

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

THE WHB-SMACF OUTSTANDING MENTOR AWARDS 2015



Sweaty palms. Bounding pulses. Feeling trapped in one's stuffy blazer. The niggling desire to adjust one's tie (is it still slanted?) for the 17th time. This cacophonous orchestra of anxiety is one memory we would vividly remember about our research conference debuts. As we reflect on our baptisms by fire, our thoughts invariably wander to those who have guided us through the flames and fought blazes alongside us — our beloved research mentors.

These giants were duly recognised at the second Wong Hock Boon (WHB) Society Symposium, held at the National University of Singapore last November. The WHB Society Symposium provides a platform for medical student researchers to

showcase and defend their work against an expert panel, thereby allowing them to gain valuable experience through the presentation of their projects. The symposium is an annual event organised by the WHB Society, an undergraduate student research society within the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine). The society is named after the eponymous Father of Paediatrics in Singapore whose wide-ranging contributions to paediatric practice, including the widespread use of rice water to alleviate diarrhoea in children and the prevention of kernicterus in newborns, was also accompanied by his unflagging guidance and research mentoring to medical students and junior paediatricians.

Sharing the day's spotlight are doctors who have selflessly imparted their wisdom and shared their enthusiasm with budding researchers. The event saw student presenters and attendees from all three medical schools in Singapore, as well as eight mentors who were nominated by their student mentees and honoured with the Outstanding Mentor Award. The SMA Charity Fund has been supporting the award since its inception.

Our guest of honour, A/Prof Lau Tang Ching, spoke of Daniel Pink's model of motivation, as described in his book *Drive*. A/Prof Lau shared how the trinity of giving students the autonomy to explore, training their mastery of the

subject matter and instilling a sense of purpose in their efforts are vital to their research success. In the anecdotes that follow, it is clear how our mentor awardees have practiced this as embodiments of poet Robert Frost's vision of education: "I am not a teacher, I am an awakener."

HEARING FROM THE MENTEES

Cai Mingzhe, a Phase IV medical student at NUS Medicine, shares with us the generosity of his mentor Dr Stefan Mueller: "No single instance can fully describe how wonderful mentor Dr Stefan has been to me. He has gone to great lengths to nurture me both in the heart and mind. Our meetings typically run overtime — for which I often feel bad — because of my never-ending list of questions and Dr Stefan's ever-enduring patience. His counsel to me goes beyond our research project and spans clinical knowledge, specialty interests, extracurricular advice, my father's health, life aspirations, values and professionalism."

Alvona Loh, who is also a Phase IV student at NUS Medicine, describes how her mentor, A/Prof Gerald Koh's role was pivotal in her research journey: "When I set out to conduct a study on the motivations, outcomes and perceived barriers of global health aid, as well as their corresponding potential solutions, it was instrumental that someone with experience in these areas supervised me. A/Prof Koh was the perfect mentor for this."

"A/Prof Koh taught me to envision this study as more than just a student project, but one that contributes meaningfully to global health aid and medical education. We worked closely to conduct the study in a way that is sufficiently rigorous and meticulous for publication on an international platform. I learnt from him the importance of open-mindedness to the findings of a study, receptiveness to constructive feedback during the research process and having acquired critical analytical skills to systematically process data, which are very useful qualities of a researcher."

FINAL THOUGHTS

While we continue to make little forays into the vast unknown on the edges of human medical knowledge, let us not forget our mentors who have tenderly

placed the map and compass in our hands and taught us how to read the constellations to find our own path in the vast wilderness. Fittingly, the great medical educator and physician William Osler reminds us of the beauty and promise of teaching the next generation: "In the hurly-burly of today, when the competition is so keen and there are so many seeking the bubble reputation at the eye-piece and the test-tube, it is well for young men to remember that no bubble is so iridescent or floats longer than that blown by the successful teacher."

As you look into the mirror adjusting your attire for your next big presentation, or even the ward rounds of the day ahead, we hope that you too will remember fondly the moments your teachers and mentors have invested in you to shape the person in the mirror whom you see today. ♦

RECIPIENTS OF THE OUTSTANDING MENTOR AWARDS 2015

Dr Alfredo Franco-Obregon
A/Prof Bettina Lieske
Dr Delicia Ooi
A/Prof Koh Choon-Huat Gerald
A/Prof Poh Kian Keong
Dr Ridzuan Farouk
Dr Stefan Mueller
Dr Vu Duc Thang



PROFILE



TEXT BY

JEREMY TEOH

Jeremy is a third year medical student at the National University of Singapore and is the co-director of the second Wong Hock Boon Symposium, alongside Ang Ting Yao. When he's not struggling to read X-rays or ECGs in the wards, he enjoys reading on rainy days with a cuppa in hand.

Legend

1. Guest of honour (GOH) Prof Lau Tang Ching delivering the opening address
2. GOH Prof Lau and Outstanding Mentor Award recipient Dr Stefan Mueller
3. Student researcher Tan Yong Chuan presenting his project to expert judge Prof Mikael Hartman
4. Alvona, Prof Gerald Koh and his son Max at the WHB Symposium

Photos by Low Zhi Xuan

