

Winners All Around

Four advisory colleges were instituted at Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School in 2010, with the aim of providing a community and support system for its students. Named after distinguished luminaries in the medical field, the colleges adopt noble ideals of growing and developing excellent clinician-scientists, and guiding them towards lifelong learning and service to society.

Three members belonging to one of the four colleges, Seah Cheng Siang College, recently made their mark by winning awards in the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) 19th Annual Scientific Meeting in April this year. *SMA News* speaks with fourth year students Foo Li Lian and Ken Goh, and their college Research Master, A/Prof Patrick Tan, to find out how the college system supported the students and helped them pair up with very distinguished clinical mentors during their research year.

SMA: What was the rationale for the college system, and how has it contributed to the growth of Duke-NUS and the students?

A/Prof Patrick Tan – PT: The Duke-NUS Advisory Colleges are a local adaptation of the Advisory Dean System instituted by Dr Doyle Graham, then Dean of Medical Education at Duke University's School of Medicine, in 1987. The colleges at Duke-NUS focus on nurturing the students' professional and personal development. They also provide a community and mutual support system for our students as they mature during their four years of study. Each member of the Duke-NUS entering class is assigned to an advisory college. Through frequent interactions with other college members, they will hopefully build bonds and team spirit, share information, and provide encouragement to each other. The colleges are overseen by key faculty who serve as masters. The masters are available to support and help the students personally and professionally as they face the challenges of medical education, as well as make decisions about their career futures and pursue their research interests.

SMA: What is your main role in the college, and why did you choose to take up this role?

PT: Students meet regularly with their college masters in small groups as well as individually. College masters are deeply involved not just in role modelling, but also helping to engage students throughout their academic life, and to prepare and recommend them for subsequent training. I play a role similar to the college masters but with a focus on developing interests and competencies in research. As Research Master of Seah Cheng Siang College, I help students, often by starting early conversations with them on their research themes and projects that they will pursue in their third year of study. I also advise them on suitable areas of research based on their interests, and help to match them with suitable mentors.



Clockwise from left: Li Lian, A/Prof Tan and Ken

The pursuit of Medicine as a service to humankind is my overarching reason for being a research master. The colleges and their masters are committed to lead by inspiration, and nurture through guidance our Duke-NUS trainee clinician-scientists to careers of lifelong learning and service to society. This is something I feel very strongly about and am pleased to have this opportunity to contribute to the college and students in this role.

SMA: What is being part of a college like?

Foo Li Lian – FLL: A college is like a big family and a second home to share both our joys and woes. Within a college such as Seah Cheng Siang College, we are well taken care of by our dedicated college masters, A/Prof Ooi Choon Jin, A/Prof Ong Biauwei Chi and Dr Ng Yee Sien, who have taken time off their heavy clinical and leadership commitments to mentor us. The college is also a platform for both inter- and intra-class peer support as well as bonding. I have established strong friendships with my “brothers and sisters” from different batches and am really thankful and glad that I can be part of Seah Cheng Siang College.

ear”, particularly during rough times. Needless to say, it is a strong support system I know I can trust and rely upon. Occasionally, it also serves as an avenue for me to air my frustrations and stress, and to find constructive ways to manage issues. Hence, the college plays a major role in my personal as well as career development.

KG: In the college system, we have college masters who are practicing doctors or clinician-scientists. They are readily approachable for help and we also get to know them on a personal level. It is certainly reassuring to know that we have mentors who can readily relate to the concerns of coping with life as a medical student. We are also privileged to have Dr Patrick Tan as our research master, whom we can look to for advice regarding our student research projects and draw from his research experience too.

SMA: Congrats, Li Lian and Ken on winning the Young Investigator’s Award in the Clinical and Basic Science categories respectively (their projects involved the disciplines of Ophthalmology and Emergency Medicine respectively). Why did you choose to work on these projects?

FLL: Ophthalmology has always been a field that both strongly

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Ken Goh – KG: The Duke-NUS college system provides opportunities for students from different classes to mix around and get to know each other. Typically this happens when we meet for informal events held every fortnight. I have made close friends in my college and we have each other to rely on in times of need. It helps to keep us going, when the going gets tough.

SMA: How have you benefited from the college system?

FLL: The college system in Duke-NUS has always been my “listening

interests and excites me. Therefore, I am deeply honoured to be able to work with Prof Tin Aung from the Singapore Eye Research Institute (SERI) in glaucoma imaging. The excellent mentorship and guidance of Prof Tin Aung has provided me with an all-rounded development in the field of research. Within a year, I was trained and equipped with valuable investigation skills, gaining a whole new perspective and insight into research.

KG: It was not a very difficult decision to make since my project, if successful, has the potential to have a direct and very practical

impact on the way we care for patients. The excellent track record of my mentor, A/Prof Marcus Ong from SGH, who has been a great source of support and encouragement throughout my entire research experience, was another reason why this project was on the top of my list.

SMA: Will you be taking these award-winning projects further?

FLL: I have a strong desire to do so and hope to have the honour to return and further my work in SERI, a world-class research institute. Together with the team of highly competent and inspiring researchers, I aspire to bring Ophthalmology research and clinical practice to a whole new level.

KG: My final year in medical school will be a busy one. Hopefully, I'll be able to contribute indirectly with regard to the planning and contribution of ideas for future studies. For now, I am working with my mentor on publishing the results of my project and other related studies.

SMA: What advice would you give your juniors who will be conducting their own projects?

FLL: The research year is an exciting one where there is plenty of room for creativity and personal growth. I would advise juniors to maximise and make full use of the opportunity given, which is quite unique to Duke-NUS – dedicating a whole year to conduct our investigations of interest. In my opinion, having dedicated research mentors is vital and critical in paving one's path as a budding clinician-scientist. Hence, I am eternally grateful to my research mentors Prof Tin Aung from SERI and Prof John Rush from Duke-NUS. My last words to juniors: "This yearlong experience could potentially have tremendous value-adding impact in your entire medical career."

KG: I was immersed in the entire process of research, from the study design to data collection and analyses. I experienced firsthand the consequences of decisions I made during the design and planning of the study. Looking back, the more important takeaways from my research experience were the result of working independently, and being responsible for my own ideas. I feel that one should not be too concerned about getting good results in the shortest time possible. Instead, explore the deep end of the pool while you have a mentor and other faculty members available for help. The lessons you'll learn, in my opinion, will be invaluable. **SMA**

Congratulations!

Four members of Duke-NUS won awards at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) 19th Annual Scientific Meeting.

A/Prof Patrick Tan won the SGH Scientist Award for his role in the project, Fanconi's Anemia in Adulthood: Chemoradiation-Induced Bone Marrow Failure and a Novel FANCA Mutation Identified by Targeted Deep Sequencing.

Ken Goh clinched the Young Investigator's Award (YIA) in the Basic Science category for his role in the project, Prospective Validation of a Cardiac Arrest Prediction Score Based On Heart Rate Variability Measurements In Patients Presenting To The Emergency Department With Chest Pain.

Foo Li Lian won the YIA in the Clinical category for her involvement in the project Determinants of Angle Width in Chinese Singaporeans.

Last but not least, Esther Chang clinched the Best Oral Paper Award in the Scientist category, for her participation in the project, Increased Numbers of Myeloid-Derived Suppressor Cells Found in Gastric Cancer Patients. (Unlike the first three, Esther is from Gordon Arthur Ransome College.)



L to R: A/Prof Tan, Li Lian, Esther and Ken