

Improving lives across borders

THE whistling sound of the incoming mortar shells was followed by explosions as the mortar hit its target. It was a war zone and Alvin Teo Kuo Jing was in the midst of it. He is not a soldier used to armed conflict – he is a pharmacist who chose to be there.

Two years after graduating from UCSI University (UCSI) in 2010 and working for the Malacca General Hospital, Alvin felt that he wanted to – and could – do more.

“My career and salary prospects were good but I knew I could serve a bigger purpose,” he said.

He decided to join the international humanitarian organisation Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), also known as Doctors Without Borders. The application process took six months and was one of the toughest Alvin had undergone, where he was tested on multiple aspects from his knowledge to his character. Alvin credited his experience as the organising chairperson of UCSI’s Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences Annual Public Health Campaign for preparing him for his role as a pharmacist with the MSF. He said that the campaign was a smaller-scale version of the humanitarian projects that he does now.

“The training at UCSI transformed us from students to pharmacists. It helped pave our professional pathways, enabling us to contribute to the betterment of community health and well-being,” he said.

UCSI’s Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences stands out as one of Malaysia’s first pharmacy schools and has a proud record of education and research in pharmaceutical sciences since 2000. What sets the faculty apart from other institutions is its focus on students’ soft skills and hands-on learning.

Since 2002, the faculty has brought its Annual Public Health Campaign nationwide, promoting public health awareness on critical diseases, importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and other health-related issues to communities in different states. This endeavour has impacted more than 10,000 people so far.

It provides avenues for students to apply their knowledge and nurtures the development of soft skills that are important in an evolving healthcare industry. This experience, and more, gives students an edge in the working world. It is in line with the UCSI’s praxis approach, which advocates the application of theory to practice.

Echoing the sentiment is Liew Chui Ting, UCSI’s current Bachelor in Pharmacy (Hons) student who recently returned from a

research endeavour at the University of British Columbia, one of Canada’s most prestigious universities. Her decision to advance the discovery of new potential drugs for Parkinson’s disease at the university gained her immense experience that will help propel her forward in her career.

“Most undergraduate students will not think about conducting research during their degree years overseas and at a well-known university. However, UCSI made it happen for me and this gives me an extra edge that will certainly help when I pursue research in the future,” she said.

At UCSI, undergraduate students advancing science at institutions and research centres of global repute happens on an annual basis. Known as the *Star Trek* initiative, the programme sees UCSI collaborating with the world’s best universities and research labs, opening doors for students and staff.

Three UCSI medical students were selected by Harvard University to pursue a year-long intercalated research in their laboratories. Meanwhile, several engineering students have pursued research stints at Imperial College London and Tsinghua University in China. Liew joined her classmates Chee Zhen Wei and Yau Mei Qian to pursue cutting-edge research at the University of British Columbia. Chee pursued research on creating mutated KCNQ2 gene that contained epilepsy mutations obtained from patients at the British Columbia Children’s Hospital while Yau advanced the discovery of a new anti-epilepsy drug. They are the first pharmacy students from UCSI to advance knowledge via *Star Trek*.

The pharmacy programme’s allure is further boosted by UCSI’s national and global standings. UCSI is classified under Tier 5 – the highest ranking received by universities in Malaysia – in the Setara rating exercise conducted by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. It is also one of the few Malaysian private universities to be ranked in the top 350 of the QS Asian University Rankings for two years consecutively. This comes on the back of increasing research output, internationalisation and affiliations with renowned universities like Harvard University, Imperial College London, the University of Melbourne and more.

■ Find out more about UCSI University’s Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, call 03-9101 8882 or e-mail www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry.

UCSI's pharmacy graduate Alvin Teo during his mission to South Sudan as part of the humanitarian team from Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders).



Pharmacy students Liew, Chee and Yau were selected to pursue cutting-edge research at one of Canada's most prestigious universities.