

New Horizons

The Upcoming Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine

By Prof Martyn R Partridge

The faculty and staff associated with the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCSOM), which will begin operations in 2013, very much appreciate that they are the third medical school in Singapore, and also that they are following two other medical schools with enviable reputations.

To some extent, all medical schools have the same mission: they need to produce graduates fit to practise in the healthcare system in which they will work, and curriculum design correctly precludes the option for a medical school to decide not to cover diabetes or cancer! In that regard, the similarities between schools are obvious, but there will be subtle and sometimes significant differences between schools in the way in which the curriculum is delivered. In addition, medical schools live or fail not just by their teaching, but by their scientific activity, and differences in areas of interest and indeed, expertise will surface with respect to research outputs.

LKCSOM, being a collaboration between Imperial College London and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), believes very strongly in the importance of students understanding the scientific basis of Medicine, for only with such understanding can students become true lifelong learners and adapt to all the challenges which will be thrown at them during a 40-year professional career. However, the clinical relevance of that science needs to be made apparent to students.

Our proposed curriculum will involve a clinical scenario-based series of seven courses which will be undertaken during Years 1 and 2 before being repeated in Years 3 and 4. During the first iteration, the clinical scenarios will be utilised in such a way that they provide a structure for the science, whether molecular or behavioural. During the second iteration, there will be a greater use of the clinical scenario to introduce diagnostics, pathology, clinical pharmacology and therapeutics and management. The length of the academic years will be 44 weeks for the first two years and 46 weeks for the third and fourth. This is so that the students can take their final university examinations at 4½ years, before starting a 17-week clinical internship during which they take progressive responsibility for patients' care, finetune their competencies, and complete the fifth year with a short prescribing examination and clinical assessment of basic skills.

Existing medical courses, such as those at Imperial, have

traditionally been quite hospital-centric. However, more recently, many healthcare systems have permitted much greater learning opportunities in the community. LKCSOM recognises the pressure especially upon clinical teachers, which has been increased by the residency programme and the higher standards of postgraduate training involved. As such, and as the third medical school, we recognise our responsibility not to further burden busy hospital doctors. Wherever possible, additional learning opportunities for our students will be provided in polyclinics, step-down hospitals, rehabilitation centres and primary care. This has the added bonus of allowing students to experience healthcare wherever it is delivered.

One of the possible limitations of a hospital-centric course is that it provides glimpses only of diseases and overemphasises the illness aspects, rather than the preventative aspects which are so important. Today's graduates need to understand that much of modern Medicine involves the management of long term conditions, usually involving the elderly. With the right approaches, great professional satisfaction can be obtained from providing appropriate support for people with these conditions. Helping students to appreciate the importance of this aspect of modern Medicine is a challenge faced by us all.

The new medical course will be innovative with regard to learning opportunities, but is also being designed to capitalise upon the strengths of NTU. The involvement of colleagues from the College of Engineering, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Nanyang Business School is also intrinsic to the development and delivery of our curriculum. We have welcomed the cooperation which we have received from the two existing medical schools, and look forward to growing that cooperation further so that there is a synergism of activities to the benefit of all. **SMA**



Prof Martyn R Partridge is Senior Vice Dean at the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine. He is also Professor of Respiratory Medicine at Imperial College London. Prof Partridge is past President of the British Thoracic Society, previous Chief Medical Advisor to Asthma UK, currently chairs the UK Department of Health (DH) Asthma Steering Group and is also on the DH Respiratory Programme board. He moved to his current position as Senior Vice Dean in October 2010 and now spends most of his time in Singapore.