

## DEAN'S MESSAGE

### A Glance at 2007 - Highlights of a Successful First Year

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*Dean, Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore*

**M**y warmest greetings as you begin a brand new year.

I am pleased to pen a few thoughts as we launch the inaugural issue of Vital Science, a newsletter of the Duke-NUS. This newsletter is meant to keep our staff members, students, our stakeholders and partners updated on the major developments and highlights at the school.

2007 has been a hallmark year for Duke-NUS in more ways than one.

We started our first academic year on August 1 and took in 26 brilliant and highly motivated individuals who share a common aspiration – to shape medicine in new ways as future physician-scientists. The class will graduate in 2011 with a joint medical degree from Duke University and the National University of Singapore.

The class comprises outstanding scholars who have proven their prowess while doing their baccalaureate studies in some of the world's finest universities. Some have also showed their strong mettle in biomedical research.

The 26 students, who come from 7 countries including Singapore, are also doing extremely well in their first year studies. Last December, the class completed a challenging 12-week clinically-oriented course on Normal Body with a 100% pass rate. Three members have made it into the honors list: Ms Bianca Chan, Ms Ong Li Ming and Mr Chia Ghim Song.

Professor Ranga Krishnan, the Chairman of the department of Psychiatry at the Duke University School of Medicine, has also moved to Singapore with his



family. He has assumed a critically important role as Executive Vice Dean at the Duke-NUS. Professor Krishnan works closely with me in providing leadership at the school.

The Duke-NUS is also making good progress with faculty recruitment. Professor Duane Gubler, a notable expert of international standing, is heading the Emerging Infectious Diseases signature research programme since November.

Another international researcher, Professor David Virshup, had joined the school in July and currently heads the signature research programme in cancer and stem cell biology.

Also in the news was the Duke-NUS' strategic partnership with the Singapore Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR). The Neuroscience Research Partnership will have a strong focus on translational research and integrates Duke-NUS' current research on Neurobehavioral Disorders more fully with other national efforts in neurosciences such as those at A\*STAR.

Professor Colin Blakemore, a noted neuroscientist, former President of the British Neuroscience Association and former Chief Executive of the UK Medical Research Council, will be working closely with A\*STAR and Dr Ranga Krishnan, the Executive Vice Dean of Duke-NUS

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## NEWS PICK

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Duke-NUS welcomes two outstanding researchers

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### V-GIFT BOX



Duke-NUS has garnered generous support from key donors.

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### V-EVENTS



Pancakes for a cause.



Our students, in and out of campus.

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V-PEOPLE

## STELLAR SCIENTIST JOINS DUKE-NUS

**R**enowned dengue scientist, Dr Duane J. Gubler, Sc.D., will be leading a world-class infectious disease programme that spans basic, clinical, field epidemiologic and translational research at the Duke-NUS. The school will act as the regional centre for reference and research in the Asia-Pacific area and will provide a U.S. Centre for Disease Control-like service to countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

A key target is to pioneer the discovery, and develop new and more effective methods for the treatment, prevention and control of new and emerging pathogens. The early identification of new pathogens associated with disease with epidemic potential will be a key outcome of the Duke-NUS research programme. The hope is to use this information to rapidly identify and prevent the spread of future SARS-like epidemics that may impact the global economy, and to develop new diagnostic tests, treatment and control strategies by harnessing our own talents and those of our Singapore-based partners which will include the Infectious Diseases Centre at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore General Hospital, National University of Singapore, DSO National Laboratories

and the Novartis Institute for Tropical Diseases.

Dr Gubler is the director of Asia-Pacific Institute of Tropical Medicine & Infectious Diseases, John A Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii. Prior to that, he was Director of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases for 15 years.

He serves on advisory boards around the world, including the Environmental Health Institute and the Novartis Institute of Tropical Diseases in Singapore.

Dr Gubler earned a science degree from Utah State University in 1963 and later, a master's of science degree in 1965 from the University of Hawaii. He obtained his Doctor of Science (Sc.D) in pathobiology / tropical disease ecology from The Johns Hopkins University in 1969.

