

Dr Allen Yeoh



Dr Allen Yeoh is currently Assistant Professor and Consultant at the Department of Paediatrics at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore. He is also a Clinician Scientist. His interests lie in the research of molecular genetics of leukaemia and the exploration of the state-of-the-art DNA chip application to childhood leukaemia in the local context, including collaboration with colleagues in Malaysia and Hong Kong.

When I was a child ...

I had three ambitions – doctor, lawyer or teacher. That was why I decided to join the university as I could be both a doctor and a teacher. The law thingy had to go.

My best medical school memory is ...

My election to be the class representative for five years in a row!

I was elected to be the class representative in Year One and together with my team of committee members, we ran quite innovative programmes like photocopying all lecture notes, buying bus stamps from the Central Co-op through a representative so that we do not need to all go there. My “embarrassing” motto was “... if in doubt, photocopy it!” So all lecture notes were duly photocopied for the class – causing many people to become poorer.

So when it was time to re-elect a new class representative, I always got *sabo-ed*.

The most influential person in early life is ...

My grandmother. Although she did not receive any education, she had remarkable vision that every of her grandchildren – boy or girl – must receive the best education based on their capabilities. Although we were initially quite poor, she spared no expense to ensure that we had all the books that we needed. As a Malaysian, the chances of me getting into medical school in Malaysia were slim. She and my mother sent me to study in Singapore, although we could barely afford it. Her vision provided me with the opportunity to be what I am now.

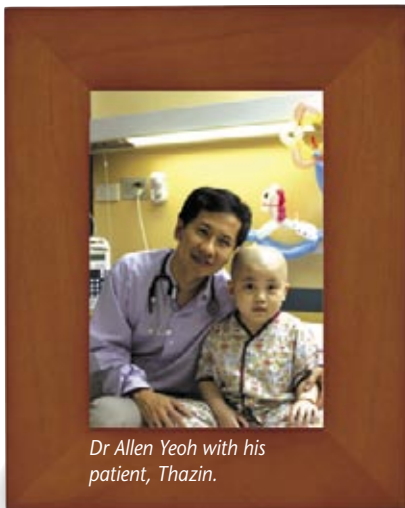
The most memorable, touching or amusing thing I can remember as a practising doctor is ...

This little girl who was unfortunately diagnosed with Stage 4 neuroblastoma (a form of childhood cancer arising from the sympathetic nervous system). Children with Stage 4 neuroblastoma have dismal prognosis.

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After counselling the family about the poor prognosis, her father left the family and her mother had to care for her alone, while making ends meet so she could continue her therapy. As she is incurable using our current therapy, she was put on a lot of Chinese herbs as well, which she stomached. She was the most mature little girl I ever knew: able to interact with adults and extremely intelligent.

One night, according to her mother, she woke up to look at her. She touched her mother's face with love. When her mother intentionally kicked away her blanket, she woke up to pull the blanket over to cover her mother properly. (*Sob, sob*)



Dr Allen Yeoh with his patient, Thazin.

The worst thing a colleague ever said to me was ...

“You are quite stupid...” This was told to me by a technician when I started working on research in the laboratory after I obtained my MMed.

It was a difficult thing to stomach as in the ward (as a registrar), I was king. To start on research with absolutely no training or experience and be scolded by a BSc holder was quite a thing. I kept my cool and learned my best from him. One must be humble to learn. The motto of SOM – not the pride of knowledge but humility of wisdom.

The funniest thing was when I started research, the laboratory staff thought that “ALL” – the short form for Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia – was an abbreviation of my name, ALLEN. Nice to know that I have chosen the correct path!

I spend my Sunday mornings doing ...

Rounds and eating *bak kut teh* in Balestier.

A bad habit I would like to kick is ...

Being late for appointments or missing deadlines. There are always emails to reply to or patients to talk to.

My greatest extravagance is ...

Building a pond to house my kois.

The book I am currently reading is ...

The Da Vinci Code – simply absorbing but poor ending. Teabing cannot be The One.

My favourite book/author is ...

Dr Pui Ching-Hon who wrote a book on acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. (*Laughs*)

The music playing in my car stereo is ...

Car-tunes, skinny ankles and papan.

My favourite song/singer is ...

Josh Groban – amazing voice. Unfortunately only two albums and too many Italian songs. (*Sigh*)

The last movie I watched was ...

4:30 by local director Royston Tan. Beautifully filmed and incredible acting by a little boy.

I think everyone should watch ...

Billy Elliot – the love of a father who was willing to give up his belief and stop striking against the Thatcherian dismantling of the workers union in Britain so that his son can learn ballet.

My biggest food weakness is ...

Malay *nasi briyani* with chicken curry.



Dr Allen Yeoh with Aqhsa, a Malay patient with relapsed leukaemia, cured by bone marrow transplant.

I would like to be remembered as ...

A doctor who has tried to improve the care of children with leukaemia through research and charity. ■