

All about O&G

By Christopher Mathew

During the end-of-term vacation after my first year of medical school, I found myself contemplating how I could make the most of the three-month break. One idea that struck me was to seek out an attachment in a hospital, which would simultaneously allow me to learn about a particular specialty and gain more clinical exposure. This propelled me to request for a three-day attachment with the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O&G) at National University Hospital (NUH). Prof Kuldip Singh, a senior consultant at the department, graciously agreed to take me under his wing and be my mentor throughout the attachment.

On the morning of the first day, Prof Singh allowed me to sit in during his clinic where he had consultations with private patients. Many came in for routine check-ups and procedures, and I watched with interest as he performed Pap smears and speculum examinations with the skill of a seasoned medical professional. For each case, he would take the time to share with me the interesting aspects and teach me a little about the field of O&G. In fact, immediately after demonstrating how a Pap smear was done on the very first patient, he turned to me and said, "So, I'm sure you can do the next one right?" I stood there momentarily stunned until I saw his face break into a wide grin.

In the afternoon, I visited the operating theatre (OT) to witness a caesarean section. Watching the team in the OT perform the delivery with remarkable efficiency and speed, fuelled by a sense of urgency that pervaded the room, I was filled with awe. The tension throughout the procedure was almost palpable and rose a few notches when the surgeon had some difficulty delivering the baby. After a few failed attempts, she called out urgently, "The baby's not coming out – I'm going to need the forceps!" Thankfully, that did the trick and the baby was delivered successfully. I could almost feel a wave of relief wash over the OT as the baby's cries filled the air.

The morning of the second day, I was offered the chance to witness Prof Singh's consultations with his

subsidised patients. I got to see a string of interesting cases, which prompted in-depth discussions between Prof Singh and me about a plethora of O&G-related problems, ranging from cancer of the endometrium to anaemia as a result of heavy menses.

During a lunch meeting with Prof Singh, I listened with rapt attention as the residents presented noteworthy cases to more senior doctors, followed by the latter offering their viewpoints and advice on the best course of action to manage the patients. I was truly inspired watching the residents leverage on the wealth of knowledge of their more senior counterparts, who were only too willing to impart their invaluable experience. I have come to appreciate that such interpersonal collaborations among our medical professionals are cornerstones of our unparalleled healthcare system.

The third and final day of the attachment held even more fascinating events in store. In the morning, I found myself back in the OT witnessing a laparoscopic cystectomy. It fascinated me to watch the surgeon deftly manoeuvre the laparoscopic apparatus – inserted into the patient via a hole no bigger than a coin – to remove a cyst growing on the ovary. It was a testament to how technologically advanced the field of Medicine has become today.

After that, I stayed in the OT to watch yet another caesarean section. This time, the patient was under local anaesthesia as opposed to general anaesthesia, as was for the case the previous day. This meant that the patient remained conscious throughout the procedure. The caesarean section proceeded smoothly, and it was heartwarming to see the immense joy on the mother's face as she gingerly took her newborn into her arms. Her husband, who was by her bedside reassuringly holding her hand throughout the procedure, even teared up. After the procedure, I started to leave the OT, and as I glanced back, I couldn't help but smile as I saw the elated couple posing for a photo with their newborn baby.

As my attachment was coming to an end, I was hoping for a chance to witness a vaginal delivery.

The opportunity presented itself in the afternoon as a patient went into labour in the delivery suite. I stood in the room as the resident on duty performed the delivery. The tension spiked briefly when the mother seemed to face difficulty in pushing just after the baby's head had emerged. "Come on! You have to push harder than that – your baby's almost out!" urged the resident. To speed things along, she performed an episiotomy, and a few final pushes later, the baby was delivered safely.

Since all that was left to do was to sew up the cut, I decided to make a move, leaving the resident to do the stitching. However, she turned to me unexpectedly and said, "Here, put on a pair of sterile gloves and come help me."

Once again, I stood there momentarily taken aback, wondering if this was another joke. However, as it dawned on me that she was serious, I immediately slipped on my gloves and rushed to her side, unsure of how much

help I could really be. While she performed the stitching, she directed me to help her by wiping up the excess blood around the area with gauze and cutting the thread whenever necessary. It was one thing to be present to watch the delivery, but it was something else altogether to be actually helping out with my own two hands! My heart was pounding the whole time. Yet, it was all worth it when I looked up and saw the exhausted mother smiling weakly at us, gratitude written across her face.

As I exited the delivery suite later, I recalled all the memorable moments during my attachment. Despite the fact that it only lasted three days, I got to see so much more than I could have ever asked for. Of course, I owe it all to my mentor, Prof Singh, who took the effort to arrange for me to see as much as I possibly could in such a short span of time. I would like to thank him for being an excellent mentor and making my attachment a truly unforgettable experience! I am also grateful to all the NUH O&G staff who provided guidance or simply shared advice during my brief stint with the department. This attachment has heightened my appreciation for the field of O&G, as well as deepened my love for the medical profession as a whole. **SMA**



Christopher is a second year medical student from the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. His interests include sports and travelling. He believes that it is always important to be open to new experiences in life.