



FROM LECTURES TO CLINICS:



Reflections on Curricula

Text and photo by Donovan Lim Wei Xuan

Studying at NUS Medicine has been a journey that surprised me in ways I did not expect. When I first entered medical school, I imagined a curriculum full of only lectures, tutorials and examinations. Even though Years 1 and 2 have traditionally been reserved for the teaching of basic sciences, the curriculum has since evolved to allow for hands-on clinical training outside the hospital.

An aspect I have grown to deeply appreciate about my pre-clinical years is the emphasis on early clinical exposure, despite the need for basic training in clinical sciences. Learning how to take a comprehensive history and perform a thorough physical examination were taught right alongside physiology, pathology and pharmacology. Having the opportunity to learn from both standardised patients and patients in the wards from Year 1 was both intimidating and exciting. I still remember my first time speaking to a patient in the hospital; I was trying to recall the “correct” sequence of questions while also genuinely listening to the patient’s story. These early experiences taught me that clinical medicine is as much about

understanding people as it is about understanding disease.

In my clinical years thus far, I have grown to appreciate the apprenticeship model, where we are embedded in the teams we are attached to. Seniors allow us to clerk independently and try our hand at presenting the patient, with our opinions on further investigations and management. The guidance and feedback from our seniors, which is always tailored to the patient we have just met, has been one of the most meaningful parts of the curriculum for me. Learning on the job allows for less structured learning but more real-world experience, and I believe learning has more impact when it is applicable to actual patients.

Of course, there are parts of the curriculum that could be improved. The sheer volume of knowledge and fast pace of learning can be too much to handle, pushing many of us to examination-focused studying rather than attaining genuine understanding. Clearer learning outcomes and more protected time for self-directed learning may help students digest material more

meaningfully. Assessment is another area that often feels overwhelming. While Objective Structured Clinical Examinations and written examinations definitely have their place, they sometimes fail to capture the nuances of clinical work. The school’s move toward more workplace-based assessments and narrative feedback has been encouraging, and I hope this trend continues.

A growing part of my learning has also taken place outside formal teaching, specifically on social media. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube and even Telegram have become spaces where students share resources, clinicians post clinical pearls, and educators simplify difficult concepts. Social media has made learning more accessible and, at times, more enjoyable. However, it has also taught me to be cautious; not everything online is accurate, and it is easy to mistake well-designed posts for reliable information.

Looking back, what stands out most about the curriculum is how it has shaped what being a good doctor means to me. As the curriculum continues to evolve, I hope it keeps nurturing both competence and compassion. For me, these past years have been challenging, but they have also affirmed why I chose medicine in the first place. For that, I am grateful to be part of this journey.

Donovan is a Year 4 medical student at NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and is passionate about serving others and making an impact in his community. Outside of medicine, he is an avid animal lover and a wildlife guide at the Mandai Wildlife Reserve.



My year 4 clinical group during our paediatrics posting at National University Hospital with Prof Loke Kah Yin

The three local medical schools – NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine), Duke-NUS Medical School and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) – are jewels of the medical profession and continue to produce professional, competent and caring doctors of all specialties. In this collection, we invite students from the three medical schools to comment on their experiences and share their thoughts on their respective curricula.

Text and photo by Gunjan Agarwal

Duke-NUS Medical School – what comes to mind when you first hear this name? A world-renowned research institute that helped advance the development of a novel mRNA vaccine for COVID-19, or the second youngest among Singapore’s medical schools? Your answer might very likely have been the former – and so today, I hope to share more about this relatively young medical school from the lens of a second-year medical student.

Before I joined medical school, I simply could not fathom how a usual five- to six-year curriculum could be compressed into four; how three years of pre-clinical content could possibly be learnt in just one. Now, as someone who is supposedly qualified enough to begin clinical year, I still fail to understand how I managed to learn all of that in the first year while also adjusting to an entirely new phase in my life.

One week. Fifteen pre-recorded lectures. Two readiness assessment tests. Countless tutorials. Repeat for 52 weeks – that was the life of a first-year Duke-NUS student.

Despite the immense stress and relentless studying that comes with Year 1, I would not change a thing about it. I say this now because I have experienced the magic of the clinical years. After a year of mundane studying with little opportunity to apply our knowledge, many of us began to lose motivation. But the moment you step into the ward and see that chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patient with a barrel chest and pursed-lip breathing, everything comes alive – our textbook comes alive. That moment reignites our drive and reminds us why we are doing this. So, despite the fast-paced nature of Year 1, I believe it gave us sufficient grounding to move into the clinical years, where we can learn on the job rather than solely from a book.



