

# Ten Not-So-Important Reasons Why We Need a Second Medical School

**A**s you all know, a second medical school is on the cards and will most probably be co-located with the Singapore General Hospital on the Outram Campus. This second medical school will be an “American-style” graduate medical school (GMS). An MOU has been signed with Duke University to this end.

Many reasons have been given for why we need a second medical school. These include the following:

“The GMS is of strategic significance to Singapore as it will produce a new breed of medical doctors and clinician-scientists, and also serve as an additional avenue to attract and anchor foreign talent in Singapore. Graduates from the GMS will augment our pool of doctors and clinician-scientists to support our healthcare system and our Biomedical Sciences initiative.” (*MOE Press Release 23 June 2003*)

The Hobbit does not doubt that these objectives will be attained with the GMS here. But the GMS will in all likelihood achieve far more than these above reasons. The Hobbit would like to plug for the project because the possible spin-offs are even greater than those already declared above. These may include:

**Reason 1: Exit planning for senior clinical staff**  
Nowadays, clinical heads of departments and above are limited to two terms of three years each (that is, six years). Some of these folks are actually quite young when they finish their terms. With more nice-sounding posts being unavoidably created with the GMS, we can exit these folks to such posts for a second lease of life.

For the “most” senior clinical staff (that is, the dearly departed), we can even name professorships and buildings after them – “permanent” exit planning.

**Reason 2: Parking space**

With the new GMS, the current jams around car parks in the Outram Campus will only get worse. Our farsighted administrators will undoubtedly take this opportunity to put in a car park or two along with the GMS.

Forget the cheese – given the significance of parking in SGH, we can even write a book titled: “Who Moved My Named Parking Lot?”

**Reason 3: Put NUS back in control**

NUS has really little control over the largest medical-teaching facility in Singapore – Outram Campus. With the GMS, we

can redraw some aberrant organisation charts and put NUS in-charge and Rome will be the centre of civilisation again. Academic titles can also work like academic tentacles... once caught, you can never escape...

**Reason 4: Prove that NUS medical undergraduates are really dumber**

The Duke curriculum is basically a four-year graduate curriculum that includes one year of full-time research. In other words, Duke-system graduates can practise medicine after three years of medical / clinical education but undergraduates need five.

**Reason 5: Dismantling the Old Boys’ Club**

Singapore’s medical profession is overwhelmingly dominated by graduates from one medical school, notwithstanding that many foreign medical graduates have contributed to the scene. With two medical schools, there will be no more “mainstream” in the profession (such as the case in Hong Kong with two medical schools). The “old boys” network can be neutralised with time...

**Reason 6: Create competition!**

In the time-honoured Singapore tradition, we need to create competition to give value to Singaporeans. Look at how we created two TV networks, two newspaper publishers, two MRT operators, two healthcare clusters and now – two medical schools!



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Reason 7: Confuse everyone even further, physically and organisationally

Everyone keeps getting lost in the massive Outram campus. Now, with the GMS in place, there will be even more road signs and directions that will confuse everyone further. We can have the Singapore version of the *Amazing Race* right in the campus.

On top of this, the organisation chart of “who reports to who” in the Outram campus can also be used as a case-study for advanced management courses to see if the students can navigate successfully through the organisation maze.

Reason 8: All-American way of life

With all things American so desired now, we can take this opportunity to remove the Housemen Canteen and put in an American-style cafeteria with such famous brands as Starbucks Coffee, McDonalds and Ben & Jerry's.

In the same vein, the GMS should also have the added spin-off of producing a whole bunch of doctors that speak American. Our present Dean already does a great job speaking American, but definitely more of such talent is needed. Let us face it – Singlish does not quite cut it in the world of medicine and academia, no matter what *Talkingcock.com* says, and we will never have the finesse to speak real English the way the English do. Speaking American is our best bet yet.

Reason 9: Turn Tiong Bahru / Outram area into a “bohemian” neighbourhood

There will be a lot of foreign talent working and staying around SGH. This means that they will also slowly turn the surroundings more bohemian, like Holland Drive and Watten Estate. Then we can build a massive bohemian-looking mall (“Outram-polis”) in what was previously Outram Park (now an empty plot of land) to house all the new restaurants, shops, and so on. The open-air areas around the morgue and Alumni Medical Centre can also be used for alfresco dining – who needs to have breakfast with Ah Meng when you can dine with the dead? We can even throw in some female healthcare staff dressed as SPGs (Sarong Party Girls), reopen Ah Ling's Canteen (like Colebar), and old staid SGH will be transformed!

Reason 10: More work for management consultants  
With GMS side by side with SGH, there will be more work for some management consultants (who seem to hang around forever like chronic osteomyelitis). Suggested airy-fairy projects include:

- a) Value Innovation in a University Hospital – Outdoor spa in the SGH Quad.
- b) Change Management in the GMS era – Redrawing last year's redrawn organisation chart in 67 colours.

- c) Brand Remaking – How to redraw the SGH logo to incorporate GMS and NUS logos with a million dollar budget. Tagline thrown in for free.
- d) Organisational Service Excellence – Greeting patients with academic sincerity.
- e) Unlocking Synergies in the Supply Chain – Buy only one brand of everything to create efficiencies of scale, a la American-vaccine-style (oops, too late, this one has already been done).

Reason 11: Have some really important departments in GMS

Ok, enough of jokes, forget the first 10 reasons. This last one is a truly good reason to have a second medical school. Let us face it, whether it is an undergraduate medical school or a GMS, any medical school funded by the state should always “support our healthcare system”. But look at our current and only medical school now:

- a) It does not have a department of geriatrics although we have one of the fastest ageing populations in the world.
- b) It does not even have a full-fledged family medicine department (one full-time staff and a bunch of part-timers) when practically everyone (including the current Minister) has stressed on the importance of the family physician.
- c) It does not have a department or even a chaired professorship in bioethics or medical ethics. Is it not scary that we want to be the kingpins of medical research and practice in Asia, yet we do not seem to want to devote significant resources to the development of our capabilities in practice and research ethics? It appears we want to have the material rewards of the life science industry without paying our dues to the soul of medicine.

Maybe the GMS will address these obvious but less glorious gaps in our system. But then again, if the GMS becomes overly obsessed with just propelling us into the first world of biomedical sciences, then maybe not. ■

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