

From ne Island to Another: New Beginnings

Text by Lye Ting Yin

Every year, members of the Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom (SMSUK) journey the thousands of miles that separate Singapore and the British Isles to pursue their medical and dental education. The arrival of summer in the UK, with its sweltering heat and unrelenting sun, signalled the end of yet another academic year: a year where SMSUK members lived their lives far away from home and developed their routines, all while grappling with the rigours of medical education. This summer break is a reprieve from the intense studying of the harsher, colder months, allowing us to consolidate the lessons and experiences from the past semester.

In this month's edition of Letters from the UK, Jhun Kai looks back on his first year as a medical student in King's College London, reflecting upon how he found community and a second home in London, and the lessons that he will carry with him into the future.

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Photo: Jhun Kai Leong

Chinese New Year hotpot with Singaporean medical students from King's College London



Photo: SMSUK

SMSUK members posing for a group photo outside the Museum of Natural History, Vienna

Text by Jhun Kai Leong

As my first academic year away from home comes to an end, I find myself reflecting on the past nine months and how much I have developed, both as a medical student and as a person. Moving from Singapore to London to study medicine at King's College London was daunting. I was leaving behind friends, family and the familiarity of home to step into an entirely new environment. However, I did not expect how quickly I managed to find a sense of home in the UK.

Building a support network

One of the things that surprised me most was the strength of the Singaporean community within King's Medicine. We found each other quickly, introducing ourselves as early as the very first lecture. We bonded quickly, because we shared the common experience of moving thousands of miles across the world to study medicine. There was something reassuring about knowing that there were familiar faces around from the very beginning. Within the first few weeks, we were already organising hotpot gatherings and mahjong sessions. These activities brought a sense of familiarity amid the uncertainties of living in a new country. They helped transform what initially felt foreign into something comfortable and welcoming. Being away from my family and long-time friends was undoubtedly the hardest adjustment, but the friendships I formed with fellow Singaporean medical students made the transition significantly easier. We became close remarkably quickly, supporting one another through the challenges and excitement of starting medical school abroad.

Another highlight of the year was travelling around Europe. While every trip was memorable, my favourite was the SMSUK weekend trip to Vienna, Austria. While Vienna was beautiful, what I appreciated most was how I grew closer to my friends from King's while also forging new friendships with my fellow medical students from across the UK. What I remember most were the nights back at our accommodation. Despite having full days of sightseeing

ahead, many of us stayed up far later than we should have, gathered around tables playing card games and chatting into the early hours of the morning. Those late-night card game sessions became some of my most memorable moments of the trip. It is hence comforting to say that some of my fondest memories from this year come not from lecture theatres or study sessions but from these simple moments of connection and camaraderie.

Lessons to carry home

One of my most profound memories was during the second week of medical school, when I had my first cadaveric dissection. Walking into the dissection room for the first time was a surreal experience. Before we began, the chaplain spoke about the significance of the donated bodies and held a moment of silence to honour the individuals who had made this extraordinary gift to our medical education. That moment left a lasting impression on me. I saw the immense trust that society places on healthcare professionals, reminding me that studying medicine is both a privilege and a responsibility. That day, I was immensely grateful to be a medical student.

Looking back, perhaps the most important lesson I have learned is the value of having a strong support network. Moving to an unfamiliar country has taught me that the people around you can profoundly shape your experience. A supportive group of friends can make challenges more manageable and successes more meaningful. The friendships and relationships I have built over the past nine months have not only helped me adapt to life in the UK but have also enriched my university experience in ways I could never have anticipated. My experiences have reinforced my belief that success in medicine is not solely about academic achievement; it is also about learning to support, collaborate with and care for those around you.

For anyone embarking on their medical journey in the UK for the first time, my advice is simple: make friends and invest in your community. Take the initiative to interact with your peers,

especially fellow medical students. The people you meet during medical school will become your support system throughout your years in the UK. Many of them will stay with you beyond medical school, to be your future colleagues or even as lifelong friends. While academic success is important, the relationships you build along the way will shape both your personal growth and your future career in medicine.

As I look ahead to the years to come, I am grateful not only for the knowledge I have gained but also for the people who have made this journey so meaningful. These nine months have taught me that while moving away from home can be challenging, a strong community has the power to turn an unfamiliar place into a home away from home. ♦

Jhun Kai is a second-year medical student at King's College London.



Jhun Kai and his friends playing mahjong for the first time in London

Photo: Jhun Kai Leong