

SMA NEWS



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On the Shoulders of Giants

Dummies' Guide to Residency

*Residency Programme
- Hits and Misses*

**DOCTORS
IN TRAINING**

By Dr Jonathan Tan, Guest Editor

“The world is changed...”

The merits of the residency programme were the subject of much debate when it was first proposed and implemented. Would these shorter training programmes with controlled working hours lead to less clinical exposure and less proficient specialists? Were these new-fangled trainee evaluation forms and feedback sessions truly necessary? There was much skepticism at first, but one should not judge a tree before seeing its fruits. Perhaps now, with most of the residency systems in full swing and the first batches of senior residents coming off the production line, we can take stock of the brave new world of postgraduate medical education in Singapore, a system in transition.

“I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air.”

To truly understand a new country, one needs to get one's boots on the ground. In this edition, we speak to two groups of people: those who have moulded and nurtured the new residency programmes and the first products of this far-eastern graft of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. I had the privilege to practise in the departments of the four professors interviewed in this edition and they have kindly agreed to share their views on their past experiences, the present changes they have effected and their hopes for the residency programme in the future. I would like to thank Asst Prof Alfred Kow, A/Prof Shirley Ooi and A/Prof Raymond Goy for so graciously sharing their thoughts, and needless to say, it was a great privilege to interview my programme director, A/Prof Joseph Thambiah.

We also invited three senior residents to share their personal views as they transitioned to the next stage of their professional training. They are Dr Tan Li Feng, a medical student who became a resident directly who is now both a mother and senior resident, Dr Tan Ming Yuan a former basic specialist trainee in general surgery and now a chief resident and Dr Wang Mingchang, who is completing his family medicine training and is now setting up a new sports medicine centre.

“Much that once was is lost.”

To the casual reader, the single institution centeredness of this edition is immediately apparent, and I apologise for it. Before the residency system, trainees had the opportunity to rotate to various hospitals around the island, but in this day and age, I doubt I will have much opportunity to see how orthopaedics is practised outside of the west of Singapore, and I hope this will in some way explain the lack of interviewees from the other clusters.

The last trainees of the old basic specialist training/advanced specialist training trainees are rapidly exiting, and soon all will be residency. Or maybe not. Dr Shaun Ho describes to us the training that radiation oncology trainees undergo, one of the last few specialties not part of the residency programme.

“For none now live who remember it”

The Chinese have a saying that one who teaches for a day, is like a father for life. Just as our behaviour reflects our upbringing, our professional life is a reflection of the training we received. When one watches a surgeon operate, with every quirk and step, one can hear the echoes of mentors past. In the end, it is my opinion that it is the people and not the system that makes a good training programme. We should never forget the teachers that make it all possible. Every specialty has its icons and giants, and perhaps in this time of transition, it would do us good to speak to someone of great experience, who even after retiring from active practice two decades ago has been active in educating orthopaedic surgeons in Singapore and the region. A tutorial with Prof P Balasubramaniam has been the stepping stone to passing the FRCS and MMED for many orthopaedic trainees, and his thoughts on medical education are well worth hearing.

I hope that as we move into the future with the residency programme, we do not forget the past and those who have helped brought us to where we are today. ■



Jonathan Tan is currently an orthopaedic resident at the National University Health System. A dwarf in a department of giants, his hobbies include falling asleep while studying, resubmitting rejected journal articles and trying to not stutter during morning teachings. He is grateful for the opportunity to pursue his dreams and hopes to become a good orthopaedic surgeon and help educate future trainees. He is thankful for the love and support of his parents and fiancée without which none of this would be possible.