Alumni Newsletter

reminiscence

Personal Interviews
3 former IMU students speak their minds

Then and Now
See how IMU has changed over the years
Greetings to all IMU Alumni and friends!

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the International Medical University alumni newsletter. This newsletter will serve as a tool in which you, the alumni, will remain informed about happenings in IMU and also receive updates from your fellow graduates.

IMU has made remarkable progress in the seventeen years since its establishment and it continues to uphold the fine tradition of excellence in education. IMU began in 1992 as International Medical College, introduced the Pharmacy program in 1996, and became a University in 1999. The first Nursing batch commenced in 2005. Starting 2008, IMU has introduced Honours Degree courses in Dentistry, Nutrition & Dietetics, Medical Biotechnology, Psychology, Biomedical Science, Pharmaceutical Chemistry and Chiropractic. Current efforts include the addition of the new Traditional Chinese Medicine course, the launch of IMU Healthcare Centre which is comprised of Oral Health Centre, Chiropractic Centre and IMU Medical Centre.

I would like to take the opportunities to invite you to become actively involved in Alumni Association. Our alumni association is relatively young and in need of committed members to shape the future of our association. Currently, we have more than 2278 medical graduates, 1211 pharmacy graduates and 9 nursing graduates.

Most importantly, we want to make the IMU Alumni about you. We want to provide a series of events and programs which suits you and your schedule. These events will not only be within the Klang Valley. We are aiming to visit regions within Malaysia where there is a large population of our Alumni on a regular basis. Be sure to look over the calendar of events in this and subsequent issues of this newsletter. Updates will be posted in IMU Alumni Facebook as well.

We value your input and feedback. We hope that you will be able to share with us your ideas and help us create as many opportunities as possible to strengthen the Alumni network.

Finally, I would like to thank you for being a part of the IMU Alumni. Please feel free to visit your alma mater and share your experience with us. If there is anything we can do to help you, please get in touch with our alumni officer at alumni@imu.edu.my or contact our Coordinator of Alumni Services, Ms Aznah Arshad at aznah_arshad@imu.edu.my.

All the best and continued success in your career.

Cheah Cheong Wooi
M1/93
President of IMU Alumni Association
An Interview with Dr. Sekhar Pillai

“I would like to acknowledge my parents’ lifelong dedication to my pursuits and particularly to my mother, Dr Serina Pillai who inspired me to become a doctor.”

1. What are you doing and where are you now? At present I am in my first year of paediatric neurology training at the Children’s Hospital at Westmead, Sydney Australia. I was awarded the George Gregan Epilepsy Fellowship for 2010. I received my Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (FRACP) in paediatrics and child health last year and decided that the time was ‘ripe’ for post-FRACP training in neurology.

2. What made you choose this path? I have always been interested in neurology from my early days at IMC (back then) and while at Melbourne university through the Austin and Repatriation Medical Campus, Heidelberg. I had excellent neurologists to learn from as a student and later as a resident. Early on, the road ahead looked daunting and would probably never have ‘dreamt’ about paediatric neurology. So my priorities were getting through the examinations first and then to think about the practicalities of further training while having a young family. Finally last year, I came to a crossroad of whether to go on and establish myself as a consultant paediatrician or another to pursue another three years of advanced training in paediatric neurology. It was a very difficult decision and thankfully having a strong Christian faith helped me through this time. Personally I can see the ‘hand of God’ in my ultimate decision...to think that I got this fellowship when my interview was via the mobile phone in a busy domestic lounge at Sydney Airport awaiting a flight...I wouldn’t advice anyone to do the same!

3. Is it worthwhile so far? Definitely yes but there are many hardships along the way. My wife and four daughters have been ever so patient with daddy being busy on the weekends and flying away for locums and conferences etc. What can I say, that as a friend of mine put it so nicely, I am being paid to do what I like to do and get great satisfaction from. There is a great reward in helping children and their families cope with their illness. New research in many fields of neurology are providing better outcome with some conditions which were previously devastating. I am gifted with having an excellent neurology unit who are dedicated, committed, innovative, enthusiastic, research driven and yet very approachable and ‘down to earth’ to work with on a daily basis.

4. How is the career prospect for foreign graduates in Australia? This is a tricky question to answer. It depends on what your goals are, for example type of training, fellowship training etc. Australia are in the process of producing more graduates and there will come a time within the next 7 to 10 years where there will be many trainees and limited training places. One area where there will always be a need for foreign trained doctors is in rural settings; this can be both good and hard as well.

