



MY FIRST STEPS TO BECOMING A DOCTOR

"You won't see the clinical relevance until you've seen patients yourself. It is from the experience of meeting patients that you truly learn, integrate knowledge and make sense of things in a way that is personal and memorable for you."

This was the mantra we heard from the doctors who taught us over the course of our pre-clinical years at the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine). Back in 2013, as a freshly-minted medical student reciting my pledge, I never could have imagined what these three years would be like.

In just three years, I found myself transiting from having only a basic knowledge of science from my junior college days to having a deeper understanding of the core principles and science in medicine in my pre-clinical years and being able to piece together a clinical picture of a real patient by my first clinical year. The transition from Year 2 to Year 3 is traditionally a difficult one and I am thankful that LKCMedicine's teaching pedagogy allowed for a smoother transition.

EXPERIENCING CLINIC LIFE

Right from the get go, our faculty drummed into us the importance of being "clinical", as knowing just the hard science and facts is not enough to make us good doctors. The School

incorporated a Polyclinic and Hospital Week during our fourth and sixth week in Year 1, respectively, where during the latter, we were assigned to different departments at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) to shadow a team of doctors and get our first taste of clinical life. The purpose of this was to let us know that the theory we were going to learn in the next two years will one day ferment into reality and clinical application. It also served as a reminder that in five years from then, we would be out in the various hospitals as junior doctors and be at the frontline of patient care. Hospital Week was an amazing experience. My team was supervised by Dr Terence Huey (consultant general surgeon at TTSH), a great role model who taught us that there is something new to learn every day. With this mantra in mind, I approached learning with the mindset that I wanted to learn as much as I could, so that I can be the best doctor possible for my future patients.

The teaching pedagogy at LKCMedicine allowed for that to happen. Team-Based Learning (TBL) forms the core of our learning model and introduced application exercises with clinical relevance right from Year 1, training us to think like clinicians. Learning was innovative; gone were the days of lecture theatres and tutorials with worksheets to fill in. Instead, we were each given an iPad on the first day of school, which

would go on to serve as our "lecturer", "worksheet" and study tool. Pre-recorded lectures from Imperial College London are uploaded onto various internet platforms for us to access in our own time, allowing us to study and prepare at our own pace before going for TBL sessions. When we are in class, we have the privilege of having clinicians from various departments teaching and showing us the clinical relevance of each theoretical point. Application exercises required us to have some basic understanding of our medical sciences for the discussion to be fruitful; thus, many of us prepared before each session to identify gaps in our knowledge that we could clarify in class. This helped to develop an inquisitive and independent learning culture at school.

PRE-CLINICAL YEARS

The highlights of my pre-clinical years were the Integrated Clinical Practice (ICP) sessions. Almost every week, we would head to Bukit Batok Polyclinic where we interacted with simulated patients under the supervision of a clinical tutor, to practise our history-taking skills and physical examinations. We were also taught practical skills such as venipuncture and suturing in a safe environment. I found this early practical exposure extremely useful as we had two entire years to hone these skills which would serve as fundamentals for our daily

jobs as junior doctors in the future. I remember that day in August 2015 when I stepped into the hospital ward to obtain a history from my very first patient, as a third year medical student. That encounter turned out to be surprisingly smooth and I managed to obtain a salient history while covering the most important bits. It was at that point that I realised how important a strong foundation in history-taking is, as it gives us — the students — the confidence to approach any patient.

One unique thing about LKCMedicine's ICP approach is that even though there was a framework taught to us (eg, presenting complaint, past medical history, etc), there was a huge emphasis on obtaining the patient's "ideas, concerns and expectations". In this way, we could learn how to be a caring doctor who is able to empathise and see medicine in totality — not just the medical aspect, but also a social and functional element that makes up the entire care experience.

MAKING STEADY PROGRESS

My first clinical year has been extremely memorable. We still have TBL sessions in Year 3 to prepare us for our clinical postings, which are split into three major blocks — a 14-week-long medicine posting, a 14-week long general surgery and orthopaedics posting and six short postings of two weeks each, covering ophthalmology; otolaryngology; anaesthesia; rheumatology, allergy and immunology; dermatology; and infectious diseases. The TBL sessions were fully "application exercises" in Year 3, and our clinical faculty taught us important principles and concepts through these high-yield sessions that

we have all come to appreciate a lot. Besides the excellent clinical teaching provided at TTSH, the highlights of my first clinical year are the patients themselves. Getting to talk to them on a personal level, understanding their concerns and learning about various medical conditions from their histories and physical presentations really helped me understand my core content better. Another highlight was my general medicine attachment with TTSH general medicine consultant Dr Ranjana Acharya's team for two weeks during my ward embedment days. I participated in ward rounds by taking charge of a few patients, clerking and presenting the patients to the team during morning rounds. In the process, I learnt first-hand how to manage patients. As the saying goes, "You learn best when you personally do it" and I am extremely thankful to have had this experience so early on in my third year.

The highlight of this year is my learning experience with TTSH's internal medicine team, where I spent 14 weeks learning the principles and key concepts of general medicine from various medical subspecialties. I am also excited about the upcoming paediatric posting in Year 4 as it will be an entirely new experience working with children.



Come May 2018, we, the first batch of LKCMedicine students, will graduate and start work in various hospitals in Singapore. The School has put in a lot of effort to set up a unique and engaging curriculum for us and I hope that we will do our School proud. ♦

PROFILE



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY

TAN YUAN RUI LEON

Leon Tan is from the pioneer batch of LKCMedicine. With a passion for music, he composes in his free time. The Victoria Junior College and Anglican High School alumnus strives to do his best to serve through leadership roles in various executive committees, including secretary to the LKCMedicine Students' Medical Society's second executive committee.

Legend

- 1. In the first month of my medical school life with my first clinical team (Y1 TBL9, 2013-2014) — with our clinical mentors during hospital week at Tan Tock Seng Hospital
- 2. Overseas community involvement programme in Sri Lanka on Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Etiology; photograph taken with the first team of 12 LKCMedicine members and our friends from Rajarata University