

# SMA

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## THE MEDICAL EDUCATION ISSUE



CONGRATULATIONS TO  
THE DUKE-NUS PIONEER CLASS  
ON THEIR GRADUATION

# Scaling the Heights of Learning

By Denise Yuen

Duke-NUS (National University of Singapore) Graduate Medical School held its Inaugural Graduation Celebration and Hooding Ceremony for their pioneer cohort of 24 students on 28 May 2011. The event, held at the College of Medicine Building, was graced by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence and former Minister for Education, as the Guest of Honour.

In his speech, Dr Ng congratulated the graduating class for reaching a “pinnacle of achievement”. He recounted that the idea behind the conception of Duke-NUS was a simple one. Singapore needed a new medical school to train and produce more doctors, as the existing Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at NUS was already operating at full capacity. Officials from the Education and Health Ministries then worked with the Duke University School of Medicine to adapt the Duke medical curriculum for this new school. Since its founding in 2005, Duke-NUS has made significant progress in a few short years, and its pioneer class is finally graduating, marking another milestone.

The master of ceremony, Prof Bob Kamei, Vice Dean of Education at Duke-NUS, also led the graduating class in a recitation of the Hippocratic Oath, and other doctors present also participated in the solemn ritual.

This was followed by the highlight of the event, the hooding and presentation ceremony. One by one, the graduating students went onstage and had their hoods attached to their academic gowns by Duke-NUS faculty members Prof Lim Shih Hui and A/Prof Koo Wen Hsin, who had been nominated by the graduating class to perform this rite. The students then received their scrolls from Dr Ng and Duke-NUS Dean Prof Ranga Krishnan, as friends and family in the audience looked on proudly.

Lim Kheng Choon, a representative from the graduating class, delivered a short closing speech in which he related the tough times the class endured together and how they finally made it to the end. His speech was received with tremendous applause.

From July 2011, the Duke-NUS graduates will continue their training as doctors in a structured residency programme created by SingHealth and the National Healthcare Group. They will train in various specialties, including Internal Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Paediatrics, Psychiatry, Anaesthesia, and Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

However, this is not the only graduation ceremony they will be attending. In July 2011, they will officially graduate at the Commencement Ceremony at the main NUS campus in Kent Ridge.

## Honouring Excellence

Duke-NUS held its Awards Gala Dinner at the Grand Hyatt on 29 May 2011, with Duke-NUS Dean Prof Ranga Krishnan as the Guest of Honour. Most of the awards were given to students from the graduating pioneer batch for their excellent performance in various fields.

SMA and the Lee Foundation (LF) jointly sponsored the SMA-LF Awards, which comprises of the Most Outstanding Exit Exam Achievement prize and the Outstanding Teammanship awards, which were given out to students from the graduating class. The Most Outstanding Exit Exam Achievement prize was won by Astrid Suantio, and the Outstanding Teammanship awards were won by Bianca Chan, Chia Ghim Song, Karrie Ko, Ong Li Ming and Astrid Suantio.



Vincent is all smiles

Other awards given out that evening included the Most Outstanding Third Year Research Thesis (Clinical Sciences). Vincent Tay, the winner, is also from the graduating class. He shared his elation with *SMA News*.

SMA: Congratulations, Vincent, on your win. What are your thoughts on this achievement?

Vincent Tay – VT: Thank you. I’m very grateful for this award. I think it is very encouraging to be acknowledged for the hard work one has put in. This achievement would not have been possible

without the advice and support from my supervisors including A/Prof Ang Beng-Ti, Dr John Allen, Prof John Rush and Dr Tal Burt. I hope this award will serve to motivate Duke-NUS students in striving for research excellence during their research year.

SMA: The journey of medical training is an arduous, but ultimately rewarding one. What challenges and sacrifices did you face and how did you overcome these obstacles?

VT: It has been an arduous but exciting journey. As the inaugural class, we had to work very hard with the school to overcome the teething issues when the school started. The onus was on us to win over hearts and minds and to effect a paradigm shift for this daring endeavour in medical education. One of my personal challenges was to financially and emotionally cope with the opportunity costs of leaving a good career at DSO National Laboratories and going back to school for four years. I had to leave the comfort zone of being a government scholar who was on a fast-tracked career, and embarked on a path that would put me many years in training and financial independence behind my peers.