He has written and spoken widely on infectious and tropical diseases, and has been honoured numerous times by, among others, the U.S. Public Health Service, the US Department of Health and Human Services and Rotary International. He is a Fellow of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and a Fellow of the American

Association for the Advancement of Science. He is Past President of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene.

Dr Gubler was appointed the director of Duke-NUS Signature Research Programme in Emerging Infectious Diseases on 1 November 2007. He will also maintain a faculty position at the University of Hawaii.



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and an eminent neuropsychiatrist. As a component of the Partnership, Professor Blakemore will also join the faculty of Duke-NUS.

The Duke-NUS has also received the tremendous support of notable philanthropic organizations in Singapore. More than S\$90 million has been gifted to the school in 2007.

The strong support from local philanthropists reflects their confidence in Mr Tony Chew, Chairman of the Governing Board, as well as members of the Governing Board, the school's leaders and the partnership with Duke University.

I record our deepest appreciation for the Gifts presented by the Estate of the late Tan Sri Khoo Teck Puat (S\$80 million), the Shaw Foundation (S\$5 million) and the Goh Foundation (S\$6 million). This is in addition to the inaugural Gift of S\$2.5 million the school had gratefully received

from the Lee Foundation in 2005. These Gifts are vital for the school to meet its educational and research objectives.

2007 has indeed been a fortuitous year and has given us a number of reasons to celebrate.

It is early days yet as we continue to nurture with pride, our fledgling institution.

I am pleased to see how the school is shaping nicely and is gaining traction in various quarters. For AY2008/09, we have attracted more applicants than we have places. Applicants come from all over the world and Singapore and selection criteria require both outstanding performance in baccalaureate studies and evidence of a pioneering attitude the school seeks to foster.

The new Duke-NUS campus at Outram is also shaping up nicely and is on target for completion in 1H/2009.

As we enter 2008, there is no better time than this to record once again, my deepest appreciation to the one and many who have contributed so significantly to the success of the Duke-NUS.

In particular, I wish to personally thank our Singapore and Duke University stakeholders, and our partners, faculty, staff and students, who held a vision for a pioneering graduate medical school that will make its mark in Singapore. It is through your belief in the purpose and with your unwavering support, that we have realized the start of this important endeavour.

Through our combined efforts, the Duke-NUS has built an exciting presence. It will hold and fulfil the dreams and aspirations of our future physician-scientists who will shape the future of medicine in Singapore and the world.

With best wishes for 2008.

## V-PEOPLE

# A CHAT WITH DR ONG SIN TIONG

### 1. How long have you been away in the States?

I left for the States in 1993, so 14 years.

### 2. What made you come back?

A combination of factors. The most important was the vibrant scientific and research environment that is now present in Singapore, and that allows clinician-scientists to 'dream big' and make significant contributions in their areas of interest.

Also, while this has been possible for a long time in the US, I believe the current environment in Singapore is particularly friendly to and encouraging of translational researchers.

Other factors include the opportunity to return to my roots, to expose my children to Asia, and to encourage them to develop a global mindset, enabling them to move seamlessly between East and West.

### 3. Why did you choose to come back and join Duke-NUS?

I started work on August 1st 2007, the same day as our inaugural intake of medical students arrived. Simply being part of the pioneering faculty of a new medical school is exciting, particularly one that is a partnership between two institutions of excellence.

It is also a tremendous opportunity to mentor very promising individuals at the beginning of their careers, and contribute to the development of what I believe will become a world-class medical school.

### 4. How do you plan to apply what you learnt in the US and UK to the Singapore context?

That's a great question. Firstly, let me say that I owe my teachers and mentors a tremendous debt of gratitude for the training and experiences they provided. That sense of gratitude, coupled with the desire to share something good with others, is why I would like to contribute to the training of future clinician-scientists in Singapore.

I think of the UK experiences as my 'first love', where I fell in love with the practice of clinical medicine. What has remained with me from those formative years, was the emphasis on bedside clinical skills, and the ideal of being able to come to a diagnosis from the history and examination alone.

It was also being able to observe how, through attention to detail, the most skilled Consultants were often able to uncover critical aspects of the history and/or elicit clinical signs that others might have missed, and with the judicious use of confirmatory tests, improve the care of the patient. Whenever this happened, it felt like you were watching a master magician pulling a rabbit out of a top hat, and of course, made you want to follow suit.

