

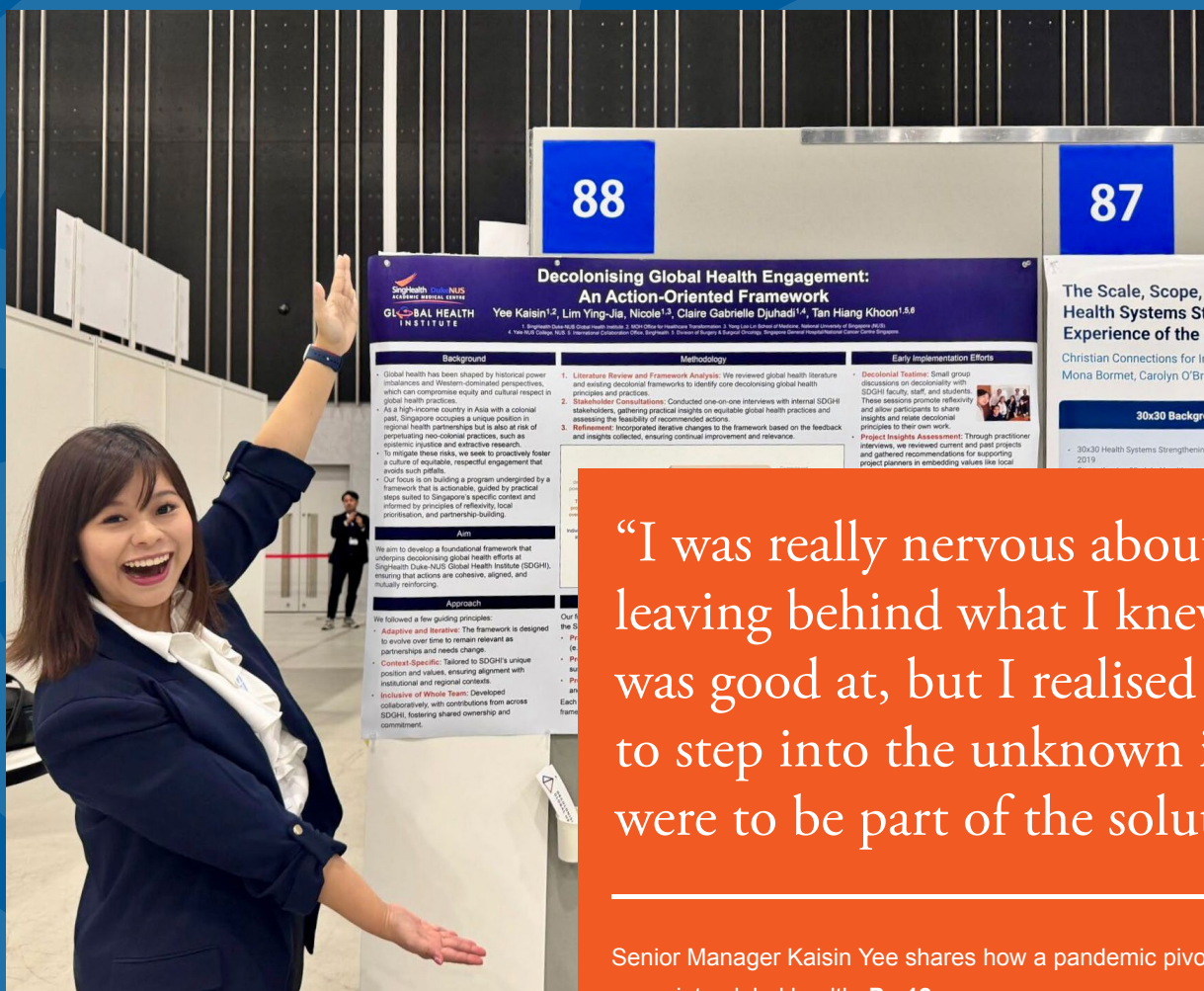
# THE GLOBAL ROOTS

## New leadership, renewed focus

Professor London Lucien Ooi reflects on SDGHI's evolving role in global health and shares his vision for building stronger partnerships, empowering people, and building health in Asia—for all, by all. **Pg 02**

