman repair her badly torn up birth canal and tear in the bladder. She was chased out of her husband's home as she was constantly leaking urine and smelling. The day she controlled her bladder successfully and went to the toilet for the first time after two years brought a smile to her face. That heartwarming image will always be imprinted in my mind.

Although my plan was to motivate other gynaecologists to head back this year to help repair these fistulas, we are still in the process of arranging the logistics and thus the trip is still pending.

Any words of wisdom to share with our current students and peers alike?

Be passionate and compassionate. If you love what you do and it fulfills you, no amount of hard work or long hours will be too tedious. One of my mentors always said, treat every patient like you would your mother, your sister, your wife or your daughter. When you treat patients with the best of intentions and you alleviate their fears by explaining, counseling and reassuring, there is no reason not to have a good doctor-patient relationship.

If given the chance to live your life again, would you have done anything differently?

Probably not much! I do believe in weighing options, making informed choices, then making the best of every situation and opportunity! Even if the outcome of a given choice is not ideal, the process is a learning experience in itself and one could emerge stronger from it. Wiser next time then!

Calligraphy work by Dr Chua Yang – These two words mean guidance and leading (for example that of God or a parent) and everyone needs to be inspired, be led and to journey in our own paths guided by spirits that touch us. Hope you like it!

New Year's Resolution

It's the time of the year to look back on the past, pause and think for the future. We asked our readers to share their resolution for 2013.



"I honestly have not had resolutions for the new year for many years now because I have hardly kept any of them! But I have recently taken my lipid panel and fasting glucose at a free health screening and I fear I'm heading down a dangerously slippery slope with my current diet. So for 2013, my new year's resolution would be to exercise at least three times a week (I love running), cut down my daily dose of chocolate (yes, it's true) to three times a week and avoid fried food at least three days a week (this will be tough!). I hope these little changes will go a long way for me!"

Yusrina Yusoff
Class of 2011

"I make lots of resolutions throughout the years but hardly kept to them. This New Year, I'm going to dig out all the resolutions and stick to them. E.g. I'll remember to eat regularly..."

Nikki Ip
International Affairs,
Dean's Office



"My 2013 resolution is to be healthy, have a stable job and be happy always."

Zulaiha Binte Junied
Human Resources,
Dean's Office

"In the coming year, I hope to find the time to appreciate those whom I care about, the energy to do the things that excite me, the wisdom to make the right choices and the humility to learn from the inevitable mistakes along the way."

Faith Leong
Phase III Student



"Leading the team at the Child Development Unit at Department of Pediatrics has been fulfilling and rewarding. We have seen our staffing grow year on year to meet patient demands for children with developmental disorders and special needs. The year 2013 will hopefully bring new clinical programs and national policies which are favourable to special needs children in Singapore — and we will participate actively in that advocacy. I hope that all our staff will embark on this work with a genuine heart, and we will focus on building family capacities and resilience in all these children and their parents, as they overcome the many challenges in bringing up special needs children."

Dr Chong Shang Chee
Class of 2002

"I want to learn to give my best to the people around me, my family, my friends and my future patients. I want to stay grateful for everything that I have. =>"

Kennedy
Phase II Student



NOVEMBER

- 1** Inaugural Interprofessional Education (IPE) Symposium
MD11 (Clinical Research Centre), Auditorium
- 15** Developing Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) and Blueprinting MD11 (Clinical Research Centre), Symposium Rooms 2 & 3
- 21** Wong Hock Boon Society Appreciation Dinner for students and supervisors
NUHS Tower Block, Staff Lounge

DECEMBER

- 15** Playhouse
ACJC, Auditorium

JANUARY

- 16** 10th Asia Pacific Medical Education Conference (APMEC)
Centre for Translational Medicine
- 29** Meet The Faculty
NUHS Tower Block, Auditorium
- 30-31** Oon Chiew Seng Distinguished Lecture Series
Venue to be advised

Details are subject to changes at the discretion of the respective departments.



Laughter – The lighter pill

White coat humour

Student: The brain is a wonderful thing.

Teacher: Why do you say that?

Student: Because it starts working the second you get up in the morning and never stops until you get asked a question in class!

Patient: Nurse, I keep seeing stars in front of my eyes.

Nurse: Have you seen a doctor?

Patient: No, just stars.

Remember:

*If you can laugh at it, you can survive it.
Look for humour and humour will find you!*

Quote of the Day

If opportunity doesn't knock,
build a door

– Milton Berle

Food Route Contest Results

Three cheers to the winners of the Food Route Contest!

Their video presentation on their route from NUHS Tower Block to NUH Main Building KopiTiam won themselves KopiTiam cards worth up to \$100!

Also a big thank you to the viewers for supporting the contest, concluding the contest with these three winners.

Top Prize

\$100 KopiTiam Store Value Card

Readon Teh

Class of 2015

Second Prize

\$50 KopiTiam Store Value Card

Colin Ng

Class of 2016

Third Prize

\$25 KopiTiam Store Value Card

Timotius Suhartono

*Academic Affairs,
Dean's Office*

*Winners will be notified via email
on details for prize collection*

Picture Quiz Result

The winner for the last issue's Picture Quiz:

Ms Mya Mya Soe

from Division of
Graduate Medical Studies, YLLSoM



The **Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine** was the first academic body in Singapore's history dedicated to tertiary education. Established in 1905, it has the honour of being the foundation of what has now evolved into the National University of Singapore. The School is a strong component in the University's Mission to advance knowledge and foster innovation, educate students and nurture talent in service of Singapore and society.

MediCine

is brought to you by the
Yong Loo Lin School of
Medicine, Dean's Office.

Please contact:

The Editor, MediCine

Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, Dean's Office

1E Kent Ridge Road, NUHS Tower Block, Level 11 Singapore 119228

Tel: 6772 3737 | Fax: 6778 5743

Email: yllsom@nus.edu.sg | Website: <http://medicine.nus.edu.sg>