Hackathon 2019

I am Matthew Ong, an NUS pharmacy (BSc) undergraduate student who was generously granted the opportunity to travel to Las Vegas, USA to take part in the ISPE Annual General Meeting and Hackathon in October 2019.



ISPE Annual General Meeting

The three-day ISPE Annual General Meeting was hosted in Caesars Palace, which provided a fantastic environment for hosting a series of educational talks, poster presentations, plenary addresses and networking events. Of the talks I attended, I was particularly touched by an address by John Crowley, CEO of Amicus Therapeutics, about his personal journey and struggle to find a treatment for his children who had Pompe Disease, a rare illness which was (at the time) untreatable. Complimented by various other talks from representatives of various companies such as Bluebird Bio and Roche, the ISPE conference was a reminder that beyond customers, we serve patients. Our work is meaningful because we grant these patients the hope for a healthier tomorrow.





Hackathon

The main highlight of the 2019 annual general meeting was participating in the ISPE Student and Young Professional Hackathon. The hackathon brought together students and young professionals alike from different institutes and backgrounds to tackle the challenge of “Designing a Facility in the Year 2030”. Each team was presented a theme to work towards, mine being “flexibility”.

It was a fantastic and enjoyable experience collaborating with my teammates from the United States in this Hackathon. The Hackathon served as an excellent avenue to bring together a team of participants from (literally) opposite ends of the world to pool our different expertise together to challenge norms in pharmaceutical manufacturing. Our team ultimately came up with the idea for project Mini Xoom, a podular manufacturing plant, focused on the idea of scaling out rather than scaling up.



It was a surreal feeling being selected to be the winning team. When Team 4 (our team) was initially announced as the winning team, I distinctly recall us slowly piecing together that we were “Team 4” and the ensuing exhilaration we all felt.

People



Of course, describing my experience would not be complete without talking about the people I met along the way. Having the chance to work with my wonderful Hackathon team-mates, Elise, Sophie, Yemisi, Catherine and Katherine made participating in the Hackathon as fun as it was. The event was also a fantastic avenue both to catch up with my Thai and Filipino friends from the ISPE Singapore Affiliate Conference earlier in the year, as well as network with and get to know peers from the United States and Europe.

I would also like to specially thank the Members of the Singapore Affiliate, Pierre, Shan Shan, Catherine, Hong Ping, and Linda that took care of this confused young adult during his first trip to the States.





Concluding Remarks

Attending the ISPE Annual General Meeting has reinvigorated my passion for the pharmaceutical industry. Evidently, ISPE values the quality of its members and invests generously into their development. Participating in the 2019 ISPE AGM has been a memorable and enriching experience. I enthusiastically look forward to the next opportunity to participate in an ISPE organised event.

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