## From Singapore to the world

Two Duke-NUS students share powerful reflections from their time in Sri Lanka and Nepal, where listening, learning, and leading in unfamiliar contexts reshaped their understanding of healthcare, equity, and what it truly means to serve. **Pg 09**



“I was really nervous about leaving behind what I knew I was good at, but I realised I had to step into the unknown if I were to be part of the solution”

Senior Manager Kaisin Yee shares how a pandemic pivot sparked her move into global health. **Pg 12**





## Foreword from the Director

Prof London Lucien Ooi, Director, SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute

Stepping into my role at SDGHI these past few months has been both humbling and energising. What struck me immediately was the shared sense of purpose that runs through this community—a drive to improve health outcomes across Asia that feels urgent, real, and deeply personal. Though we are a small entity, SDGHI acts as a powerful prism, bringing together the strengths of SingHealth and Duke-NUS Medical School, and focusing them into high-impact action.

As SDGHI's third Director, I'm inspired by how far the Institute has come since Clin Assoc Prof Tan Hiang Khoon's time. Today, we are entering a new phase: consolidating our activities, building a stronger and more intentional structure, and placing people at the heart of everything we do. When we invest in our people, empower them, and help them grow, success naturally follows.

Looking ahead, our priority over the next three years is clear: to grow SDGHI's global health stature—not by expanding manpower, but by working smarter, forging more strategic partnerships, and better engaging our broader Academic Medical Centre

(AMC). By strengthening SingHealth's presence and collaborating across the region, we can make meaningful contributions to the global health space.

Global health cannot be pursued in isolation. Collaboration is vital—not just in what we offer, but in what we can learn. Our Regional Collaborating Centres (RCCs) are a testament to that spirit of mutual exchange and regional solidarity.

SDGHI may still be young, but our mission is strong. We carry the potential to amplify the efforts of our entire AMC. The energy within SDGHI is real and it's only the beginning. As we channel our collective passion into action, I'm excited for what lies ahead. Let's move forward together, **building health in Asia—for all, by all**. "For all" speaks to our commitment to health equity. "By all" reminds us that true progress depends on collaboration, partnership, and shared ownership.

If you missed it, the announcement of SDGHI's new leadership is available [here](#).



The newly launched Regional Collaboration Centre (RCC) in Hanoi marks an important step forward in SDGHI's commitment to fostering regional partnerships, joining established hubs in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. This third and latest addition strengthens efforts to promote shared learning and sustainable health improvements across Southeast Asia.

Established through a joint effort between the SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute (SDGHI) and Hanoi Medical University (HMU), the new RCC is set to become a cornerstone for advancing medical research, academic exchange and healthcare innovation in the region; formalising long-standing collaborations while creating new opportunities for collective progress.

To date, Vietnam–Singapore partnerships have focused on issues such as mental health, non-communicable diseases, pathogen genomics and early childhood development. With the RCC now in place, these collaborations are poised to scale up and evolve, offering a platform for even deeper engagement and impact.

Read the press release [here](#).

## Deepening ties in Southeast Asia: RCC launches in Hanoi



Partners from the Regional Collaborating Centres in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, and Medan, Indonesia coming together to celebrate the launch in Hanoi.



# Bridging borders: how trust shaped the Hanoi RCC launch

The journey to launching the Hanoi Regional Collaboration Centre (RCC) didn't happen overnight. The groundwork began in late 2023 through several collaborative projects onsite and virtual engagements, during which we built mutual trust and respect between teams in SDGHI, Singapore and HMU, Vietnam.

"Project-level collaboration is important, but lasting impact depends on a deeper commitment – like adopting a co-investment model", shared Asst. Prof. Vincent Pang, who spearheaded the collaboration with the Hanoi Medical University with the support of team members from both SDGHI and SingHealth International Collaboration Office.

This launch is particularly meaningful for him: it's his first time leading a centre with a global health flavour, building on his past leadership experience. "What stood out most was seeing how relationships built over the years can truly shape a more sustainable model."



*Prof. Nguyễn Hữu Tu, Rector, Hanoi Medical University, and Asst. Prof. Vincent Pang interacting with guest before the launch of the Hanoi RCC.*

The Hanoi RCC aims to incubate regional excellence in areas that matter deeply to both countries, including mental health, infectious disease, and health system strengthening. With key ministries based in Hanoi, the centre is well-positioned to also support policy alignment and translation of research findings.

