

Supporting the Pursuit of Medical Knowledge

By Jennifer Lee, Deputy Manager, SMA Charity Fund

SINCE THE SMA Charity Fund (SMACF) was first established in February last year, we have been working very closely with the local medical schools, to reach out to students from less privileged families. The SMA Medical Students' Assistance Fund bursary (which started in 2007 and is now under SMACF's umbrella) ensures that these medical students can concentrate on pursuing their dreams to become doctors without the constraints placed on them by their financial situation. One of SMACF's other key initiatives is providing these needy students with learning exposure, which includes attending conferences or seminars, and doing electives in foreign universities. SMACF also encourages them to embark on research projects in their fields of interest and share their findings on the international stage.

Recently, Roland Xu and Sharon Tan, both final year students from the National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, received subsidies from SMACF to fund their participation in overseas learning exposure trips. (Both students were also previous recipients of the SMA Medical Students' Assistance Fund bursary, which helped with their basic living expenses.)

Roland took part in the Tripartite Colorectal Meeting held in Birmingham, UK, from 30 June to 3 July. The conference, one of the world's largest coloproctology meetings, was organised by the Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland, the Royal Society of Medicine and the European Society of Coloproctology. Roland's project, "The Limited Value of Routine Bacterial Culture Study in Perianal Abscess", had been accepted as a poster presentation for the conference.



Roland with Dr Bettina Lieske after the operation

Roland says...

I was simply blown away by the many research ideas that were presented and I could not be more thrilled to listen to the leading international experts in the field discuss various topics. I also had the opportunity to present my own research poster at the conference.

After the conference, I was privileged to be offered the opportunity by Dr Bettina Lieske (from the National University Hospital Department of Colorectal Surgery) to participate in a peritonectomy surgery and hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemoperfusion at Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital. It was an awesome experience! It was my first time witnessing such an operation and I was deeply

amazed at its intricacies. As I watched the surgery proceed, I was reminded of the importance of research that I had learnt during the conference, and I believe that we need to be constantly pushing ourselves to come out with new techniques to better treat patients. I will definitely work towards my passion and dream of becoming a good doctor, and to constantly better my craft and give nothing but my best, so as to alleviate the sufferings of my patients!

It is only with the support from the donors of SMACF that I was able to bring my ideas halfway across the globe to present them in front of international experts and learn from the wisdom of others. It has been a humbling trip as I

got to listen to various topics from the giants in the field, and appreciate that there is so much more that we do not know, and so much more for us to explore and learn about through research. Thank you for investing in the research interests of young medical students and for fuelling our passion for it!

Sharon attended the annual European Orthopaedic Research Society (EORS) meeting in Nantes, France, from 2 to 4 July. She gave a podium presentation on her team's study, "Atypical Fractures of the Ulna and Bisphosphonate Therapy: A Case Report and Systematic Review of Published Case Reports". The conference, which strongly advocated the integration of basic sciences as well as clinical research, saw the participation of international orthopaedic surgeons and scientists. It also had a special focus on young investigators like Sharon, and aimed to spark curiosity and innovation among them through various activities.

Sharon says...

The EORS conference, though short, has taught me beyond what textbooks can offer, and definitely opened my horizons to future experiences and adventures waiting to unfold.

With the integration of basic sciences as well as clinical research, the conference wowed me continuously as I learnt from hundreds of international delegates. This cooperation was echoed by speaker Avriel Hillman, who personally shared her struggles as a patient to highlight the power of having multiple brains – scientists, clinicians and patients alike – working together.

It is with this spirit that I continue journeying through my premature days in Medicine, in hope that one day I can truly marry basic sciences and clinical work to bring a little more for my patients. And accompanying this newfound knowledge, experience and passion, is my sincere gratitude to everyone who made this humbling learning journey possible. No words can describe my appreciation and thanks to all the donors of SMACF for this humbling learning journey and the experience that could not have been possibly bought by any other means. ■



Sharon speaking at the conference

Sharon and Roland's trips were made possible by financial grants from SMACF, which supports medical students from needy families to acquire medical knowledge by participating in conferences, seminars and the like, for the enhancement of their medical knowledge and training. Please support SMACF's work by making a gift to us. For more info, visit <http://www.sma.org.sg/smacades> or email smacharity@sma.org.sg.

Medical students who require financial support to participate in conferences or seminars and do electives in foreign universities can also contact SMACF for assistance.

