

# The Season of Giving

Photos by: Duke-NUS medical students Lie Tjen Sin, Trina Arifin, Rachel Fok and Sophie Cai



It was once said, "Charity should begin at home but it should not end there." Despite the hectic curriculum at the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School (Duke-NUS), community service remains close to the hearts of the medical students. In the past few years, many new community service projects were pioneered, while pre-existing projects were embraced wholeheartedly by the Duke-NUS medical students. In particular, the last couple of months of 2010 were truly exceptional, as the four classes of Duke-NUS were involved in many projects ranging from running a charity marathon in aid of cancer awareness and research, performing Christmas carols at St Joseph's Hospice and bringing Halloween celebrations to the children in KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). In addition to the health screenings conducted for the elderly residents at Bukit Merah, a trip was also made to Batam, Indonesia to provide health screenings for approximately 1800 children! In this special feature, four Duke-NUS students share their perspectives and reflections on the various community events that closed the fulfilling school year of 2010.

Ong Li Ming, Class of 2011 and Jason Leen, Class of 2013

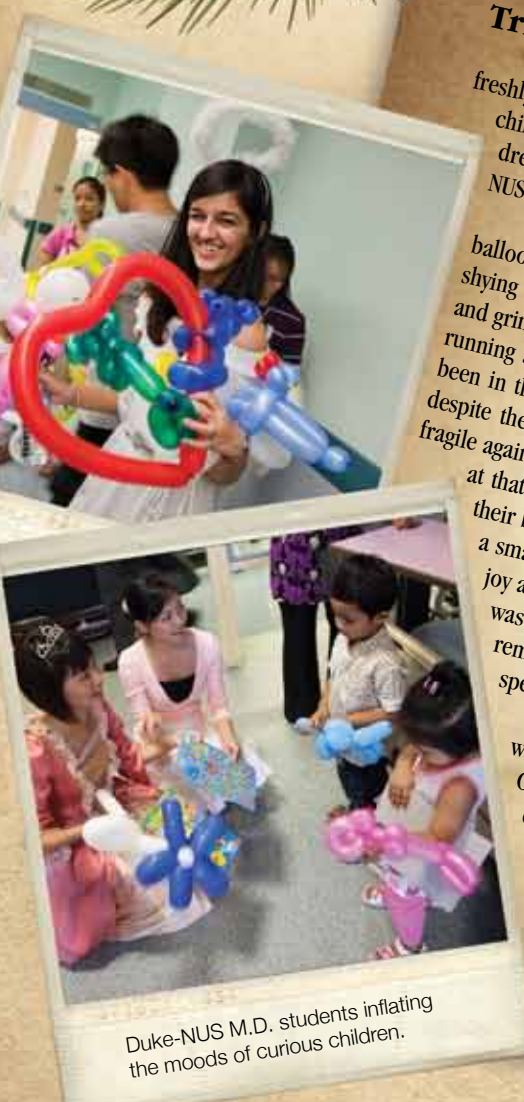
## Trick or Treat at KKH – 23 October 2010

Yellow leaves scattered haphazardly on the pavement, cool crisp air ruffling your hair and the smell of freshly baked apple pie wafting through the windowsill. It's autumn, folks, and this season brings with it American children's favourite holiday – Halloween. The famous tradition of trick-or-treating with candy, treats and dressing up – what's not to like? Guaranteed to bring a smile to the children of KKH, Duke-NUS students decided to bring this holiday to the children of KKH.

Dressed as Snow White, Harry Potter and other famous characters, and armed with small toys and balloons, we visited the children, and distributed the goodie bags to them. Initially, the children were quiet, shying away from us but as we chatted and played with some of us. Some of the children had been in the hospital for quite some time already, so it was incredible to see them so carefree and grinning at some of our more oddly dressed colleagues. The older children were especially lively, running around the ward and playing hide and seek with some of us. Some of the children had despite their illness and being confined to their beds. Seeing them look so tiny and fragile against the stark white sheets stirred feelings within me that I could not name at that moment, but in retrospect, I think it was admiration. Admiration for their bravery, their resilience and the wonder in their eyes as they examined a small toy. The smile on their face upon receiving the object, that simple joy as they looked to their parents for confirmation that they could keep it, was really the cherry on top of the ice cream for me, and in that instant I remember thinking that this moment was worth all the late nights I had to spend studying after packing those goodie bags.