Looking ahead, a joint steering committee will provide strategic direction, while working groups will focus on strengthening thematic collaboration through grant applications, and capacity building with local partners.

"We're not just starting new projects. We're empowering partners to strengthen their existing capabilities and ability to lead in the public health domains in their communities. We believe that meaningful impact begins in joint Global Health partnerships", emphasised Asst. Prof. Vincent Pang.

Explore more of SDGHI's growing regional presence [here](#).



*(From left): Asst. Prof. Vincent Pang, Prof. Thomas Coffman, Mr. Donald Tsang Tsz Lok, Prof. Ivy Ng Swee Lian, Prof. London Lucien Ooi, and Prof. Ong Biauwh Chi at the launch of the Hanoi RCC.*



## Championing planetary health: Dr Renzo Guinto receives global honours

We are proud to share that Dr Renzo R. Guinto, Associate Professor of Global and Planetary Health at SDGHI, has been awarded the [1st Kiyoshi Kurokawa Award](#) by the Health and Global Policy Institute (HGPI). Presented in Tokyo at the Health Policy Summit 2025, this prestigious accolade recognises young leaders who are driving transformative change in health policy. The award aims to amplify their impact across the Asia-Pacific region and onto the global stage. Dr Guinto was recognised for his trailblazing work in planetary health – an emerging field that highlights the vital links between human health and the health of our planet.



*Assoc. Prof. Renzo Guinto receiving his award from Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Honorary Chairman for Life, Health and Global Policy Institute, at the Health Policy Summit 2025 in Tokyo, Japan.*

At SDGHI, Dr. Guinto leads our [Planetary Health initiative](#), to advance the health of people and the planet in Asia and beyond through education, research, innovation, policy, advocacy, and clinical excellence. This initiative addresses the triple planetary crises identified by the United Nations – climate change, environmental pollution, and biodiversity loss – and promotes sustainable solutions not only for health systems but also for the wider systems that influence health: including food, cities, energy, transport, and the economy. The goal is to build climate-resilient, ecologically sustainable health systems that safeguard present and future generations.

Learn more about Dr. Guinto's recognition [here](#).



# Innovation meets urgency: Asia-Pacific Hackathon sparks bold health-climate solutions

From intensifying heatwaves to worsening floods, the climate crisis is already reshaping the region's health landscape. In response, the Asia-Pacific Global Health Innovation Hackathon 2025, held in Singapore on 17 and 18 January, set out to catalyse bold, youth-led ideas to protect vulnerable communities.

Jointly hosted by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medicine Innovation Institute, the SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute, and the SingHealth International Collaboration Office, under the auspices of the SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medical Centre, this first of its kind event brought together 16 diverse teams from 13 markets across the Asia-Pacific. Their challenge: to design scalable, tech-enabled solutions to real-world climate and health threats - within just 48 hours.

The [three winning teams](#) have now embarked on a six-month incubation programme—each valued at SGD 25,000—to transform their concepts into fundable, real-world solutions.

With guidance from mentors in health, sustainability, and innovation, participants will benefit from a two-week intensive, in-person session in Singapore, followed by ongoing virtual support. More than just a competition, the hackathon has become a launchpad for mentorship, cross-border collaboration, and mission-driven innovation. From disaster preparedness to clean water access, the ideas put forward reflect the power of collective action in shaping a climate-resilient future for health.

[Learn more about Team LungGuardian's journey and innovation.](#)



# Singapore unveils new Asia hub to champion mental health innovation across the region



From 17 to 19 February 2025, more than 300 mental health leaders, researchers and policymakers from 26 countries gathered in Singapore for the inaugural Global Mental Health in Asia Symposium—a milestone moment for the region's mental health movement.

Hosted by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute (SDGHI), and supported by an array of partners, including the World Bank, the event tackled urgent challenges such as mental health financing, climate-related stressors, service gaps, and stigma; while spotlighting home-grown innovations that are already making a difference across Asia.

A key highlight was the official launch of the Mental Health Innovation Network (MHIN) Asia Hub, established in partnership between SDGHI and MHIN. Headquartered in Singapore, the new hub will serve as a regional platform to share innovative resources and ideas to promote mental health support across Asia.

