



Kudos to the team of Duke-NUS medical students who embarked on the Batam Health Screening project

In the Service of Others

17 students from Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School conducted the annual Batam Health Screening project organised and sponsored by Yayasan Citramas from Indonesia, from 23 to 25 September 2011. This programme was started in 2007 and aims to assess developmental milestones of children under five years old in Batam, allow students to observe and assist in clinics, and distribute medicines and vitamins.

The 17 intrepid students ranged from first to fourth years, who put aside their studies, clinical rotations, research and internship schedules to embark on the project. The screening also involved consultants and residents from KK

Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), medical practitioners from RSBK, a local hospital, and volunteers from Red Cross Batam. Jillian Pakiam, a first year student at Duke-NUS, reflects on her journey with *SMA News*.

SMA: You have been volunteering since 2005. What keeps you passionate about humanitarian, and more recently, medical trips?

Jillian Pakiam – JP: I think what keeps me passionate is experiencing a different side of life and being allowed into other people's lives. When I was 17, I went on a Youth Expedition Project to a rural village in Surin, Thailand, to

run workshops educating the children there on conservation. It was an eye-opener to see how simple their lives are, how difficult their day to day survival is, and yet how happy and willing they are to share what they have. I think volunteering is not difficult if you keep an open heart and mind. Be aware that it is not just about what you can offer, but that you benefit tremendously in return as well.

Before I started at Duke-NUS, I spent three months in Kolkata volunteering with the Missionaries of Charity at a home for disabled children as well as a palliative care home. I came out of that experience gaining much more than I thought I would, and some of my perceptions

changed after having seen the strength and joy in people who had been dealt unfortunate cards in life. I feel that if you have something to give back to society, you should, because you will gain so much more in return.

SMA: How did the team manage to screen 1720 children over two days?

JP: Through a lot of hard work and cooperation! It was a joint effort between Red Cross Batam, Yayasan Citramas from Indonesia, doctors from KKH and students from Duke-NUS. The screening was carried out in a big warehouse with different stations set up all around. Busloads of children and their families came streaming in bright and early on Saturday morning. The huge surge of people caused bottlenecks to form at a couple of the early stations, and things were messy at the start. But together with the organisers, we amended the screening process and it was basically making sense of chaos. Things moved much more efficiently after that with everyone doing their part.

The hours flew by on those two days. There was always something to do because people kept streaming in for screening. We were either helping out with charting of nutritional status, assisting the GPs who were performing the screening, or in clinic, which was probably the most exciting of all. One of the seniors said it was like a continuous flow of bedside tutorials. It was extremely exciting, especially for a first year student who has yet to see any clinical work at all. I remember looking through an otoscope at an inflamed ear and being amazed.

SMA: Drawing from the experiences of your seniors who conducted the inaugural Batam Health Screening last year, what are the additional lessons that you and your team gleaned from this trip?

JP: I think a big lesson we learnt is to be prepared for anything. Before we left for Batam, Andrew Green, our student leader, had a nice rotation schedule worked out for our different stations. But when faced with the crowd control issue, those plans had to be quickly shuffled around to accommodate the situation. It was important to take initiative because everything was going on very quickly and everyone had to do what they could to help.

We were fortunate to have extremely helpful seniors guiding us. Weeks before the actual screening, Andrew gave us tutorials so we had a better sense of what we would see during the screening. The seniors kept pointing out signs in patients, were always willing to explain things, and kept encouraging us to see and experience more. Being generous with one's time and knowledge was an important lesson I learnt.

SMA: Many of your previous humanitarian trips have involved working with children: is this a possible indicator of the field you see yourself specialising in?

JP: I love working with children, and I've always gravitated towards the idea of working in Paediatrics. But while volunteering in the palliative care home in Kolkata, I realised I enjoy working with the elderly too. Both involve different interactions and different emotions. So, I don't really have any indication of what field to specialise in yet. I'm just keeping an open mind and hoping to discern further during my clinical years. **SMA**



Children waiting patiently for their turn



Kashfi, a fourth year student, attending to a baby in the clinic



Patients streaming in for the health screening



Children who benefited from the health screening were all under five years old