In addition to bonding with the children, we also ended up bonding with each other; Cinderella met Karate Kid, while Santa found new friends. One of the most amazing things about this whole experience was that despite everyone's stressful and busy schedules – ward rounds, readings, IRAs – during those few hours, each and every single one of us found our inner child again that day.

Giselle Reinoso, Class of 2014



Duke-NUS M.D. students inflating the moods of curious children.



## Christmas Carolling Cheer at St Joseph's Hospice – 28 November 2010

It was the end of November, heralding the beginning of Singapore's rainy season. Droplets of rain splattered outside as we pulled up at St Joseph's Hospice in Jurong. Old-style colonial convent buildings with orange-bricked roofs and red pavements were nestled among well-manicured wide open lawns, creating an air of serenity and peace.

As we walked into the airy hall, the residents were wheeled in by the staff. The residents looked expectantly at us as we set up the microphones and equipment. First-year students Clarissa and Vincent kicked off the programme with an energetic introduction of the Duke-NUS students, who were there to perform Christmas carols for the residents. Starting with the familiar Christmas carols, we readily engaged the audience by clapping and swaying on stage. A few residents even started swaying in their wheelchairs!

Students mingled among the audience and worked up their excitement. Residents called for an encore as everyone sang their hearts out. After the second half programme of Chinese songs, they requested us to sing their favourite, "Shanghai Bund", thrice! The residents also requested for their own favourite oldies such as "Sweet Caroline". An old lady sang with such excitement and our talented keyboardist Josh Chua was kept busy keeping up with the residents' fervour. The joy on their faces and their infectious smiles certainly got us going.

Caught in the electrified atmosphere, a resident hurriedly waved his hand and the staff duly wheeled him forward. He excitedly took out a scrap of paper – it turned out to be his original composition! As soon as the introduction started from the keyboard, a loud, clear baritone emanated from his frail body in the wheelchair. Later we found out that he used to be a singer before he fell ill. His peppy singing, which reverberated in the hall, truly warmed and stayed deep in our hearts.

This was an especially rewarding experience seeing the joy of the residents. During the few hours, the audience was distracted from the sufferings of their condition, and enjoyed the world of music, and the festive season. I felt a new sense of humility as I learnt that while age and illness may affect one physically, they can never take the spirit away.

*Lai Hsuan, Class of 2014*



Duke-NUS M.D. student Eric Cher encourages a resident to perform together with the carollers.

## Running for a Cancer Cause – 21 November 2010

On a beautiful and sunny Sunday morning in Singapore, 21 Duke-NUS medical students and faculty joined thousands of others at East Coast Park to partake in Run for Hope. Run for Hope is a charity marathon, hosted annually by the National Cancer Centre Singapore, to raise awareness of cancer and much needed funds for cancer research.

I have participated in charity runs in the past, but the experience this time was different. Being in medical school, I've learned about different cancers, stages, prognoses, treatments, medical breakthroughs and the need for more to be made. Also, many of the professors at Duke-NUS are researchers and have shared some of their work with us in class. This made my participation in the Run for Hope event much more meaningful as I had a better understanding on how I was helping to advance cancer treatment.

In addition to raising money for cancer research, Run for Hope also strengthened the sense of community within Duke-NUS, especially for the first-year students. The opportunity to see our professors outside of school and in a casual setting was refreshing. It was also great to mingle with so many of the upperclassmen, since their schedules are so busy. Six first-year students showed up, despite having an exam the very next day. Dr Charles Gullo and Assoc Prof Ong Sin Tiong were particularly supportive of us with their humour, and motivated the first-year students with reminders that the best parts of medicine have yet to come. Running 10km with my classmates, upperclassmen and professors was quite relaxing and a welcome study break.

