



# A GLOBAL EXPERIENCE FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

Text by Ho Li Shan, Assistant Manager, SMA Charity Fund

In 2015, when Singapore celebrated our 50th birthday, we looked back at how far we have come in building a safe and independent nation we call home, and in mobilising our people for social action. Over the years, many social action projects have been set up to help the disadvantaged through fundraising and by galvanising support from the people. Similarly, SMA Charity Fund (SMACF) aims to provide financial assistance to needy students pursuing medical studies in Singapore through the support of the medical profession.

We all know that the path to becoming a doctor is not an easy feat. For needy medical students, making ends meet over the five-year course can be a struggle. It requires not just talent, but perseverance! However, perseverance alone is sometimes not enough, as the high tuition fees and the rising cost of living may deter certain potential students from entering medical school.

According to a recent study on finances and financial support for medical students in NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine),<sup>1</sup> 19.5% of medical students came from households with

monthly incomes below S\$3,000 (182 students). About 14.4% of medical students engaged in part-time jobs during the course of their medical studies. As many as 17.1% of these students worked more than five hours per week to help keep up with the cost of their studies. More than a third of students who worked stated that the additional responsibilities of working while studying had negatively impacted their focus on medical studies. This suggests that a high proportion of medical students who work do so out of necessity.

SMACF exists to help nurture the doctors of tomorrow and provide a level playing field by not only helping needy medical students with their basic living expenses (via the SMA Medical Students' Assistance Fund [SMA-MSAF]), but also with opportunities to attend international conferences and/or electives to broaden their horizon and knowledge of medicine in foreign grounds.

Medical students Vishaal and Jiawen share with us how SMACF made it possible for them to expand their knowledge in their respective areas of interest at conferences in the UK and Greece, respectively.

To help students like Vishaal and Jiawen gain the necessary overseas exposure to enhance their learning journey, please log on to <https://www.giving.sg/smacf> to make a donation. We are heartened and grateful to the many of you who have played a great part in supporting our cause, and we look forward to your support in continuing the accumulated good work.

Bursary application for AY 2017/18 is open for all current and new medical students of Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine. Please submit your application online at <https://www.sma.org.sg/smacares>. The SMA-MSAF is open to Singaporeans and Singapore Permanent Residents who have a per capita income not exceeding S\$1,900. Application closes on 25 August 2017. For more information on the SMA-MSAF, please visit our FAQ page at <https://www.sma.org.sg/index.aspx?ID=323>.

## References

1. Sayampanathan AA, Tan YT, Fong JM, et al. An update on finances and financial support for medical students in Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. *Singapore Med J* 2017; 58(4):206-11.

This trip was a wonderful opportunity for me to showcase a poster presentation on a project that I had been working on for the past year. On top of that, I also hoped to exchange valuable knowledge with other experts to aid my learning in orthopaedic study.

During the trip, I had the opportunity to attend various talks, sharing sessions and keynote sessions, where I was lucky to discover many learning points. I learnt that to achieve a sustained and equitable improvement in quality of care, a gender-sensitive approach that takes the different needs, constraints, and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys into account, is needed. This can then be reflected strategically in programme design, implementation and evaluation.

Another key learning session, Patient Safety in Latin American ICUs: The Goodbye Bacteremias Collaborative, allowed me to learn that central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSI) are the leading cause of healthcare-associated bloodstream infections worldwide. Their burden is significantly higher in low- and middle-income countries, where CLABSI are usually the result of a failure to follow standardised procedures for the insertion and maintenance of central lines.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank SMACF for awarding me with this bursary that has enabled me to showcase my project on an international platform – one organised by British Medical Journal! Without your generosity, I would not have been able to experience being a part of such a big international conference.



**Vishaal Nanik Thadani,  
Phase V (NUS Medicine)**

**Conference:**  
**International Forum on Quality  
& Safety in Healthcare, 26 to 28  
April 2017, ExCeL London, UK**

**Area of interest:**  
Orthopaedic surgery

I wanted to attend the conference to hear more about the psychiatric topics presented, as well as to experience presenting my study findings and poster to doctors who are not from our local cultural background.

Throughout the conference, I made it a point to attend various sessions. On the first day, I found the sessions by Prof Stephen Houghton to be most interesting, especially his session on the transition to mainstream schooling for African refugee adolescents in Australia. Prof Stephen's research and insights were very interesting and unique to the Australian education system, and taught me a lot

about adolescent-related disorders, personalities and behaviours.

The highlight of the conference was the segment on strengths and weaknesses in perinatal care. The speakers were individuals who had worked directly with Greek women, and the stories they shared were very intimate and anecdotal. The issue of mental well-being in mothers who gave birth preterm was brought up quite often during the sessions, and this was something I did not give much thought about before.

Without the funding from SMACF, I would have never gotten the opportunity to travel to such a beautiful city for the conference. On the whole, it was a great learning experience for me. ♦



**Ong Jiawen,  
Phase V (NUS Medicine)**

**Conference:**  
**22nd International Conference  
of the Association of  
Psychology and Psychiatry for  
Adults and Children, 16 to 19  
May 2017, Hilton Athens, Greece**

**Area of interest:**  
Maternal and child  
mental healthcare