My family has been extremely supportive and understanding, and the financial assistance from school was very helpful. The members of faculty who believed in us were pivotal in our journey too. The belief that this graduate programme will empower us to make a strong impact on the landscape of medical science and care kept me going. The ultimate reward will be when I see myself or my classmates make a notable contribution to Medicine in Singapore or the world. I have faith that this day will come. **SMA**





Duke-NUS graduands proceeding from their campus to the College of Medicine Building



Prof Victor Dzau, Chancellor for Health Affairs, Duke University; President and CEO, Duke University Health System



Guest of Honour Dr Ng Eng Hen (left) receives a token of appreciation from Mr Tony Chew, Duke-NUS Governing Board Chairman



Prof Soo Khee Chee (right) receives the Benjamin Sheares Professorship in Academic Medicine from Dr Joseph Sheares



Graduating class speaker Lim Kheng Choon



A/Prof Koo Wen Hsin (left) and Prof Lim Shih Hui (right) performing the hooding of graduand Pamela Gopal



Graduand Astrid Suantio (right) receives her scroll from Duke-NUS Dean Prof Ranga Krishnan

## Milestones

2000

Singapore launches a \$3 billion Biomedical Sciences Initiative designed to develop the country into Asia's biomedical hub

2001

A Ministry of Education-appointed Medical Education Review Panel recommends that Singapore establishes a graduate medical school to produce highly-trained clinician-scientists to support the Biomedical Sciences Initiative

2002

Singapore's then Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tony Tan, Minister of State for Education and Manpower Dr Ng Eng Hen, and National University of Singapore (NUS) President Prof Shih Choon Fong visit Duke University to discuss a partnership

2003

Duke University and NUS sign a Memorandum of Understanding to establish Singapore's first graduate medical school



Reciting the Hippocratic Oath

“I’m elated. My first degree is in bioengineering but I chose to become a doctor because it is a good way to interact directly with the patients.”

*Shera Chaterji, who will be going on to train in Pathology at Changi General Hospital*

“The initial challenges of being the pioneer class at Duke-NUS was getting accustomed to new learning methods, such as teamwork in TeamLEAD sessions, clinical skills in Practice Course classes, while having very little personal time outside of medical school. As the years progressed, different challenges arose such as adapting to ward work, and juggling research interests. All these would not have been possible without dedicated faculty, supportive family and colleagues. I would advise my juniors entering their research year to follow your hearts and choose a research interest which truly excites you. It is only then you can truly make a difference to your patients or desired research field.”

*Tan Tze Chin, who will be doing Internal Medicine at SingHealth*

“I used to be an engineer in the Republic of Singapore Air Force, but I wanted to look for a more meaningful career where I could touch people in personal ways, so I came to Duke-NUS. I’m very happy and relieved to be able to graduate.”

*Lim Kheng Choon, who won the David Sabiston Gold Medal in Surgery, will be going on to train in Radiology at Singapore General Hospital (SGH)*

“I was working in Public Health before Duke-NUS. I wanted to work in Aceh after the tsunami struck, but decided to deliver care personally. I am also interested in working with older people. Duke-NUS was a challenging experience but I don’t regret a single minute of it. During my time in Duke-NUS, the main personal challenge I faced was maintaining a work-life balance. As for work challenges, I had to learn new things all the time. I made a lot of sacrifices, and so did my parents and those who supported me. I’m happy, scared and excited to start work in the real world.”

*Astrid Suantio, who won the Most Outstanding Exit Exam Achievement prize and the Outstanding Teamsmanship award, will be going on to train in Internal Medicine at SGH*

“I’m very very proud of our seniors as they have truly demonstrated what it means to be pioneers and trailblazers. They’ve achieved so much in a new school and I think this is the true spirit of Duke-NUS.”

*Josh Chua, first year student at Duke-NUS*



**April 2005**

Duke University and NUS formalise first phase of a partnership to establish the new school, which is named Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School

**August 2005**

- Prof R Sanders Williams, Dean of the Duke University School of Medicine, is officially appointed Duke-NUS Founding Dean
- Duke-NUS begins operations from a site adjacent to Singapore General Hospital
- Staff and faculty recruitment commences

**September 2006**

Construction of permanent Duke-NUS campus begins

**August 2007**

First Duke-NUS MD class begins

**July 2008**

Prof Ranga Krishnan appointed Duke-NUS D





Emotions written all over the graduands' faces

“I’m excited and scared at the same time. I’m no longer a student and already feel the responsibility of being a doctor. I’m glad the whole class made it.”

*Bianca Chan, who won the Outstanding Teammanship award and the National University of Singapore Society Outstanding Achievement Award, will be going on to train in Paediatrics at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital*



Graduand Bianca Chan (left) with Duke-NUS faculty A/Prof Tan Soo Yong



Married couple and graduands Daniel Yong and Rena Dharmawan



A proud moment for all 24 graduands, including (L to R) Lim Kheng Choon, Karrie Ko, Koh Huishan, Dixon Grant and Ee Tat Xin



**May 2009**

Staff and students move to the new Duke-NUS campus

**September 2009**

Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School is officially opened by Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

**August 2010**

The PhD programme, Integrated Biology and Medicine, commences with 12 students

**November 2010**

Duke University and NUS officially sign second phase of collaboration in medical education and research

**July 2011**

Duke-NUS pioneer class officially graduates at the NUS Commencement Ceremony