For attendees, the Symposium reinforced that Asia is not just catching up addressing mental health across the region - it's leading with courage, creativity, and collaboration.

[Global Mental Health  
in Asia Symposium –  
Official Press Release](#)

[Asia's Mental Health  
Turning Point – Feature  
Article](#)

[Global Mental Health  
in Asia Symposium –  
Recap Video](#)





## MHIN Asia Hub: connecting and showcasing mental health innovation across Asia

The Mental Health Innovation Network (MHIN) is a global platform co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. With established hubs in Latin America & the Caribbean and Africa, the Asia Hub is proudly hosted by SDGHI in Singapore.

As the MHIN Asia hub, we help to maintain the online repository of resources and innovations coming out of the countries affiliated with the WHO Western Pacific and Southeast Asia regions. The platform serves as a dynamic space for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and cross-border collaboration, ensuring that impactful work from Asia gains the recognition it deserves.

### Here's what MHIN Asia offers:

- Resource repository: an evolving online collection of innovations, tools, and research from the region.
- Spotighting innovation: identifying and showcasing promising initiatives, often overlooked in global mental health discourse, and helping position them for recognition or investment.
- Blogs & webinars: engaging content and regional discussions on key mental health challenges, practices, and policies.

- Cross-country learning: facilitating connections between innovators working on similar interventions; such as adaptations of the Friendship Bench – a community-based mental health model where trained lay counsellors offer talk therapy on benches - to promote shared learning and collaborative scaling.

To be featured on the MHIN platform, innovations should demonstrate some form of evaluation to showcase their effectiveness or efficacy. We recognise that not all organisations have access to the resources needed for comprehensive evaluations - yet. In such cases, the SDGHI Global Mental Health Team can offer technical expertise and advisory support to strengthen evaluation capacity and build a robust evidence base, to scale their innovations and solutions with confidence.

**Explore the MHIN Asia Hub and discover how your work can be part of this growing regional network.**

[www.mhinnovation.net](http://www.mhinnovation.net)

**You are welcome to email us at:**

[mhin-asia@duke-nus.edu.sg](mailto:mhin-asia@duke-nus.edu.sg)

## Where medicine meets humanity: field lessons from Sri Lanka and Nepal

Now in its sixteenth year, Project Dove continues to offer Duke-NUS medical students an immersive platform to engage in sustainable healthcare delivery and education across underserved communities in Asia. A student-led initiative supported by Duke-NUS Student Affairs, Project Dove is guided by dedicated faculty who accompany each trip. This year, students Krishaa and Vanessa share insights from their experiences in Sri Lanka and Nepal — encounters that not only shaped their clinical perspectives but reaffirmed their commitment to health equity.



For Krishaa, Sri Lanka's post-conflict public health landscape offered a chance to witness care delivered with immense resilience. During one community screening, she met a woman who, despite needing treatment for anaemia, prioritised joint pain that affected her ability to work. "It was a powerful reminder that clinical priorities are not just medical — they're human," she shared. Her team, accompanied by Dr Ignasius Aditya Jappar (Cardiology), Dr Christelle Chow (General Paediatrics), and Ms Goh Siew Li, addressed local health challenges such as betel nut chewing and non-communicable diseases. For the first time, they also introduced a speech therapy initiative for children with special needs. Developed with a visiting therapist from KKH, the pilot included a needs-based assessment and training for local educators — laying the foundation for more inclusive allied health support. "We weren't there to impose solutions," Krishaa reflected. "We were there to learn, co-create, and respond meaningfully."



In Nepal, Vanessa joined the team for Project Dove's second year of engagement — and helped pilot its first community-focused health education curriculum. Partnering with Peace Child Ministry and local physicians, the team ran medical camps and delivered sessions shaped by needs identified by local stakeholders. One encounter stood out: an elderly man, deceived by a false healing event, sought help at their hostel. "Watching his daughter cry quietly as we tended to him was heartbreaking. It brought home the devastating consequences of healthcare inaccessibility," Vanessa recounted.

