

# Dal News

## Embracing the hands-on medical experience **Insights to Success: Yoong Wah Lee**

Amani Saini - May 29, 2014



**Yoong Wah Lee graduated from Dalhousie last Friday. (Ryan McNutt photo)**

It was the North American educational system that first attracted medical student Yoong Wah Lee to Canada.

He was studying medicine in his home country of Malaysia and had heard that medical schools in Canada were more hands-on, different from some countries where students mainly observe and do not participate in direct patient care. Wanting to be directly involved in assisting patients, he decided to attend Dalhousie for the clinical year's proportion of his degree in medicine.

Today, he is glad he made the decision to study in Halifax.

"Canada is well known for its universal health care and to be able to work in this environment gave me a new perspective on the attitudes of the doctor on treating patients," says Lee. "It's not about making money here, like it is in the USA. Here, because

health care is free, doctors are able to treat patients using all the available resources and do not have to worry about patients not able to afford their treatments.”

In 1993, Dalhousie began a partnership with the International Medical University (IMU) in Malaysia, where each year six IMU students are eligible to complete clerkships in the latter years of their medical studies at Dalhousie. The program, which kicked off officially in 1996, improves the health care in Malaysia and surrounding areas and builds the educational capacity of IMU.

“Growing up in a tropical country I had always wanted to know what it was like growing up in a snowy environment. I thought it would be a challenge to come here,” he says, on making the decision to attend Dalhousie.

### **First impressions of Canada**

Canada was full of many surprises Lee, from driving on the right side of the road, to the friendliness of the people and the cultural diversity.

“The weather was a shock to me,” says Lee. “It was bone chill. I remember my first winter, I bought my first jacket and it wasn’t good enough for me. I had to learn how to wear layers. In Malaysia you can just wear one layer all year.”

Though the weather took some time getting used to, what Lee immediately fell in love with in Nova Scotia was its food.

“Halifax is a culinary heaven and I did not expect this from such a small city,” says Lee. “Malaysian food is taken from different cultures, like Chinese, Indian and Malay culture. Which I find is the same in Canada: there is no “Canadian” food,” though he admits that lobster and salmon are now his all-time favourite foods.

He was also happy to learn that students on campus shared the same interests as him. He joined the Dalhousie Table Tennis Club, where he was able to meet many students from outside of medicine. The club represented Dalhousie at tournaments organized by the Nova Scotia Table Tennis Association and he found himself competing in Truro, Canning and Musquodoboit.

### **Looking forward to the future**

Lee is glad he could be directly involved in patient care during his studies.

“My most rewarding experience has been working with patients who you first saw when they were sick, and then watching them walk out in good health,” he says, “That makes me think that all that hard work and night calls were worth it. Especially the hugs the patients

give me, it touches my heart.”

He admits the learning curve was steep, but the support he received from resident doctors, nurses and pharmacists really helped him in adjusting to the work.

Now with experience under his belt, he is ready for the next chapter in his career. In July he will begin his internal medicine training in Newfoundland and Labrador and then will decide what area of medicine to focus in. “I am thinking about the ICU or general internal medicine, but I will decide that in my later years. I’m just taking baby steps right now.

“By the end of the clerkship I felt that I not only learned about medicine, but it was a life journey and I learned a lot about myself,” he says. He claims that he was very shy at first in Halifax but learned how to be approachable.

“It is important to be approachable, so that patients can tell you what problems they are having. I am very glad I came here and consider myself very fortunate to be part of this program.”

Lee adds that he wishes to thank everyone in the Global Health Office and the Learning Resource Centre, along with Drs. John Leblanc and Tony Lee, for support and guidance during his time at Dal.