

Views from The River

SMSUK events calendar

UK Term 1 '22

PSA TEACHING SERIES

October 2022 onwards
teaching sessions on the UK's new Prescribing Safety Assessment (PSA) for medical school graduates, run by our very own alumni members. Our first grassroots event of the year!

DINSICAL

22nd October 2022
a gathering in London to watch Les Misérables and catch up over Thai food.

WORKING IN THE UK TALK

26th November 2022
a fireside chat with alumni members on life as a junior doctor in the UK.

WIDER UK TRIP

19th November 2022
a day trip to the historic cities of Bath and Bristol.

Text by

Gabriel Kwok

Heraclitus the Obscure is often said to have written that “no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man”, attesting to an ever-changing world in perpetual flux. Actually, that reading is almost certainly untenable, given he also (and rather less apocryphally) said, “Different waters flow over those

who step into the *same* river”. There is continuity in change, just as there can be unity in opposites; not that this stopped his disciple, Cratylus, from doing one better. He claimed one could not even step in the same river *once*.

The new academic year brings much change and its attendant provocations. With these challenges at the fore, Sanya and Leanne reflect on where the year has taken them.



Gabriel reads medicine at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, and is Editor on the 28th Executive Committee of SMSUK.

Text and photo by

Sanya Trikha

I am 20 years old and have spent most of my life ordering the same margherita from the same pizza place. I keep wearing the same jumper to all my medical school examinations, because it must surely be the sole reason I managed to pass my examinations these past two years! I mean, why should I change my habit when it is tried, tested and familiar?

However, the reality is that our lives are changing constantly for both good and bad, like it or not.

I have experienced quite a few changes over the past two years. I graduated high school, shifted overseas during the peak of the pandemic, lived through multiple lockdowns and hotel quarantines, and went from rolling out of bed at 8.59 am for online lectures to waking up at 5.45 am for hospital placements. Trust me,

none of these were easy! Plus, doing all of this while studying for courses such as medicine and dentistry deserves more credit than we often give ourselves!

Everyone has doubtlessly gone through many changes, and it can certainly be exhausting. However, I have learnt that the first step is to accept that it will be hard, and that you will need time to settle in.

It is a human tendency to resist change or fear uncertainty, but we can shorten the time taken to accept it if we develop a positive attitude towards change. This also means planning proactively for all possible scenarios. There is nothing I can achieve by fearing change as I climb the medical training ladder. However, the more informed and knowledgeable I am about my job and its requirements, the easier the adjustment will be. Clinical placements have helped me to realise this.

It is crucial to ask for help if you are struggling with a change. It is tough and you need to be kinder to yourself. Your university, teachers, family and peers have a lot of advice and support they can give you. Moreover, the Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom (SMSUK) community and I will always be happy to help you out in any way!

Remember, a good change is always empowering and rejuvenating rather than exhausting.



Sanya is a third-year medical student at Cardiff University.

Text by

Leanne Foo

In the last few months, I have come to enjoy watching travel vlogs (video blogs). There is just something so exciting and cathartic about seeing the world through a personal lens – the experiences we gain and the memories we encrypt in our minds – even if only through a digital screen. I recently followed a group of British high school students on a graduation trip, where they had a great time experiencing South Korea’s phenomenal water parks. What stood out was a ride they took on the banana boat, with its back-and-forth transitions between exhilarating adrenaline rushes speeding across the water surface and momentary shocks of panic when the bumps threatened to hurl them into the cold, gushing river. Sitting back in my chair, I realised how similar this was to the changes I was experiencing in my university life.

Under pressure

Before the academic year commenced, I foresaw a rise in the rigour of dental school. I had received unanimous feedback from many seniors that Year 2 would be the hardest year of all, with the relentless, brutal torrents of lectures and tutorials making them consider dropping out – jokingly or otherwise. And indeed, it only took me two days to understand where they were coming from. My days gradually blended in a blur with this increase in schoolwork, making life seem monotonous.

Arguably, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”, a line

from one of my favourite rhythm and blues songs that I found myself truly resonating with. Amid these transitions, I found solace and comfort in my support system, a crucial element of life abroad that kept me sane. I maintained weekly catch-up sessions with friends in Singapore via video call, and I struck a balance between hanging out with my Singaporean friends in the UK and other British or international friends from the university.

Coping and living

To counter the monotony, I began attending more student society events, meeting new and old friends alike, exploring new hobbies and reminding myself that there was more to university than just school. Additionally, I started a daily photo diary. Keeping a visual archive grounded me in the events of each day while also giving me fond memories to reminisce about. I fondly remember the physiology practical where I punctured my earlobe to learn about blood flow, and the first clinical laboratory session where my partner and I amusingly over-drilled a cavity in the phantom head, making it 4 mm deep instead of 2 mm – we laughed it off afterwards.

I would not claim to know all, but I do know some hacks that have kept me grounded thus far. Sometimes, certain routine elements help: the key for me was a 30-minute nap (at most, or so I try to keep to) each day to keep my mind fresh, walks around the city each week to appreciate the beauty of Belfast, and fortnightly social nights over a hearty meal to catch up with friends. It also

helps to rely on your support system – your family, friends and comrades on this journey in healthcare. I treasure all of them greatly and their support means the world to me. Lastly, never forget why you chose this career in the first place. A personal motivation – be it to touch lives, help those in need or simply because you enjoy this vocation – can go a long way, especially during those long, painful nights you spend cramming for examinations.

Navigating an ever-changing life through medical and dental school is much like riding a wave; there are waves of opportunity and waves of uncertainty and panic. Let us enjoy the thrill of riding our waves up to their peaks, while being careful not to drown when they crash back down. We embarked on this journey together, like going on an exciting but daunting banana boat ride. However, even as our ride gets bumpy, we must never forget why we set off in the first place – to do what we love, help one another in need, and remember that our fears are perhaps not as daunting when we face them together. ♦



Leanne is a second-year dentistry student at Queen’s University Belfast.



Sanya in her lucky jumper



SMSUK members in London to catch *Les Miserables* at the Sondheim Theatre