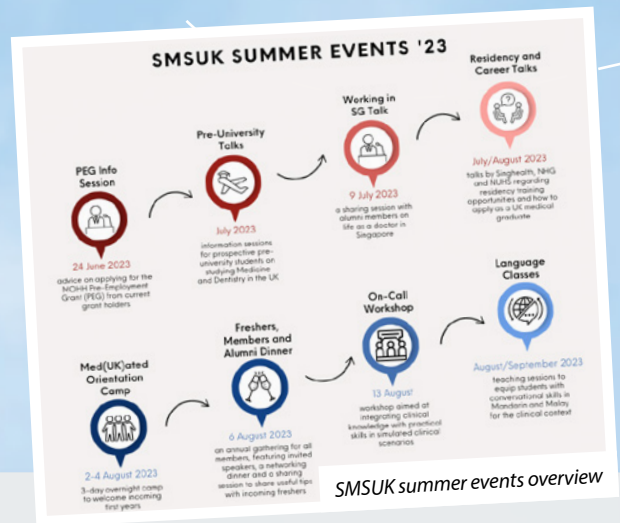


Bridges: Connecting Us to Home



Text and photos by Melanie Chee

It is summer in the UK, and with temperatures forecasted to hit a high of 35°C, it feels reminiscent of Singapore – albeit without the stickiness and bad hair days that come with the humidity of home. By now, most UK-based students have returned home for the holidays. It is a much-needed break after a hectic academic year, and a good chance to rest and recharge before the next one.

For members of the Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom

(SMSUK), summer also represents an exciting time with a range of events lined up, including various networking opportunities, educational events and the annual orientation camp to welcome incoming freshers. But SMSUK is more than just a mere event organiser. Since 1994, the society has been integral to keeping students connected to home while they were away at university – a bridge between home and our home away from home, 10,954 km apart.

In this month's letter, Audrey and Alicia share what SMSUK means to them and how the community has rooted them to home, despite the distance.

Melanie is a Year 3 medical student at the University of Leicester and is the 29th Editor of SMSUK.



Text by Audrey Yap

With the turn of the academic year comes society handovers and transitions for their respective executive committee members. Much is the same for SMSUK, a student-led non-profit organisation representing the interests of over 1,000 Singaporean and Singapore-educated medical and dental students in the UK.

As we approach summer, the 28th SMSUK committee has stepped down and handed the reins to the 29th committee; the former passing on their wisdom and earning a well-deserved rest, while the latter is eager for new journeys and challenges ahead. I have had the absolute privilege of serving as treasurer in the 28th committee and

am now holding the role of president in the 29th committee.

Nevertheless, SMSUK has meant a lot more than merely a student society or leadership position to me – it is a large community that I hold dear to my heart and will be etched in my memories of university. For students studying overseas in the UK (inclusive of England, Scotland,



Wales and Northern Ireland), having this home away from home forms a vital part of our university life, no matter how clichéd it sounds. Overseas students will surely resonate with the pangs of being away from home, be it missing family, friends, food, convenience or even the weather.

Another aspect that unites medical and dental overseas students is how we have grown used to questions like “Will you be staying in the UK for training?” and “What makes you want to return to Singapore?” cropping up in casual conversations. These may seem like simple questions, but they comprise deeply rooted themes and concerns that are shared by many overseas students. At the crux of it, we are all in the same boat, and SMSUK is one such community that binds students together through shared joys, worries, surprises and challenges. This unique bond is what has drawn me to this society, and ultimately led to me staying in the committee for two academic cycles.

I would like to think of the journey from my 28th to 29th committee roles as crossing a bridge. The bridge between my previous role as treasurer and current role as president has linked me to a new landmark. Though the role of President may seem daunting at times, I am not alone on this passage. Helping the executive committee together with my two fellow steadfast vice-presidents (Magil and Alicia) is definitely a new challenge, but one that I am embracing as I learn along the way. Joined by the new committee and supported by previous ones, I have been fortunate to have this community share my overseas journey with me, and I hope that everyone is able to find a community that walks with them. I greatly look forward to our year ahead, and I hope that through this “Letters from the UK” column, readers are able to catch a glimpse of our lives as medical students overseas.



SMSUK's booth at the NUHS Residency Open House

Audrey is a Year 3 medical student at King's College London and is the 29th President of SMSUK.



Text by Alicia Tao

“Where is home for you?” was never a question I could answer easily. My answers would fluctuate between my birthplace (Singapore), the city I grew up in (Hong Kong, China), and my parents’ home countries (Malaysia and China). But more often than not, my response would be simplified into being Singaporean or to jokingly flex my Singaporean passport.

Despite that, I have only lived on the island for a total of less than a year. Spending most of my life attending an American international school in a city where neither of my parents were from, it seemed as though my origins were scattered in various places, separated by vast distances and seas. Growing up with the label of a third-culture kid, I never saw myself as fully local no matter which country I was in.

Imposter syndrome admittedly has the better of me at times, leading me to question whether others would accept me as “Singaporean” enough to be a

representative of a Singaporean society. There were aspects of Singaporean culture – subtle jokes and childhood references – that I worried I would not be able to bond over with my peers. Singaporeans are known to have a firm sense of cultural identity and I was not sure if I could relate to that.

Yet in the daunting first few months after moving to London for university, I found solace in being a part of the SMSUK family. During those early days when the sense of homesickness was never-ending, it was comforting to spend time with people who came from similar backgrounds as me. SMSUK trips to Bristol and Bath in the UK, and later Budapest, Hungary, were adventures I never imagined myself having the chance to experience. There was a camaraderie in our shared journey of leaving home to study halfway across the world; I am beyond grateful for the friends who welcomed me as I am and reminded me what it is like to belong.

“What does it mean to be Singaporean?” I expect my answer would differ from many others, but to me, the myriad of responses reflects the beauty of the question. Being a part of SMSUK has given me the opportunity to reconnect with my heritage and the overseas Singaporean community. It is my hope that SMSUK will remain inclusive to the diverse pool of individuals who identify with it, regardless of their upbringing or nationality on paper. Now, whenever I return to Singapore, I feel that my bond with the place has been strengthened by the many familiar faces and fond memories I now associate with it. I know that I will always consider Singapore one of my homes. ♦

Alicia is a Year 1 dental student at King's College London and is the 29th Vice-President for media and communications of SMSUK.

