



# Creating Global Connections

Text and photos by Dr Benny Loo

**I REPRESENTED** SMA at the World Medical Association (WMA) and Junior Doctors Network (JDN) meetings in Oslo, Norway, from 15 to 18 April this year. It provided me with a platform to learn the different postgraduate medical education systems around the world and also speak about Singapore's transition to the residency programme.

## More about the associations

WMA is an international organisation representing physicians. It was founded on 17 September 1947 and has now grown to encompass 111 national medical associations. The organisation was created to ensure the independence of physicians and to work for the highest possible standards of ethical behaviour and care by physicians, at all times.

JDN is made up of junior doctors who are representatives of the respective national medical associations or associate members of WMA. It was formed in 2010 to provide a forum for experience-sharing, policy discussion, project and resource development on issues of importance to junior doctors, such as postgraduate medical education, their well-being and the healthcare workforce.

## My experience

Junior doctors from all over the world, including America, Canada, Spain, Brazil, Turkey, Germany, Nigeria, Japan and Singapore attended the JDN meeting, hosted by the Norwegian Medical Association. It was an enriching experience where I gained insights on various training systems and difficulties faced by the junior doctors of the respective countries. Many of the issues raised were surprisingly similar to those of Singapore's training system, such as the appropriate amount of duty hours (and the challenge of not exceeding it), influx of foreign-trained doctors and support of junior doctor representations in national medical bodies (such as postgraduate training governing groups).

I also realised that the limitations of one system could be the ideal for another. For instance, the Singapore system is packed with multiple examinations including the exit examination (which is a requirement for specialist accreditation). The lack of an equivalent examination in more established medical systems, such as the Norwegian one, was deemed by some to be an inadequacy in ensuring



**Clockwise from far left**  
 Dr Loo (third from left) with participants of JDN with Dr Xavier Deau (President), Dr Mukesh Haikerwal (Chairperson of Council) and Dr Otmar Kloiber (Secretary-General) of WMA  
 Dr Loo explaining the Singapore health system and residency programme  
 Photo taken with Dr L Kayode Obembe (President of Nigeria Medical Association) and Nigerian delegates  
 Group photo with the JDN participants

the good quality of specialists trained. This, however, does not necessarily mean that poor specialists are produced as it governs the trainees through the training programme and constant guidance by their supervisors.

The other lesson I learnt was the luxury of being part of Singapore's relatively younger medical training system. We enjoy a robust training system with the benefit (and burden) of integrating two medical systems and we never had to fear the collapse of the training infrastructure. The harsh reality faced by our compatriots in Nigeria is the lack of investment in medical training from the government and they are constantly fighting for the survival of their residency programme. The Nigerian delegates were duly awarded the best country presentation after sharing with us the grim plight of their training system.

Thereafter, for the next three days, I observed the WMA meeting where many issues ranging from membership, ethics, socio-welfare to education were enthusiastically discussed. It was a great learning experience as multiple countries came together to debate for the better cause of mankind. Issues discussed included environmental health,

support to street children and chemical weapons – which are fortunately not experienced in Singapore. These problems faced by many developing, and even some developed countries, further validated Singapore's achievements in 50 years. WMA has also formed closer ties with other international bodies such as World Federation for Medical Education and gained more impact in international health (as evidenced during the Ebola outbreak). I believe that Singapore will be able to play a bigger role as WMA continues to strive for better healthcare across the globe.

This experience has broadened my mind on international healthcare and medical training and I feel very glad to have met many like-minded friends. I look forward to participation in future JDN and WMA activities. ■



*Dr Loo is currently training as a senior resident in paediatric medicine at KK Women's and Children's Hospital. He likes to look on the bright side of life and always strives to balance his work, family and personal duties.*