Under the shade of palm and tropical trees along Singapore's coastline, the run itself was quite enjoyable. As an American, I found the run to be very scenic and am awaiting the end of the rainy season to return to the relaxing atmosphere of the beach at East Coast Park. And it was nice to have endorphins coursing through my body instead of caffeine. Run for Hope definitely provided me with much-needed exercise and sunshine before going home to prepare for the exam the next day. I look forward to participating in Run for Hope 2011 – continuing the tradition with the Duke-NUS community.

*David Tainter, Class of 2014*



Duke-NUS M.D. students from the different classes uniting for a common cause.



Mission accomplished – a race well run.

## Volunteering at Batam – 3 to 5 December 2010

On 3 December 2010, a team consisting of 17 Duke-NUS medical students, Duke-NUS' Vice Dean of Education Dr Bob Kamei, Dr Darryl Lim, Dr Arif Tyebally, Dr June Tan and two nurses from KKH, went to Batam on a trip sponsored by Citramas Foundation, to provide health screenings-cum-simple treatments for children under five years old. Over the weekend, with the help of the Indonesian doctors and Red Cross volunteers, our team managed to see around 1800 children from the three villages in Kabil and Nongsa, Batam.

I met a patient who was particularly memorable, and had somehow reinforced my appreciation of the resources that we often take for granted. Mdm M, a single mother, brought her three-year-old son in for groin pain, which turned out to be inguinal hernia. The boy grinned weakly, and was below the 25th percentile in weight despite his normal height. His mother said he only ate eight spoonfuls of rice daily, with a glass of sweetened condensed milk, and six bottles of water. Dr Kamei and I suggested referring her son for surgery in Budi Kemuliaan Hospital in Batam, and to change his diet in view of his low weight. Mdm M gave a faint smile, curtsied awkwardly, and spoke in very polite Malay, praising us for half a minute that we were good people travelling all the way from Singapore. "But," she said, "We have no money to follow your advice. He goes for surgery, and we won't have money to buy food for his sister. Buy milk for him daily, and I myself would have no money to eat. No offence Doctor, no offence," and she bowed low to apologise repeatedly. I almost wrote down in the boy's note: *Plan – refer dietician, refer MSW (medical social worker)* – and it occurred to me that we were not in KKH. We assured her that the Foundation would help as much as possible for the surgery, and for her son's nutrition, ideally he should have more to eat.

Too often, we become so accustomed to facilities available in our hospital, such as the presence of our allied health colleagues and social workers, that we do not appreciate their importance. As in Mdm M's case, no matter how good the physicians' advice was, it could not be carried out if the patient is not supported financially. Is it not that the contribution of an MSW is equally crucial as the physician's?

In the following weeks of my attachment in KKH's paediatric ward, whenever I saw a frail child with his or her anxious parents, I remember Mdm M bowing meekly, "No offence Doctor, no offence." I would then glance across the ward and find people with smart ties, fitted with "MSW" tags, nurses smiling to the kids, and our dietician in a white overcoat – and I would remind myself how fortunate we are and never to take the availability of support and resources for granted.

*Gerard Natbanael Adrianus, Class of 2013*



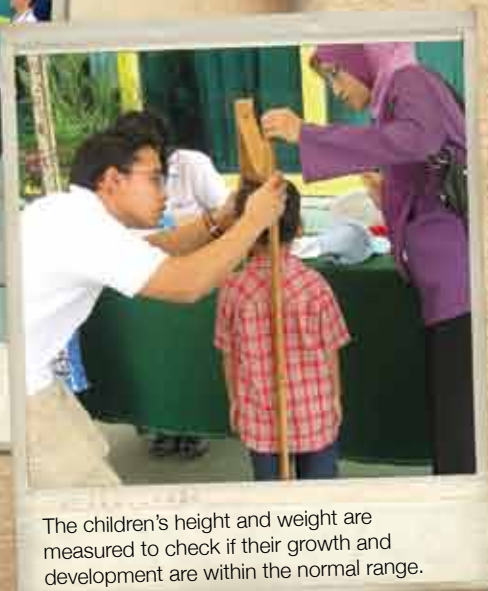
Duke-NUS M.D. student Shang Lei holds a microphone for a shy resident to sing along.



Briefing session with the Red Cross staff members.



Animal mascots provided by the Citramas Foundation kept the children entertained!



The children's height and weight are measured to check if their growth and development are within the normal range.