Supported by Dr Lim Gim Hui (Occupational Medicine), Dr Toh Liying (Paediatric Emergency Medicine), and Dr Preetha Madhukumar (Surgical Oncology), the Nepal team revised their wound care materials after learning that standard items were unaffordable for many families. "Health equity means meeting people where they are, not where we want them to be," Vanessa said. "Real change comes not from doing more, but from listening better."

Both students also spoke candidly about leadership — navigating uncertainty, managing logistics, and confronting moments of self-doubt. In doing so, they discovered a shared truth: that leadership isn't about having all the answers, but about creating space for collaboration and trust.

For Krishaa and Vanessa, Project Dove offered more than a field placement — it was a lens to reimagine what compassionate, community-rooted healthcare can look like. As Krishaa puts it, "Global health begins not with action, but with humility." Vanessa adds: "Carry the heart and offer your hands. The rest will follow."





## Graduate Certificate in Global Health Practice in Asia

4 X 1-WEEK SESSIONS • PART-TIME • IN-PERSON

- Learn about Global Health with an Asian focus
- Provides deeper understanding of Asia's healthcare challenges and intervention approaches
- Taught by practitioners
- Choose from 5 electives



Scan to find out more

## Graduate Certificate in Global Health Innovation

4 X 1-WEEK SESSIONS • PART-TIME • IN-PERSON

- Gain technical tools and frameworks to develop, evaluate and implement innovations
- Master design-thinking, systems thinking and needs analysis
- Builds on the fundamental insights of Global Health practice in Asia



Scan to find out more

[www.duke-nus.edu.sg/sdghi](http://www.duke-nus.edu.sg/sdghi)



## Townhall

Monday, 26 May • 4.30PM • Duke-NUS Amphitheatre



REGISTER NOW



Special guest appearance: Prof. Michael Merson, Founding Director of SDGHI

## Global Health Voices

Stay tuned for our next podcast episode on 1 July 2025!

Across six thought-provoking episodes, hosts Glen Koh and Natasha Tsai explore themes of access, power, purpose, and identity, inviting listeners to reflect on what truly shapes global health:

1. What even IS global health? – answering the question everyone asks
2. Chance encounters: getting to global health
3. Not from Geneva, practising from Southeast Asia
4. The path less travelled (Read: Underfunded)
5. Inside or outside the ivory tower – where are we really?
6. Privilege and power: colourblind saviourism

Explore the often unspoken realities of working in global health – how people find their way into the field, the tensions they navigate, and why perspectives from Asia and the Global South are vital to shaping its future.

Whether you're new to the field or have long worked in it, we invite you to tune in, reflect, and hear from voices that might challenge, inspire or broaden your view.

[In the meantime, discover our previous episodes here.](#)





# From patient to population: journey towards equitable global health

Find out the motivations, interests, and expertise, behind Kaisin's work in the field of global health and feel free to reach out to her for collaboration opportunities!



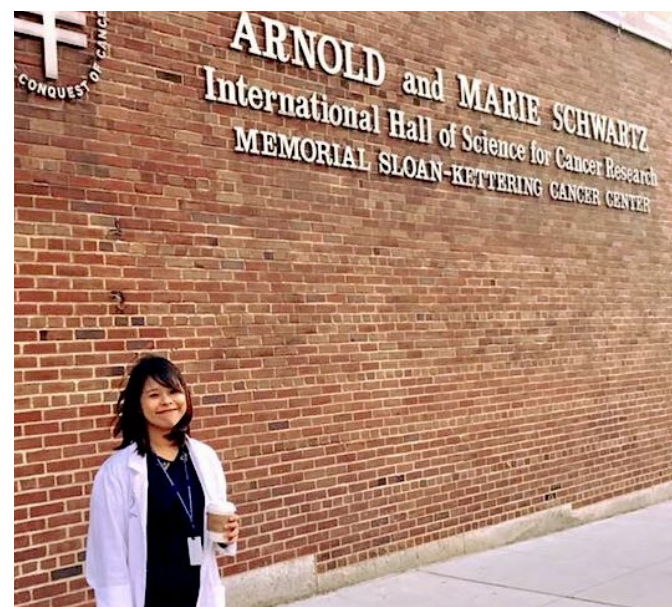
## Kaisin Yee

Senior Manager, Global Health Systems  
SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute

Kaisin Yee's journey into global health didn't begin in a classroom or a policy office—it began in the clinic. For over a decade, she served as a speech and language therapist with SingHealth, leading allied health efforts in a multidisciplinary head and neck oncology service. Her work spanned the rehabilitation of patients after cancer treatment, the development of competency frameworks, and the set-up of cross-disciplinary clinics. While these contributions were impactful, Kaisin grew increasingly unsettled by systemic barriers that prevented patients from consistently accessing the care they deserved.

