

In the Blink of an Eye



Text by Shayna Walia

The 2023/2024 academic year has come and gone. Members of the Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom (SMSUK) have experienced yet another turn of the seasons and are preparing for the new academic year. For SMSUK, a new season has also come. The 30th committee has been appointed and the 29th has handed over their duties. I would like to express my gratitude and best regards to the 29th committee for spearheading new initiatives and events, leaving a large impact and legacy on the Society.

In July, SMSUK saw its usual flurry of events, holding talks catered to members, alumni and

potential members. Working with various junior colleges, SMSUK reached out to budding medical and dentistry students to introduce the Society and share how we support our members through university. Open houses by Singapore Health Services and National Healthcare Group, and the National University Health System career guidance fair were held to guide our graduates and members as they considered professional pathway opportunities. SMSUK also organised its second give-back initiative with the Red Cross, which gave members the opportunity to donate blood and be on the receiving end of medical attention.

Over the summer, much has changed, and the feeling of new prospects with another turn of the seasons is exciting. Change is a constant, and retrospection in the middle of a bustling schedule is a powerful tool. Looking back, so much has been revealed in the year about the role that medicine plays, reaching beyond academics into the subtleties of my own life.

Below, Tristan and Yerin write about how their experiences as freshmen have changed them, as well as what change means to them.

Text by Tristan Lim

*Slow down you crazy child
You're so ambitious for a juvenile
But then if you're so smart tell me
Why are you still so afraid?*

Every once in a while, a song I choose to play puts me in a pensive mood. The days of relentless studying that usually coalesce into a blur now give rise to more focused musings on what I have been doing lately, and what should be obvious but strikes me with an incisive acuity is how rapidly things change. Everything is transient, including the sanctity of life. For instance, there is, of course, the quick turnover of topics to be learnt at medical school. Medical school knowledge then eventually becomes out of date and fails to cover the abundance of new knowledge from the latest research.

I once came across an analogy of how undergoing medical school is akin to drinking from a firehose. Indeed, balancing the large pool of knowledge and skills to be mastered with the inevitable need to independently manage administrative aspects of life takes constant effort. After all, achieving the perfect harmony of work and recuperation is limited by time. Naturally, I have learnt more about myself and what values I prioritise. For example, something I want to prioritise during my time in medical school is sleep, and introducing



such non-negotiables makes me more secure in my beliefs. This in turn helps me to set appropriate boundaries for how I live my life and truly value my time.

At the same time, change involves reinventing my methods. What worked before does not guarantee future success. I have had to experiment with new studying methods from a variety of sources to enhance my efficiency and effectiveness of learning. I have opted to multitask when doing household chores to create more free pockets of time. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle and the fast-paced stress, it is sometimes rejuvenating to take a slow walk outdoors. I notice litter strewn on pavements, fallen autumn leaves in parks, shattered wine bottles on roads. My mind gets a rare chance to wander. Such meandering primes my brain to think more creatively or imaginatively, a suitable counterpoint to the task of internalising immutable information from lectures and textbooks. This re-charges my brain for another intensive study session and clears my mind to make connections across different topics and deepen my understanding.

Undoubtedly, change is a vehicle that allows comparisons and evaluations to be made relationally. This academic year has made me more keenly aware of the privileges that I have. I now treasure things I once took for granted – good home-cooked food, eating out, the weather, transport and safety. On the other hand, being sited in London, a cultural hotspot, has given me the invaluable access to watch more plays, musicals and concerts that would have been harder to catch in Singapore. Of course, I am most grateful for the opportunity to pursue my educational and career goals with the irreplaceable support of family and friends.

“When will you realise, Vienna waits for you?” As Billy Joel’s voice trails off, I am calmed by the reassuring lyrics that prompt me to “slow down” and realise that life is more than the rat race. Since

change is ever-present, it is all the more crucial to maintain an internal compass to keep myself in check against the vicissitudes of life, and measuredly use the changes around me as formative lessons. Up next: “These Days” by Nico.

Text by Yerin Kim

Many expect me to be an expert at adapting to change. Having switched schools four times while moving back and forth between Singapore and Korea, experiencing change has certainly been a significant part of my upbringing. Regardless, to this day, change is a concept that feels familiar yet foreign every time; while the mixed emotions of excitement and apprehension remain the same, each opportunity of entering a new environment brings about its own challenges to overcome and benefits to learn to take advantage of, in order to adapt.

In March 2023, I was accepted into King’s College London to study medicine. Although independently pursuing my passions in a city with such diversity and exposure was something I had worked toward and looked forward to for so long, I would be lying if I said the intimidating thought of leaving my friends and family back home did not make me reconsider my choices.

Looking back at a year ago, this academic year has pushed me to become independent in many ways. Academically, the absence of class teachers to guide and pace my learning by providing us with resources meant that I needed to take a more proactive approach to my education. While this meant finding the resources would take more time and effort, I enjoyed using the freedom to pace my learning according to my understanding of the different concepts.

From a personal standpoint, managing my finances within the allocated budget, cooking for myself, and remaining organised

without help from my parents made me realise how the small things I used to take for granted were a lot to manage. I grew a greater appreciation for my parents, family and friends. Having a group of friends whom I could rely on truly helped me a lot during the times I felt homesick or needed a support system.

My first year as a medical student overseas has helped me grow in a multitude of ways. I truly hope the next few years of being overseas will further my holistic development, as I prepare myself to welcome and adapt to bigger changes in my path to become a doctor. ♦

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