5. Are you still in touch with your batchmates? I am still in touch with some of my batch mates thanks to Facebook. There are other that I have lost touch and would like to catch up with so hopefully the alumni will be such a platform. I am not sure if my batch has had a ‘reunion’ but that would be a nice gathering.

6. What is your best moment in IMU? I think getting the green light to go to Melbourne University followed by the graduation. In those days, things were quite ‘fluid’ and we weren’t really sure until the very end. So to finally pass and get the Melbourne university selection and all the rest of the visa etc was quite a relief.

7. Favorite IMU lecturer so far? Dr Paul Jambunathan was certainly a very eloquent and funny lecturer. Dr Sanjay Gupta was a very pleasant and friendly surgeon. We had an Obstetrician/Gynaecology lecturer from Calgary I think who could play the guitar very well. The others include Dr Reddy who patiently answered our anatomy questions at the lab and many others whose names I have forgotten but whose memories have not been lost.

8. How do you spend your leisure time? Apart from work the rest of the time is with the family which is reading books to the girls, occasionally playing in the back yard or going to the near by park. And of course there is the cricket for which I have a weak spot for and could spend hours watching a limited overs game. We do go to our local church and join in the community activities on Sunday.

- Dr Sekhar Cyril Pillai joined IMU in 1994 for IMU-PMS Medical Degree Programme. He was among the first batch of students that was transferred to Melbourne University Australia and has made his way since then. He is currently a paediatrician, a trainee in paediatric neurology and the father of 3 beautiful girls.
1. From IMU to Stratchlyde, then the University of California and now Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); What is the recipe for your success?

Thanks. I am glad with where I am at right now, but I wouldn’t define this as a success yet. I see it as a path to hopefully more achievements in the future. I have been traveling to several places to pursue my dream, and the only motivation behind it has been the desire to be better and to achieve more in my life.

2. Why did you choose to pursue neurosciences and also biological engineering as your postdoctoral education?

The work that I have been doing in UCSD and MIT are related to DNA and RNA modification, that’s something I feel passionate about since graduate school. I am hoping to get an independent position to start my own lab after my time here, and pursue research in cancer and/or nucleic acids damage/modification.

3. Is it worthwhile so far and what have you gained from it?

It is definitely worthwhile, it has been such an invaluable experience for me, not just for professional development but also for personal development.

4. Which IMU campus did you go to? How many students were there in your year?

I was in the PJ campus, I believe there were about 500 students at that time (but not I am completely sure about it).

5. Are you still in touch with your batchmates?

Yes, I am still in touch with some of them. A lot of them have gone back to Malaysia to do great things back home in the field of pharmacy, and there are several of us who are still overseas pursuing a career in scientific research. I met with some dear friends at the beginning of this year when I went home for vacation, and in fact, I am meeting another friend when he visits Boston for conference in 2 weeks’ time!

6. What is your best moment in IMU?

The most memorable time for me would be the time spent in Glasgow, as it was a very intensive one-year course, nevertheless, we all managed to work hard and play hard. It was definitely a great experience. I am glad that the partnership between IMU and Strathclyde provided us with that amazing opportunity and experience. IMU has changed a lot since I left, and as an alumni, I am very proud and glad to have been part of it.

7. Favorite IMU lecturer so far?

The 3 lecturers during my time whom I remembered the most are Dr. Soh Kai Sam, Dr. Helen Cheung and Dr. David Watson. They have been very supportive of my career after I left IMU.

8. Are you still in touch with him/her?

During my last visit to IMU a few years ago, I heard that Dr. Soh and Dr. Cheung have left, but I did get a chance to meet with May Kuan, Pei Se and Prof. Peter Pook. About 1 year ago, I met with Dr. David Watson in a conference here in Boston. It had been more than 8 years since we last saw each other. We had a nice chat and I was really happy about the meeting with him.

“Looking back, I’m happy with the path I have taken so far”

-Dr. Lim on whether he had any regrets in life

*Dr Lim Kok Seong joined IMU in 1996 for IMU-Strathclyde Pharmacy Programme. He graduated from University of Strathclyde with first class honors and later furthers his Doctorate of Philosophy (Biochemistry) at National University of Singapore under supervision of Professor Barry Halliwell. He is currently undergoing postdoctoral fellowship with Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Biological Engineering.*
An Interview with Geevetha

“I aim to be a better nurse by learning as much as possible. I still have a lot of things to know about nursing with the outbreak of new diseases. I also plan to continue my nursing education to a higher level.”

