

By Ms Joline Lim Si Jing and Mr Lie Sui An

## “Excuse me, are you the Class Rep?”

Lost in the midst of our daily struggles of staying afloat in medical school, almost before we had the time or energy to realise it, another year had slipped us by, leaving in its wake the memories of fourth year medical school. Glad to have survived thus far, we now face with utmost trepidation the vital year that lies ahead: the final stretch to MBBS.

Academic year 2005/2006 will be remembered, not only for the much feared Obstetrics and Gynaecology posting and spine-chilling end-of-year pathology examination, but also for us, our term as class representatives. Being voted to serve the class gave us a sense of dread and anticipation. On one hand, we looked upon the chance of being able to bridge the gap between the Deanery and the students with much fervour. The thought of having the opportunity to bring the class together tasted sweet. We looked forward as a class committee to interact with more of our fellow peers from the class and to get to know the class better through the various activities and projects we had in mind. However, there is always a dystopian shadow which hangs over this rosy picture. What if we could not cope with the additional administrative work? What if the class did not want to cooperate with us? What if we could not live up to the expectations of the Dean's Office? What if we went down in the history of Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine as two of the worst class representatives the medical fraternity had ever seen? We could “what-if” no further as work started for the new committee almost at once. One way or another, we took up the job.

The most basic task of the class rep is to be messengers, relaying important details of upcoming events to the class via sending emails or making announcements during the weekly combined teaching sessions we had. As the chance of meeting our peers on campus during the clinical years are few and far in between, it was inevitable that we drifted apart, hence the regular mails we sent kept communication channels open. We tried writing a line or two with each announcement email we sent, hoping to keep the class in the loop of what different postings we are all involved in, keeping one another updated and offering words of encouragement along the way.

Next up on the task list was establishing contact between the Dean's office and the student body. Working with the Deanery proved to be an educating

and humbling experience. We served as a voice for our peers and the Deanery alike and found that being the “middleman” is never easy. Many a times we were caught in between as it was inevitable that the student body and administration could not see eye to eye regarding certain issues such as Clinical Group assortments, hospital rotations, curriculum issues and so on. As class representatives, it was a fragile balance trying to maintain what the Deanery wanted and what the students felt should be done. To be fair, we were given the chance to sit in the curriculum review committee, which was set up to ensure that the design and delivery of the undergraduate medical curriculum is capable of meeting the demands and challenges of the medical profession in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sometimes it really takes being in the thick of action to realise why change is so difficult. It is easy to complain about the flaws in the existing curriculum. It was only after we started sitting in on the meetings that we realised the administrative nightmare of trying to instill change. There were just too many conflicting opinions from the various departments that there was little common ground. After a few meetings, we learnt to appreciate the problem from a whole new perspective and will definitely think twice about complaining in future.

Of course, Medicine is not all about work and no play. Right. A senior once told us: “Medicine is hard work and you should write down your hobbies before you forget in a few years' time that you used to have one!” We decided that our aim as a class committee was simple: to bring the class closer together and to instill a stronger sense of belonging as a batch. After all, we would be seeing one another for many more years to come! We did not actually get down to asking our peers to write down their hobbies on small slips of paper so that we could sort them into the different “Hobby Clubs”. We did it our way – holding our first ever class party at Sentosa (the last party we had as a batch was outside Medicamp during our freshman year). The objective was to let the class gather outside the hospitals and have fun in the sun, sand and sea. The class committee did harbour the secret fear that the turnout would be embarrassing, so it was a pleasant surprise that more than half the class showed up. That day at Sentosa was definitely something that we could all look back on in the years to come.

When the academic year came to an end with the



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pathology exam, we congratulated each other and went our separate ways to do our electives, thinking our only job left was to hold the next class elections. Never did we expect our real test came only at this point of time, when a good number of our fellow classmates were called to sit for a supplementary paper. Many were upset and even outraged at the numbers and we can only guess what was running through the minds of our friends who were going to have to study for another two months. However, it was extremely heartwarming to see so many people offer words of encouragement to the rest of the batch, sharing personal notes, dishing out tips on how to conquer the pathology paper. A few from the batch even got together to prepare notes and tutor our peers. It was truly a commendable effort as a commitment of thrice-weekly sessions on top of the usual hospital rotation schedule, which was no mean feat. As a class, we were handsomely rewarded when everyone cleared the paper eventually and we could proceed on to final year together.

Passing on the baton to the next committee and handing over our responsibilities as class reps was definitely a bittersweet moment. The pains of being class reps were numerous – being caught in between conflicts of the “axis”, dealing with 233 different

characters and personalities and accommodating black sheep. In such a competitive environment as medicine, where we have been taught from day one that our aim is to pass with an MBBS (while trying to develop class spirit is not going to give you the “honours” behind your degree), there were times when we wondered whether it was worth the effort doing such a seemingly thankless job. Nonetheless, we are happy to say that it was an enriching experience gaining a better insight to the system, learning to work within constraints and making the best out of circumstances. Most of all, we are thankful for the relationships built with our fellow committee members, with whom we might never have had the opportunities to work with if not for our portfolios, the class for their unwavering support, and the encouragement that friends never failed to offer.

Did we succeed in bringing the class closer together? Probably not, but we can rest in the knowledge that in the event of a crisis, we can always count on our fellow peers to give support when it is most needed. That, to us, is what matters most. If we had to describe our experience in one line, we will say it is like the army – when you are in it, you cannot wait to get out, but when it is over, you will always remember it with a tinge of fondness. ■