However, it was during my time in the US when I decided to 'marry' a career in medical research. The US has a more well-worn path that prepares clinicians, including those without a Ph.D., to pursue



a serious career in bench research.

What makes the US environment so conducive to one's scientific development is the presence of world-class research labs within medical schools, as well as outstanding scientists who are keen to have medical students, residents and fellows spend time in their labs.

In fact, it was through a series of apprenticeships in the laboratories of my mentors (Drs. Michelle Le Beau, Timothy McKeithan, and Hung Fan) that I learnt the business of doing science at a competitive level.

So back in Singapore, I look forward to mentoring individuals with an innate curiosity about how things work. I would hope to share with these students the best of the UK and the US systems, and how they can make use of their clinical and scientific expertise to enhance patients' lives.

**Dr Ong Sin Tiong is the Associate Professor in the Cancer and Stem Cell Biology Signature Research Program at Duke-NUS.**

## V-GIFT BOX

# A RESOUNDING MANDATE

Despite being a fledging educational and research institution, Duke-NUS has garnered generous support from key sponsors. To date, it has raised substantial sums for its student scholarships and various research programs. Duke-NUS GMS is deeply grateful to the following, whose gifts are a resounding mandate of the school's mission and vision:

Estate of the late Tan Sri Khoo Teck Puat	S\$ 80 million
Goh Foundation Scholars Program	S\$ 6 million
Shaw Foundation Scholars Program	S\$ 5 million
Lee Foundation	S\$ 2.5 million



Generous gift from the Estate of the late Tan Sri Khoo Teck Puat



Dean Williams presents an appreciation gift to Mr Goh Cheng Liang



At the Goh Foundation dinner party

## PANCAKES FOR A CAUSE – THE DEAN’S TEAM BREAKFAST



It was around 8 o'clock in the morning on 24 October when the staff of Duke-NUS were hit by the enticing aroma of melted butter and maple syrup as they entered the campus. The sound of sizzling sausages and eggs was clearly audible in the lounge just outside the Large Teaching Room.

Clad in white aprons and looking like professional chefs were Dr Craig Stenberg, Dr Sandy Cook and Dr Bob Kamei. By about 9 am, they had already cooked up a storm of pancakes, sausages and eggs which the students and staff heartily tucked into. The occasion? The Dean's Team Breakfast.

Inspired by pancake breakfast

cookouts typically held at fire stations in the US to raise funds for the community, the Dean's Team Breakfast helped rally Duke-NUS staff and faculty support for our students' first participation in a local charity event called the Singapore General Hospital Community Day.

Our students wanted to operate a fun photo frame design activity stall at the Community Day. The event gave needy families caring for a seriously ill family member a day of fun and family bonding despite their financial hardships.

The Dean's Team Breakfast raised over S\$2,000, which the students used to purchase bookshop vouchers and other useful items for the beneficiaries.

The vouchers were a meaningful gift as most of the families needed help to put the children through school.

Bianca Chan noted when writing to her classmates that this event is a chance to "remind ourselves why we're studying so hard" and said, "This is our way to give a little back to others who have so little."

The Dean's Team Breakfast was a great success since it not only raised funds for the students to serve the local community, but because it was also a socially engaging occasion. All in all, it was a demonstration of the School coming together to support the students for a very good cause.

## Student Life

### SGH COMMUNITY DAY



Smiles all around as our creativity for craft was unleashed to help families make their own photo frames at the Singapore General Hospital Community Day – a refreshing break from the textbook and a reminder of what we were studying for.

### CLASS DINNER & NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS



Our November babies (including Dr Kamei!) got a nice treat when the class dined together with members of the faculty at Clarke Quay after the second integrated exam of the Normal Body course.

### THE NORMAL BODY COURSE



Easing ourselves into the hustle and bustle of the information highway that was the Normal Body course involved exploring the surgically important landmarks of anatomy in the lab.

### CHRISTMAS



We're getting ready for Christmas! All the tests in the world didn't stop us from decorating a tree and exchanging gifts in the spirit of Christmas. Now where do you suppose the red packets for Chinese New Year should be coming from?