No one likes to fall sick. But when illness strikes, doctors bear the responsibility of restoring health. It is a calling that requires not just medical knowledge, but also skills such as good communication and teamwork. Training the next generation of doctors is the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine), an institution that brings together two world-class universities—NTU Singapore and Imperial College London—to transform medicine and meet the healthcare needs of the 21st century.

The seeds of LKCMedicine were planted more than a decade ago. In January 2008, NTU commissioned a feasibility study for the establishment of a new medical school. Given Singapore's rapidly ageing population and evolving healthcare needs, the plan received the go-ahead; by October 2010, NTU and Imperial College London had signed a Collaboration Agreement to establish LKCMedicine.

The school is named after the late Tan Sri Dato’ Lee Kong Chian (1893-1967), a renowned business tycoon and founder of the Lee Foundation, in acknowledgement of the landmark gift of S$150 million the Foundation made to NTU in 2011 to support medical education and research. LKCMedicine opened its doors to its inaugural batch of medical students in August 2013. Five years on, the training wheels have come off, and this first batch of 52 newly minted doctors are now making their ward rounds at hospitals across Singapore. NTULink caught up with four of them to find out what they’ve been up to since leaving their alma mater.
A fear of blood almost caused Dr Aishwarya Narayanan to take a detour away from medical school. But she faced her phobia head on: she signed up for a three-day attachment at a hospital while she was still a student in junior college, during which she witnessed orthopaedic surgery being carried out.

“I ended up seeing quite a lot of blood in the operating theatre, which somehow helped me become immune to it,” she quipped.

As a house officer at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital, Dr Narayanan’s day consists of ward rounds, attending to the needs of patients already in the wards, and seeing newly admitted ones—the bread-and-butter work of fledgling doctors. Reflecting on her time spent at LKCMedicine, she noted that the most memorable lesson she picked up was how to learn from her peers.

“The learning style at LKCMedicine is not your typical lecture-tutorial format. Instead, there was a lot of team-based learning,” she explained. “There’s a lot of teaching one another—sometimes you understand one concept better than someone else, and vice versa.”

Dr Aishwarya Narayanan

“It’s important to treat every patient as an individual—with respect, dignity and empathy.”

Dr Delwyn Lim

The curriculum at LKCMedicine didn’t just focus on acquiring medical knowledge, said Dr Delwyn Lim, currently a house officer at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. For him, the communication skills he picked up as a student were the most valuable.

He recalled a clinical encounter session in his sophomore year where a patient was invited to share about his experiences with doctors and the healthcare system. “It brought us a fresh perspective and allowed us to gain insights about how a patient feels. The experience has stayed with me and serves as a constant reminder to treat every patient as an individual—with respect, dignity and empathy,” he noted.

This mindset has served Dr Lim well—he was able to gain direct admission into a residency programme under the National Healthcare Group (NHG), specialising in internal medicine. Typically, doctors work for a year or two before getting accepted into such programmes.

“I’ve always been interested in internal medicine, and I had good mentors in medical school who guided me along the way and provided me with career advice. I certainly hope I won’t disappoint!” he said.
Although consultations with doctors are often one-on-one sessions, a host of other healthcare professionals work behind the scenes to provide invaluable support.

Dr Claudia Tong, a house officer at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, acknowledged this, stressing that teamwork was the most important takeaway from her time at LKCMedicine.

“I felt that collegiality and teamwork were reinforced, which is very important in medicine because you have to work with co-house officers, allied health officers and nurses. We need to know how to be tactful and function as a team,” she said.

Learning how medicine sometimes fails, and how to deal with death, was also important for Dr Tong. She recalled how during one of her first weeks at LKCMedicine—known as ‘hospital week’—the consultant she was assigned to led her and her course mates through the morgue and the palliative care unit.

That was when she had the chance to observe the bedside dynamics of a lady on her deathbed.

“I thought that it was quite an enlightening experience, and to me, it brought out the human aspects of medicine,” said Dr Tong.

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Dr Claudia Tong
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Dr Leon Tan

A MELODY FOR LIFE

Dr Leon Tan also remembers the passion and dedication of the teachers and mentors he met while at LKCMedicine. This was especially true during their three-hour-long clinical communications sessions, which involved five other medical students and a qualified doctor. “At first you’re not used to people criticizing the way you speak, the way you sit, that kind of thing,” he admitted. But the feedback really helped him become a better communicator. “You could be doing a good job medically for your patients, but if they do not feel that you are communicating with them, it all goes to naught.”

But ‘all work and no play’ is not how Dr Tan would describe his time at LKCMedicine. He and Dr Lim played in ‘The Medicine Band’ and even represented NTU at the National University of Singapore’s Medicine Music Festival. Dr Tan continues to compose music, and hopes to produce his own record one day. In the meantime, he hopes to keep the LKCMedicine alumni a close-knit community. As the founding President of the LKCMedicine Alumni Association, he aims to organise gatherings for his peers to keep in touch with one another. “It is rare to have an entire class spend five years together like this, and it will be nice to stay connected even as we go along different paths during our medical journey,” he said.

Additionally, Dr Tan is looking to encourage alumni to donate towards meaningful school initiatives, such as community projects. “We are also looking for alumni to help organise clinical sessions and revision sessions for our juniors.”

Because after all is said and done, modern medicine is built on a long history of deep knowledge and shared experience, and this generation of doctors looks set to fly the LKCMedicine flag high.

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- 2012
  The Teh Tsun Chui Foundation donates S$20 million to LKCMedicine

- 2013
  LKCMedicine admits its inaugural intake

- 2014
  Professor James Best is appointed as the first Resident Dean of LKCMedicine

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- 2016
  LKCMedicine graduates its first batch of 52 doctors

Harnessing Health Insights With HELIOS

New discoveries are vital to the medical profession. At LKCMedicine, a cadre of scientists is seeking ways to improve primary healthcare, population health and global health.

One key study is the Health for Life in Singapore (HELIOS) Study, a partnership between LKCMedicine, National Healthcare Group and Imperial College London aimed at determining the causes of common diseases such as diabetes, heart attack and stroke. The goal is to promote health and wellbeing, and ultimately deliver better healthcare to future generations in Singapore.

If you are an NTU alumnus and a Singapore citizen or permanent resident aged between 30 to 84 years, you are invited to participate in the HELIOS study. This will involve visiting the study centre for three to four hours to complete the following:

- Answer some questions about yourself, your dietary habits and your medical history.
- A range of health assessments, including height, weight, blood pressure, bone health, eye health, heart, lung and blood vessel functions.
- A collection of samples such as blood, urine and saliva.

After your visit is completed, you will receive a personal health report at no cost, and an opportunity to discuss the results, if necessary, with a doctor. You will also receive a token of appreciation for your time.

To make an appointment or to find out more, contact HELIOS at +65 6904 7077 or email helios@ntu.edu.sg.

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- 2015
  Then-President of the Republic of Singapore Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam graces the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony, during which a foundation stone is laid at each site of the School’s dual campus. Later that year, LKCMedicine moves into the Experimental Medicine Building at NTU’s main campus

- 2016
  The Clinical Sciences Building at LKCMedicine’s Novena campus is completed

- 2017
  Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean officially opens LKCMedicine

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