

Off the beaten path

Tan Ka Liong

When the travel books are boasting the best scenic and interesting places we should never miss, we may overlook places that are grounded, simple yet invaluable. It is indeed masking us as we are always framed by a so-called 'pro'. However, curiosity draws us apart, and we opt for the independent route. The one that veers away from tour groups and take us off the beaten path.

Puzzled?

Like most of others, I was puzzled after graduating with a BSc. in Health Sciences. Divergent options were available. I thought about joining the workforce with an ordinary job for there were simply bills to be paid. My interest in research drew me to hunt for an institutional research career. And to my surprise, I managed to grab the research assistant post at my present university. Soon, I was gaining interest and intent to further my study to a higher perspective.

Freshman and Works

Knowing that joining the workforce is far different from university life, I took nothing as child's play. At a laboratory, being new to proposal writing and bench work can kill. To unwind such tense atmosphere, I hit the fields with favorite sports, have good music in my room, etc. Upon my table at home and my bench at the lab then, it is coffee, coffee and more coffee.

In this parcel of life, I learned the importance of establishing a solid rapport with my colleagues in my research field. Still, the task can be rather intricate. It needs 'investment' in terms of time and patience. The perfect way of such implementation is by offering a pair of helping hands to those in need, as we do not know when we may need them in return. Reinforcing our bonds through mutual help enables us to get work done more efficiently. And in fact, a friendly and harmonious environment may encourage conducive yet creative thinking! I assume.

My Research

I work on a pharmacogenetic line focusing on leukemic cancer study. Currently, I am studying the anticancer drug called imatinib mesylate (GlivecTM) which is the first-line gold standard to treat chronic myeloid leukemia. We, at the same time, observed that Asians might have different metabolism profile than in Caucasians. To routinely involve in pharmacokinetic analysis, my proposed work is to collect blood samples and to extract the drug for further analysis.

Through conversations with colleagues, I realized that

the genetic profile of the patients might potentially alter their drug response. This idea was becoming another piece of my PhD zigzag puzzle. I am grateful to the professors and researchers who enriched my proposal and formulated the works that aligned with mainstream research. In fact, those constructive suggestions have broadened my spectrum and reminded me of not to see things in single direction; but different directions that may open another new insights.

Invited by TMDU to ISP2009

To my luck, I was invited to attend TMDU's International Summer Program (ISP) 2009, entitled 'Recent Advances in Cancer Research' and which took place at the TMDU Faculty of Dentistry Auditorium. The event was well organized, and featured discussion of mainstream and emerging topics by bringing cancer research scientists altogether. During the lab visit session, (based upon our research interests) I was allocated in pharmacogenetic group. Guides brought us to the relevant laboratories, and explained a number of advanced research facilities and campus services. All in all, the TMDU laboratorial environment was very impressive and laboratories were very well equipped.

In addition, TMDU organized a half-day trip to nearby tourist spots, such as Asakusa Shrine and Odaiba (Rainbow Bridge). And, interestingly, we took a river cruise from Hinode Pier. In short, we had a true taste of traditional and modern Tokyo.

The memory I left behind held far greater and much deeper meaning than the actual one. The moment to share all the findings in conference was precious as different opinions intervene for the better ones. Also, learning about Japanese culture and experiencing Japanese hospitality brought us warmth right to the bottom of our hearts.

Journey defines the goal

Working in research is like traveling on a road. Research teammates, friends and other researchers share ideas and resources, help each other and care for each other. These interactions may be the greatest virtue of the experience. Throughout the journey, trouble happens, but life goes on.

Henry Miller once said: "One's destination of is never a place, but a new way of seeing things." I wish those on the research path a joyful 'journey'. Be sure to get off the beaten path to find out the values that making us stand out.