

She took elective in India

Before graduating, new doctor had six weeks at a top medical school, CMC Vellore

S.VENGADESHWARAN

DR AISHWARYA Narayanan, 23, is in the pioneer batch of 52 students to graduate from the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMed), a partnership between Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Imperial College London.

A highlight of her degree course was a six-week elective programme at Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore, India. Outlook magazine ranked CMC one of the top three Indian medical colleges last year.

Founded in 1900 by an American missionary, Dr Ida S. Scudder, CMC has won many accolades.

It was where India's first open heart surgery was done in 1961.

"I was aware it was one of the top medical colleges and hospitals. The doctors were really interested in teaching and imparting knowledge," Dr Aishwarya said.

In India, she saw children struggling with congenital diseases that would normally be detected earlier in Singapore.

"My most important takeaway was that no matter which hospital or country you are at, the patient is the most important person. One of the highlights of my stint there was realising some conditions

are endemic or more prevalent in certain countries than in others. So it was interesting to see a different range of problems there," said Dr Aishwarya.

She stayed in a hostel and a guesthouse and got the chance to interact with local and other overseas students.

"It was definitely an interesting experience. But most of my extended family is in India and I have been back quite regularly, so I had no issues with food," she said. "People were also very nice and keen to show us around as well."

Fear of blood didn't stop her

Though she was interested in a career in medicine, she knew she had a problem, since seeing a friend bleed from a small cut when she was in Raffles Girls' School.

The sight of blood made her feel light-headed and uncomfortable.

Then, in her second year of Junior College, she went for a three-day attachment programme at the National University Hospital orthopaedics department and had to see bags of blood.

Testing her limits, she accepted an opportunity to witness live surgery in an operating theatre. "On my first day, I felt queasy and uncomfortable. But by the second and third days I got more and more used to it," she said.

Dr Aishwarya found her first year in the course particularly challenging. This was because she did physics instead of biology in her pre-university education, unlike most of her peers.

She said: "I felt like I was learning a completely new thing. I studied more and asked a lot about the things I didn't understand. Second year onwards it felt like I was on more even ground."

The degree programme was noteworthy for the focus on tutorials involving more team-based learning.

Lectures are watched at the students' own time on their iPads and they will go into classes to do quizzes and application exercises, followed by a discussion of their answers.

"There's a lot of sharing of information, justifying of answers," said a spokesman from LKCMed.

Dr Aishwarya added: "It helps because sometimes when I have a question, I remember an argument I had with someone over that, rather than the answer from a textbook."

The LKCMed school was set up in 2010 by NTU and Imperial College London as part of an effort to meet Singapore's growing healthcare needs.

The graduates, who have completed their five-year undergraduate course, started their first day of work on May 2 in various hospitals. The batch will officially graduate in July this year.

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