

Metamorphosis into an active MMA Member



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On a hot sunny day while sipping a glass of iced lemon tea, our senior colleague, Dr Nicholas Heng as matter of conversation urged and cajoled us into contesting the forthcoming student council elections of Melaka-Manipal Medical College (MMMC) which was just a couple of weeks away. Retrospectively, reflecting the moment, it has indeed been a life changing decision for us. From leading a mundane life of theory classes, ward rounds and then the library, we were thrown into a cauldron of excitement with adrenaline flowing in spurious spurts but at times resulting in a lack of serotonin due to the excessive self-induced stress resulting from appalling depressive situations.

The Dream

Being part of the elite MMMC Student Council was never in our dreams, nor did we ever contemplate contesting the elections. Partaking in the democratic process of managing the Student Council changed our impression of life. The metamorphosis of a medical student into a fully rounded doctor was an amazing drama-filled experience that would change our visions and expectations in life. Trials and tribulations abound. It is a soul-searching and character-moulding experience that gave us added new meanings to life. Many flashbacks of the events following this spontaneous action will be etched forever, to advantage, in our hearts.

The MMMC Student Council

The exploits commenced the moment we filed in our nomination forms for the elections. The starter's gun was already fired. The race had begun. Elections in MMMC are fun time with so much colour, sound and vibrant activity. Wow! It was fun indeed but we never expected so many twists and turns during the election period. At times we were joyous and energised and at times we felt sapped, irritated and depressed.

We were given 'air-time' officially on the MMMC Facebook page where each contestant had an officially supervised recording 'broadcasted' to all MMMC students. Of course the public too had a 'peep' at the recordings. We felt the world was getting to know us. It was like the General Elections. The MMMC was turned into an election constituency as we see in the General Elections. We had banners of ourselves pasted all over the place. Supporters on both sides went on motorbikes and cars around the college distributing flyers and manifestos in campaigning for the candidates. We were also allowed to hold *ceramah* in the classroom. These were lively and effervescent shows that excited the 'electorate' however,

the 'voters' were not easily swayed. The candidates had to campaign till the very last minute to ensure that they were still in the race.

The Lessons Learnt

Much was learnt. Those who we thought were our 'dependable' voters turned their backs on us. This may be due the fact that they felt envious that we would bask in fame if we won. Where support was least expected we received it in abundance. It was truly a learning experience of what life was all about. We realised that the true friends will stand out during times of a crisis or need. My father always remarked, "*It is better to have a few good friends than to be surrounded by a horde of hypocritical ones.*" It was a bitter learning experience.

Election Campaign

After the intense campaigning finally wound down, D-day had come for the students to cast their ballots in a closely contested election. It was a hard-fought election sometimes



The doctors who became a family, the MMA Melaka State Committee 2015-2016

made bitter by unwarranted personal attacks, innuendoes and unacceptable conduct. Even University elections can be 'heated' and thrilling affairs filled with nail-biting suspense.

Election success

Mr Shival Tharmaseelan won the historic elections and became the President of the Council whilst I, Shakilone Tharmaseelan was elected as the Director of External Affairs of the Student Council 2014/2015.

Amongst the hallmarks of our election manifestos was a record-breaking 28 benefits unlike the handful of promises

made yearly. Making 'election' promises is easy but to fulfil every one of them requires arduous planning and back-breaking commitment.

Improving MMA – MMMC bonds

In addition we had promised to improve on the pre-existing working relationship between the Student Council and MMA Melaka. We promised to enter a new era in the close bonds of this relationship. We felt that with a closer symbiotic relationship between the two, MMMC and MMA would be of great benefit to medical students.

We felt we would be able to tap the wealth of experience and knowledge of MMA branch committee and we had the privilege to participate in the flurry of activities organised by the MMA State branch. The MMA welcomed the MMMC Council's contribution of fresh blood and innovative ideas in keeping with the times.

Co-Opted Members of the MMA Branch

Improving the working ties between the MMMC Student Council and MMA topped our priority list. As the External Affairs Director I was co-opted into the MMA Branch committee. The President of the MMMC Student Council, Shival Tharmaseelan, decided to take the bull by its horns and be part of the MMA Melaka State Committee as a co-opted member.

The MMA and The Politics Within

It was love at first sight. We were welcomed with open arms by the Past Chairman of the MMA Branch, the esteemed Associate Professor Dr M. Swamenathan and his team. We were treated as equals in spite of the fact that we are still medical students. All our opinions were given due consideration and appreciation.

Committee meetings were not cosy outings or a rendezvous. It was heated at times with occasionally unbelievable silly arguments made by mature men taking potshots at one another. We also learned that tantrums brought the engine to an abrupt halt and how diplomacy helped the wheels of function. Leading and working as part of a MMA Branch Committee is no easy feat.

Getting feathers ruffled, egos bruised with an occasional pretentious pat in the back were all part of life that we were getting used to. Meetings were sometimes long drawn. It was games 'big' men indulge in whilst managing the affairs of an association. We were learning the ropes in managing an association – the good, the bad and the ugly all in one.

MMA AGM

The conduct of the branch Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the national AGM taught us how one conducts himself as honourable men of a noble profession but at times it awakened our inner souls when the meeting halls witnessed slanging matches and unreasonable behaviour. We learnt what is expected and unexpected of us. AGMs can occasionally be rings of fire!