- Geevetha on her career aspirations

1. It is impressive that you received an offer from the National Singapore University Hospital before your graduation. How did you that?
Actually I applied to NUH even before I sat for the Malaysian Nursing Board Examination. They called me for an interview after a couple of months and by that time I have already passed the Malaysian Nursing Board Examination and obtained the nursing license.

2. Are you the only person that managed to secure a place in Singapore or are there others as well?
My three other friends also managed to secure jobs in Singapore but they are attached to Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

3. Is it difficult to secure a job there as a nurse and why?
Well, if you have the required qualifications and able to communicate well in English, then I don’t think there should be any problems. It’s not about getting the job, it’s more about securing it by providing the best that is required out of you.

4. Why Singapore? Why not start your career in Malaysia?
It’s because Singapore is nearer to my hometown Johor Bahru and not to mention that I can experience the best of both countries. But anyhow, I plan to serve in Malaysia in the later years.

5. How did your life in IMU help you achieve your goals either personally or professionally?
Personally, IMU had molded me into a stronger and more determined person compared to the reserved school girl I was 5 years ago. Professionally, IMU equipped me with the knowledge that is required for the profession and the professional qualities I require.

6. Any embarrassing moment in IMU that you would like to share?
I had my fair shares of embarrassing moments in IMU. On the fourth day after I joined IMU (Sept 2005), I fell down head first from the steep stairs. Thank God, there was someone who helped me to break my fall and I avoided that person from then onwards. Come to think of it now, I nearly suffered a head trauma rather than an embarrassing moment. I also fainted at the sight of blood in the lab during my first semester to add to more embarrassing moments.

7. Favorite IMU lecturer so far?
I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the lecturers and clinical instructors who had painstakingly taught us and imparted their knowledge to us. I am fond of all them as they had done their best in shaping us to what we are now, I mean for the better part of it, of course. But there are a few people who are close to my heart like Miss Linda Ann Kelandai and Dr.Margo Mapanga. Miss Kolandai introduced me to nursing as to begin my journey and Dr.Margo taught me professionalism as to guide my journey.

8. How do you spend your leisure time?
I used to spend during my spare time but nowadays it depends on my mood or the situations. If my friends are around, I would like to go shopping or watch movies but mostly we tend to sit in restaurants and chat aimlessly about everything. If I am alone, I like to read or just plant vegetables in Facebook.

9. Where will you be in 10 years time?
Ten years is a long time period so I can’t vouch on where I will be then. But I hope I will at least be more matured and able to understand and judge things better rather than being impulsive. I also look forward to update my qualifications by then.

- Geevetha joined IMU in 2005 for IMU Nursing Degree Programme. She was actively involved in club and societies, community projects and became the batch representative of N1/06 cohorts. While waiting for her convocation last June 2010, she received offers from private a medical institution and settled with National Singapore University Hospital.
The three day two night stint at the Residence Desa Lagoon Resort in Port Dickson has certainly been an amazing experience to all of us who actually made the effort to come. Many of us had mixed feelings regarding the trip but if you were to ask any of us now, we would all be simply thrilled to share the many wonderful experiences that we gained. This retreat was indeed the vision of one team which dared to make a difference. They were united, zealous and mostly caring towards the new generation of budding doctors in IMU who truly needed guidance.

The very first day, after a sumptuous meal and a warm welcome, we were all exposed to the various aspects of financial prudence by a financial consultant. To many of us who knew nothing about how to deal with our finances in the future, now have great plans on how to save and invest our money wisely.

On the second day, we were exposed to grooming. In a nutshell, we learnt all about fashion and being well-dressed as doctors. The guys even had fun putting on facial mask and the ladies learnt about putting on simple make-up in ten minutes. (Can you believe that?) The third day was on stress management and we were all made aware of the various techniques of relaxation. Truly what we needed!

Most importantly, we all had fun being with each other and developing new friendships. That was indeed a priceless treasure which we would forever cherish. In short, this trip has really been an eye-opener for all of us and it’s our desire that there would be many more trips to come. Hats off to the team and thank you for your care, IMU ALUMNI. God bless.

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**Future Events**

2nd IMU Alumni Pharmacy Gathering  
Date: 28 August 2010  
Venue: IMU Bukit Jalil

IMU Alumni Retreat  
Date: 20 – 22 September 2010  
Venue: TBC