



A Year in Review

By Jennifer Lee, Deputy Manager, SMA Charity Fund

THE SMA Charity Fund (SMACF) was granted Institution of a Public Character status in December 2013. Since then, we have had a busy year, planning and executing many programmes to ensure that SMACF begins its charitable activities on a great start.

Supporting less privileged medical students

SMACF continues the good work of the SMA Medical Students' Assistance Fund (SMA-MSAF), which now comes under our umbrella. In addition to the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM), we have extended our support to the other two local medical schools, Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School and the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCmedicine). The cost of pursuing a medical education in Singapore comes with a huge price tag. Even though aspiring students have the passion to become doctors, the heavy

school fees are often huge deterrents to achieving their dreams. It is no surprise that some medical students take on part-time jobs, like providing tuition on the side, to see themselves through their university education.

According to a survey conducted by the National University of Singapore (NUS) Medical Society in 2007, an NUS medical student needs at least \$4,410 a year for daily expenses such as transportation, food, books and miscellaneous items. This amount will definitely be higher today, if we factor in inflation and a more challenging environment that medical students currently face.

SMACF is currently working with YLLSoM, Duke-NUS and LKCmedicine to carry out the Medical Student Living Expenses Survey. A preliminary review of the survey showed that things have changed, and more has to be done to ensure aspiring and current medical students are able to focus on



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Photo: Chew Yi Rong



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Photo: Public Health Screening 2014



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Photo: Project Legacy

Photos

- 1. YLLSoM students attending ICHMM 2014 with the support of SMACF
- 2. Chew Yi Rong (first from left) with fellow volunteers from the Strategies for Trauma and Resilience course in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, organised by Tan Tock Seng Hospital in June
- 3. Medical students in action at PHS 2014
- 4. The Project Legacy team

their studies without any financial worries. The SMA-MSAF bursary quantum was adjusted to \$5,000 for Academic Year 2014/2015, and a total of 35 medical students from the three schools received the bursary.

The SMA-MSAF has given out more than \$550,000 in bursaries to medical students since it was first started in 2007.

Encouraging medical education and training

Apart from providing financial assistance, SMACF also supports the pursuit of medical education and training for medical students from less privileged families. They are encouraged to undertake research projects and share their findings at both local and overseas medical conferences, or attend electives in foreign universities. Such exposure gives students the chance to take their learning beyond school and learn from medical professionals around the world. We hope to level the playing field by supporting underprivileged medical students when they take part in such programmes.

Roland Xu and Sharon Tan, both final year students at

YLLSoM, have benefited from participating in conferences abroad, with funding from SMACF (see SMA News August 2014 or <http://goo.gl/57m77a>).

Recognising the mentors

SMACF recognises that the achievements of medical students are often made possible through the guidance of senior medical professionals and educators, and therefore wishes to acknowledge their efforts in developing these students. This year, the Wong Hock Boon-SMACF Outstanding Mentor Award was presented to ten mentors who helped in projects led by medical students.

Benefiting the community

Not only are SMACF's charitable initiatives geared towards developing and supporting medical students, they aim to benefit the community as well. We are open to exploring collaborative partnerships and supporting healthcare projects as part of our strategic thrusts of promoting volunteerism and building a compassionate

profession. We believe that the value of altruism should be inculcated in our medical students, so that they enter the profession not just with the necessary skills, but also the desire to help the less privileged.

Two of the projects that SMACF supported this year were the Public Health Screening (PHS) project and Project Legacy.

The PHS project, organised by the NUS Medical Society, was held in October at Clementi Central. About 600 medical students were involved, from the pre-publicity phase to the actual two-day event. In addition, these students clocked close to 4,500 volunteering hours, bringing health awareness and screening programmes to the grassroots (see SMA News October 2014 or <http://goo.gl/hhmb6n>).

Another group of 59 students from YLLSoM volunteered for Project Legacy, launched in 2012, which helps palliative patients celebrate their lives by leaving keepsakes for their loved ones. These mementoes take the form of letters, photo albums, video montages, or even recipe collections. SMACF will continue to support this project as it allows medical students to better understand the perspectives of palliative patients as well as that of their caregivers and loved ones (see SMA News January 2014 or <http://goo.gl/4gus5t>).

Besides that, 18 medical students pledged 1,500 volunteer hours and involvement with 28 humanitarian medical missions at the inaugural International Conference on Humanitarian Medical Mission (ICHMM), held recently at the Academia from 30 October to 1 November. SMACF had sponsored these students to attend the conference, as it was in line with our aim to support students to learn more about humanitarian medical missions.

We would not have been able to accomplish all the above in the past year without your committed support. SMACF aims to deliver such charitable initiatives and more, as we work towards our vision of building a compassionate profession that will positively impact healthcare for the community! ■

"My life dream is to serve communities and change people's lives. I have been affected by the poor who are in dire need, and was trapped by my helplessness. It was then that I realised the ability to help was not only the matter of good intentions, but requires means as well. I yearn to have knowledge of medicine to bring healing of people both physically and emotionally for it's the most direct and simplest way to show my love for the people I reach out to. A big thanks to all the donors of SMA Charity Fund, you have allowed me to pursue my passion wholeheartedly!"

- Chew Yi Rong, M2, LKCMedicine (SMA-MSAF bursary recipient, Academic Year 2014/2015)