MMA – Unwavering Support

However, we as students were given tremendous support

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# Partaking in the democratic process of managing the student Council changed our impression of life

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in all our endeavours. We were able to carry out a string of activities due to strong support from MMA. We learnt from the senior members of MMA as to how we could successfully organise events. Many successful events were fruits of the joint labour efforts with MMA.

MMA Treasure Hunt

The MMA Branch Committee had expressed their concerns to us regarding the poor turnout from us medical students in the previous years. We assured them that this year would be different. We made tremendous efforts to keep our promise.

True to our word, MMMC students formed 15 out of the 23 cars that participated that evening. The previous year there were only five cars. This event was the first peek into the world of MMA for many of our students and the treasure hunt was certainly the perfect first impression. The 60 of us competed, traversing the streets of Melaka with fellow doctors in a battle of wits and navigation skills. This event was the perfect foretaste of our relationship which MMA left students drooling for more.

MMA Annual Dinner

This Hawaiian-themed dinner held at the poolside of Equatorial Hotel saw participation from many MMMC students. The dinner served as the perfect platform for students to mingle with doctors over a sumptuous meal and eye-catching performances. Of course our duties as part of the Committee was to sell tickets and seek sponsors and advertisers. In addition, we also had to assist in the arrangements of the dinner. It was truly an unforgettable experience. However, we realised it was the same MMA members who were doing the work for the branch every year whilst a few were annual chair warmers.

MMA Volunteer Corp (MMA VoC)

In Kelantan: We sprang into action when Mother Nature struck and the floods devastated the east coast. The MMA State Committee informed us that the MMA VoC was looking for volunteers and essentials to be distributed in Gua Musang, Kelantan. The MMMC Council immediately began to pass the hat around collecting funds as well as daily essentials from our students. The President and I both volunteered to be part of the relief mission to Kelantan where we personally handed the items to all the affected individuals. We were commended by the locals especially by a mother of three children who lost her home. She was reduced to tears and thanked all the students via a video that was taken. Her video sent shockwaves through the college. We received a letter of commendation from Dr Ravi Naidu, the Hon.



Essential items that were collected for the flood victims in Gua Musang, Kelantan

General Secretary of MMA. It was a touching moment as MMA had sent the commendation to the Dean of MMMC. It was at this moment that we students realised we needed an intermediary between us and the public. We need the MMA.



Villagers from the Orang Asli settlement seeking medical treatment



All the native children of the Belum Forest were given deworming medication

In Belum Forest: A month later, MMA VoC requested for volunteers to help out in a medical camp that was to be conducted in collaboration with one of Malaysia's premier property developer, EMKAY Group. This was set to take place in the midst of a tropical paradise, Belum Rainforest where the *Orang Asli* population was in need of medical attention. They have a high prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension and the nearest hospital is in Grik, an hour's drive away. We gave out multivitamins and conducted deworming as most of the children looked pale and anaemic. The whole team was taken aback by the amiable hospitality that the villagers showered upon us. We returned home with memories that will last a lifetime and an open invitation to visit the village at any time. MMA gave us this opportunity to serve the underprivileged community.

Alor Gajah Medical Camp: After all the medical camps that were done outside Melaka, MMA Melaka decided to serve the people of Melaka in Gadek, Alor Gajah. This was a massive joint effort between MMA and MMMC, where our medical students and professors from a wide range of specialties were present. Thanks to MMA, this medical camp provided us with a platform to harness and practise our examination skills under the supervision of experienced consultants.

MMA Family Day

Our relationship continued to prosper as MMMC faculty, students and their families turned up in large numbers at the

Melaka Wonderland Water Theme Park. It was a day filled with frolic and laughter as we whizzed down the slides and lazed around the pool, before culminating in an interesting telematch. We went back home on that day not as MMA members but as a MMA family.



MMA Melaka Family Day in Melaka Wonderland Water Theme Park

Manipal's Run for Life

The MMA Branch Committee has always ensured the welfare of us budding young doctors in Melaka Manipal as we represent the future generation of MMA. They have always supported all the events organised by the Student Council including sponsoring the inaugural Manipal Run's for Life, in the Council's bid to promote a healthy lifestyle among medical students.

Manipal's Postgraduate Fair

As specialisation is the way forward for doctors, we organised a national level Postgraduate Fair which was attended by more than 400 participants, which was the highest turnout ever, after years of dwindling attendance. Various renowned speakers from around the country, many of them MMA members including the then State Chairman, Dr Swamenathan imparted their knowledge on various pathways to specialisation. MMA Melaka proudly sponsored goodies for all participants.

Manipal's Open Day

As part of MMMC's corporate social responsibility, a health screening camp was organised in campus for the benefit of the residence from the surrounding vicinity. MMA Melaka again lent its helping hand by sponsoring medical equipment, thus helping secure the roaring success of this camp.

Conclusion

Looking back on our decision to join the MMA committee, it has indeed been an eye opener of sorts. We have learnt many valuable lessons over the past year with this stupendous Committee currently under the dynamic leadership of Prof Dr M. Nachiappan. They have inculcated in us the spirit of volunteerism, the aspirations to improve ourselves to become better doctors and taught us that medical life is not all about working but also having fun and being useful members of society. We students have also grasped the idea that we need to have a voice to represent us doctors in the future.

As evidenced by the burgeoning relationship between our Council and Melaka MMA Branch Committee, we strongly feel the need for medical students to become MMA members. We urge all MMA branches to co-op students into their respective State Committees. This will certainly increase the relevance of MMA amongst the next generation of doctors. This will also immensely assist in the metamorphosis of mere students into becoming fully qualified all-round doctors.