It was during the COVID-19 pandemic that her pivot toward global health took shape. Deployed to the Community Care Facility at the Singapore Expo, she coordinated holistic care of low-wage migrant workers under quarantine, addressing mental health, policy communication, and even practical needs such as salary remittance. The experience was eye-opening, revealing deep systemic inequities and sparking a realisation: to address these challenges meaningfully, she would need to broaden her sphere of impact beyond clinical work. "I was really nervous about leaving behind what I knew I was good at, but I realised I had to step into the unknown if I were to be part of the solution," she reflected.

Supported by a MOH Holdings scholarship, she pursued a Master of Public Health in Global Health at Harvard University, where she deepened her understanding of health systems and reform. Today, she holds a joint appointment managing organisational strategy at the MOH Office for Healthcare Transformation and at SDGHI, where she partners with SingHealth clinicians to build health systems capacity strengthening initiatives across Asia and the Pacific.



Kaisin spent three months in New York completing her clinical fellowship in speech therapy at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Travelling and working with health system leaders and policymakers in Asia has strengthened her appreciation for regional capacity and context. During a visit to a community health worker programme in Assam, India, she was struck by how local teams had developed innovative models of healthcare delivery that were deeply rooted in community realities and local needs. "When we visit lower-resourced settings, we tend to look for gaps and what is lacking, and miss the ingenuity and existing strengths," she said. "There's a lot to learn if we begin from a place of curiosity and humility."

Increasingly, Kaisin's work and writing have centred around decolonisation and reflexivity in global health. In a recent article for [The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific](#), she and her team challenge Singapore's position in global health, asking whether the country's neutral stance is a barrier to achieving the structural change it champions. For her, dismantling imbalanced

systems and amplifying underrepresented voices are no longer optional but central to the future of global health. She works with staff, faculty, and students to embed principles of decolonisation, such as shared leadership, reciprocal partnerships, and critical self-reflection, into global health practice.

Looking back, Kaisin doesn't see her journey as a break from clinical practice, but as an expansion of the same values that drew her to it: care, equity, and impact. "Every step in your career builds on the last," she shares. "You don't have to be fearless to take the next step, just be ready to grow into it. There's space in global health for people with all kinds of backgrounds, and we need more voices at the table." Her journey is a reminder that global health isn't a distant field, but something that you can grow into, starting from wherever you are.



Kaisin collaborated with community health workers from the GNRC Affordable Health Mission in Assam, India.

### Connect and Collaborate

SDGHI works with partners in the region to advance health and wellbeing in Asia and beyond. Reach out to our faculty for collaboration opportunities [here](#).

### Be Featured as A Global Health Warrior

If you would like to be featured as our Global Health Warrior, or know one who should be featured, connect with us at [sdghicomms@groups.nus.edu.sg](mailto:sdghicomms@groups.nus.edu.sg)





# Stay connected with our work

The **SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute (SDGHI)** is an enabling platform for global health activities across the Singhealth Duke-NUS Academic Medical Centre. Bringing together partners from across the region and beyond, we work to address current and emerging health challenges in our region. Want to stay updated on our work?

Subscribe to our newsletter via [duke-nus.edu.sg/sdghi/contact-us](https://duke-nus.edu.sg/sdghi/contact-us).



The **Duke-NUS Centre for Outbreak Preparedness (COP)** was established in 2022 to advance the application of pathogen genomics for early disease detection and response. By bridging research, training, policy, and practice, COP aims to strengthen regional health security across South and Southeast Asia.



Have thoughts or suggestions for Global Roots? Is there something you'd like to see in future issues? Let us know at [sdghicomms@groups.nus.edu.sg](mailto:sdghicomms@groups.nus.edu.sg)