Another unique aspect of Duke-NUS is the fact that each student has a different background, a different *past life* that has shaped who we are today. In my case, it was an engineer’s problem-solving mindset; for others, it might be the attention to detail honed as a pharmacist or the analytical precision of a scientist. When all these past lives come together, we learn to approach a case from different angles and we begin to understand what holistic patient care truly means. I experienced this first-hand during our weekly TeamLEAD (which stands for learn, engage, apply and develop) sessions in Year 1, where we worked through patient cases and used practical problem-solving to guide our discussions. The varied perspectives of our small groups made these sessions one of the richest parts of the curriculum.

While I promised to write mainly about this relatively young medical school, it would be a shame not to acknowledge the world-renowned research institute that Duke-NUS also is, because these two identities are not mutually exclusive. Dedicating nine months of our already packed four-year curriculum to research may seem like a lot, but this is exactly what many of us

came for: to be Clinicians First, Clinicians Plus – clinician-scientists, innovators, educators and leaders. Our diverse past lives help define our “Plus”. In turn, the research year helps us hone those skills so we can contribute meaningfully as clinician-scientists in the future.

I hope this short write-up helped you learn a little more about this young medical school and why I am proud to be part of it.

Gunjan holds a Bachelor of Engineering from the Singapore University of Technology and Design and is currently a medical student at Duke-NUS Medical School. She hopes to practise as a clinician while applying her systems engineering training to enhance healthcare efficiency and innovate within Singapore’s medical landscape.





Year 3 team hands-on learning session as part of LKCMedicine curriculum

The most transformative curriculum is one that evolves through changing times without losing the essence of its beginning, while embracing the relentless evolution of the future. In 2021, my first year started in an unusual setting: in the comfort of my home, behind my laptop screen.

It was the COVID-19 period, and behind the screen, my teammates and I were deeply engaged in our discussions – sharing knowledge, providing perspectives and refining each other's ideas. In the Application Exercise segment of LKCMedicine's Team-Based Learning (TBL) lessons, we exchanged our pre-reading insights with one another to formulate a unified solution for real-world scenarios. I am privileged to have experienced the TBL curriculum throughout my five years in medical school. As an introvert, TBLs gave me the courage and safe space to express my thoughts while learning to mingle with other personalities. I could gauge my retention of pre-TBL lectures and learning materials through the individual assessment segment, which helps me reinforce and ingrain the content into my mind. As I sat in various multidisciplinary team meetings and preoperative rounds through nearly every specialty during my clinical attachments, I realised how pertinent TBL has been in preparing us for our responsibilities and professionalism as clinicians. Doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other healthcare professionals came together to collaborate on treatment goals and management plans, each contributing

expertise from their own fields tailored specially to every individual patient.

Having faced uncertainty together with the school through COVID-19 times and achieving a milestone together through gaining curricular independence after its partnership with Imperial College of London, being in LKCMedicine felt like growing and learning with a friend. Being the youngest child among three children, I grew up observing my older brothers, learning from their experiences, adapting their advice and finding my own identity. In many aspects, LKCMedicine's development resembles this journey. As Singapore's youngest medical school, LKCMedicine has the unique advantage of learning from the strengths of local and international curricula. It has evolved its own distinct education approach, one that is innovative, dynamic and fine-tuned to the needs of Singapore's healthcare scene. This forward-looking curriculum extends beyond essential medical content and emphasises the need to understand and integrate ever-changing technology into medicine and distinctive patient contact experiences. I had opportunities to conduct clinical communications for various groups of patients. The most memorable events for me were communicating with children, navigating a history-taking session with a third language and exploring telemedicine.

With social media just a tap away, it has become a valuable adjunct to our medical education, from student-

run Instagram accounts and Telegram quizzes to engaging high-yield content by global healthcare professionals. These snippets of humour and freshness help me absorb medical content seamlessly while having a guilt-free recharge, with the added benefit of bringing worldwide healthcare providers together. On the topic of well-being, one of my favourite aspects of LKCMedicine's curriculum is our protected Wednesday afternoons. This dedicated time offers me the freedom to explore interests outside medicine, whether discovering a new hobby in basketball, exploring research or catching up with studies. It is a reminder that personal growth, rest and balance are integral to becoming a compassionate clinician. With the wide variety of community involvement projects and co-curricular activities in LKCMedicine to choose from, it is so easy to enjoy the journey of learning medicine. LKCMedicine's curriculum prepares me to learn proactively, think critically and integrate knowledge through an evidence-based lens while caring for my well-being. Following LKCMedicine's footsteps, I am confident that I too can evolve through the changing healthcare landscape, retaining the essence of my beginnings while growing alongside an advancing medical field. ◆

Xin Yi is a final-year medical student from Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine). She is passionate about medicine, public service and healthcare. She served as the 12th president of the LKCMedicine Students' Medical Society. For six months, she was part of the National Mental Health Office at MOH Holdings. She continues to contribute to the community through volunteering and service while maintaining an active interest in sports and musculoskeletal health.

