

The Postgraduate Fair for Medical Students



Mr Shival Tharmaseelan
shivalone221090@hotmail.com
Student Member MMA

On 28 March 2015, the Student Council 2014/15 of the Melaka-Manipal Medical College (MMMC) organised the 3rd Postgraduate Fair, a major event in the calendar of medical students all over Malaysia. Previous editions of this fair had been plagued by falling attendances and decreased interest amongst students as the novelty factor began to wear off with every passing year. In keeping with the passionate desire of the current Student Council to reactivate, enliven and broaden the students' academic horizon, we decided to give this event a renewed lease of life.

We worked day and night, as usual, with a committed band of individuals to plan for the event. We sought the assistance of MMA Melaka. We were also assisted most willingly by our lecturers and the administration staff of MMMC. We enticed the medical students to lend a shoulder in organising the event. We kept our communication channels open 24 hours (via emails and social media) with all the medical colleges. We also went on a publicity blitz to attract students from various medical institutions. The MMA Melaka Branch, Chairman, Prof Dr Swamenathan and many of the Committee Members who are academic staff of the MMMC gave immense support to ensure the success of this event.

We decided that introducing and exposing students to new specialities in this year's event would be the best way forward to invoke the curiosity and interest amongst participants. We wanted all postgraduate pathways

to be delved into so that students would explore the full potential of the information provided. We wanted the speakers to be the main draw of the function and thus approached renowned speakers from all over the country. All eminent speakers obliged and not one refused our invitation. We were humbled by their acceptance.



Altogether, the participants see this as the beginning of closer ties among us medical students from different universities



The final turnout was a stunning 406 participants which represented a five-fold increase from the previous year. More interesting was that 30% of the students were from other universities from as far away as Kedah and Johor, representing more than ten Medical Universities around Malaysia. Registration started at 8.00 am as the participants began to throng the state of the art MMMC Academic Building. Upon registration, all participants were provided with a goodie bag which included notepads sponsored by MMA Melaka, pens by Draeger Medical, snacks, and a detailed booklet displaying various pathways for postgraduate studies in Malaysia. The participants were ushered in by our dynamic volunteers to have their breakfast before the start of the event. The coffee, tea and delicious pastries played its part in starting the fair on the right note.

Participants then proceeded to the opening ceremony where our Guest of Honour, Prof Datuk Dr Abdul Razzak Bin Mohd Said, CEO of MMMC and Pro Vice Chancellor of Manipal University, delivered the opening address. He is currently an elected member of the Malaysian



Student Council President delivering welcome speech

Medical Council. He stressed on the importance of postgraduate studies in the world of medicine and wished all participants would have a fruitful day.

The Chief Guest was overwhelmed by the sheer number of participants and mentioned that this has to be one of the best Student Councils that the college ever had. He acknowledged that this event was the largest ever attended, and was certainly pleased that the Postgraduate Fair was recognised as an important event by all medical students in the far-flung corners of Malaysia.

He was happy the MMMC Student Council had kept the college vibrating with awesome events throughout the year. Prof Datuk Razzak was presented with a token of appreciation. The participants then proceeded for the first session of talks. Two concurrent speciality talks were held on two different floors to accommodate the massive turnout.

We had Dato' Dr Sree Raman, Senior Consultant Physician, Department of Internal Medicine Hospital Tuanku Jaafar Seremban, as the first of many speakers. He continuously amused the crowd with his humorous anecdotes about his childhood. He was an inspiring speaker who was a classic example from a rags-to-riches story. He was a 'hardcore estate boy' who rose to

become the personal Physician to the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong Malaysia. He stressed the importance of perseverance and patience in order to succeed in Medicine.

Dr Sentilnathan Subramaniam, a member of the *Royal College of Surgeons (MRCS) Edinburgh*, was able to offer the easiest pathways to follow in specialisation, something that everyone looked forward to. His in-depth glimpse into the field of specialisation in Surgery evoked the interest of many medical students.

The second slot of talks commenced after the crowd adjourned for a short break. We kick-started the talk with a giant in the field of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (O&G), the current National Head of Services, Dr J. Ravichandran. The students were awed by his charismatic personality, well-articulated speech and his absolute passion for the discipline. He reminded us that O&G required us to be at the beck and call of the patients due their unpredictable progress in labour. He stressed that this was a high-risk speciality that involved the handling of two lives. He informed us that the attrition rate for those undergoing the Masters programme in O&G was high. Students were advised to view O&G from all aspects (the risks, high insurance premiums for indemnity, long hours, and the uncertain or acute emergencies that can occur) and not just focus on the financial rewards before choosing this as a speciality.

As Melaka General Hospital is one of our training grounds, the Council decided to have speakers from this hospital. We invited two speakers from the Department of Orthopaedics, Dr Faizal, Consultant Orthopaedic Specialist and Dr Saturvethen who is currently pursuing his Masters in Orthopaedics. The latter spoke about the pathways to become an

Orthopaedic Surgeon while the former spoke about the life as one. We were given a comprehensive insight into the world of Orthopaedics, having heard from both a Consultant and Medical Officer's point of view. The rigid bones have an inner soft core therefore you will need to possess a tough exterior and empathy as well in order to pursue this highly 'traumatic' field.

As both the talks concluded, the corridors of the building began to swell-up with students. They crowded the hospitality counters on each floor that had unlimited supply of drinks and tit-bits. The passageway was buzzing with chitter-chatter and small talk that was going on between participants. This interaction amongst the many provided another informal forum for them to exchange ideas, views, and personal information to 'hook-up' for the future.

They began to reassemble in the respective venues where the last two talks were slated to take place. We started off with an eminent personality with a wealth of experience, Prof Dr Swamenathan, who is also the Deputy Dean of Faculty of Medicine, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Hospital Melaka. He is an extraordinary speaker who spoke with exuberance. His effervescence and magnificent powerpoint presentations kept the audience spellbound. He kept the crowd eager by serving up a dish of his experiences with a side of rib-tickling jokes.

In the hall below, we had Dr Siti Fatimah Binti Datuk Haji Abbas, former National Head of Services of Radiology, Melaka, giving a penetrating visual perspective of prospects in Radiology. She has been lecturing in Melaka Manipal since its inception, and hence interacting with students was something she knew all too well. She was able to see

that under those enthusiastic eyes of the students, a sign of hunger was already setting in. She delivered a concise informative talk.

At the end of all six talks it was time for the most anticipated moment of the day, lunch. All were served a sumptuous meal of six different dishes with rice, fruits and orange juice. Constant jibber-jabber filled the air throughout the meal and I decided to mingle with the crowd to gather some feedback.

The students from all the various colleges were impressed with the magnitude of the event and the clockwork-precision of the schedule. They have sought our assistance in organising such events at their college, to which we have gladly agreed. Altogether, the participants see this as the beginning of closer ties among us medical students from different universities. My fellow colleagues from MMMC were singing praises and heaping accolades about the event. None expected a huge crowd or such esteemed speakers coming from revered institutions around the country. The President and members of the Student Council were walking with a sense of pride on that day, receiving pats on the back from all participants. The greatest sense of satisfaction was the shower of praises we received from the CEO and Pro Chancellor himself.

As a whole, this event required momentous amounts of work to put into motion, but at the end it was well worth the effort. I would like to personally thank the participants, speakers, and Organising Committee for turning all the ideas into reality. The management of the MMMC also contributed funds and encouragement to make this fair a grand success. This fair has certainly added another feather to Students Council's ever-growing cap.



Guest of Honour, Datuk Dr Razzak, listening attentively



Full house at this year's fair