PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Singapore to Sweden by motorbike for Asian breast cancer research

23,000km odyssey to raise funds, awareness of disease

Two professors are preparing to take breast cancer education on the road, literally, by riding their motorcycles from Singapore to Sweden.

The 23,000km journey by Associate Professors Philip Iau and Mikael Hartman is part of the celebrations by the National University of Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine’s Department of Surgery, which is marking the centennial of the appointment of the first chair of surgery.

The two surgeons aim to increase awareness of breast cancer, as well as raise money to fund research into the disease, which accounts for almost 30% of all cancers diagnosed in Singapore and is also the most common cause of cancer death in women. The disease accounts for 18% of cancer deaths in women.

The four-month odyssey on motorcycles, which will begin in March next year, will take them on an expedition through 17 countries, across Asia and into Europe. Along the way, stops will be made at cancer treatment centres. At these places, they will meet with cancer doctors as well as patients and carers, participate in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and conduct health education sessions.

“This trip will be attempting to increase breast cancer awareness but possibly not in the usual way. There are now more cancers in Asia than in Western countries, and we want to tell their story – what is it like to be an Asian woman with breast cancer – the access to care, the cultural and religious views on treatment, the effect of that treatment. Theirs is a story that deserves telling.” said Assoc Prof Philip Iau, a trauma and breast cancer surgeon as well as a faculty member of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and a motorbike enthusiast who has ridden to Malaysia and Thailand.
His fellow bike enthusiast and colleague, Assoc Prof Mikael Hartman, lectures at the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health. “We also aim to study, along with anthropologists and social work specialists, the socio-cultural influences on breast cancer and related health seeking behavior. The varied beliefs regarding breast cancer across Asian societies have harmful impacts such as late presentation and lack of acceptance of treatment options; resulting in too many lives lost too early. In the face of such dire circumstances, we feel compelled to spotlight the barriers and help bring about policy changes, establish awareness programs and improve access to care through our efforts,” Assoc Prof Hartman said.

The journey, named *The Long Ride 2014 – Singapore to Sweden For Breast Cancer Research*, will kick off on 21 March 2014. The two riders, accompanied by a support vehicle, will traverse Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran, before crossing into Europe and ending at the campus of the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. The Institute has a long-standing partnership with the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in the area of cancer research and is also Assoc Prof Hartman’s alma mater.

The trip promises to be an arduous one, with unpredictable weather, road conditions, and reams of required paperwork for border crossings. Still, the two travelers are unfazed. “All we can do is to be as prepared as possible, and then keep a fluid mental state to respond to what challenges may come.” said Assoc Prof Iau, who served for five months in Afghanistan in 2010 with the Singapore Armed Forces as a trauma specialist attending to war wounded.

They believe that whatever rigors they face on the road to Sweden pales in comparison with the quiet bravery and determination that many of their breast cancer patients exhibit in coping with their illnesses. “We hope the ride will be a modest tribute to the extraordinary courage we see on a daily basis in our patients as they go through the phases of breast cancer screening, treatment and survivorship,” said Assoc Prof Hartman.

“While our difficulties in the planning and running of this mission end with our destination, the patients’ struggles continue, and we hope that providing a research fund to help understand their disease will be an enterprise that as many people as possible will want to participate in.”

The duo expect to return to Singapore in July next year.

All expenses for the trip itself will be self-funded and contributions towards their effort will go to the Breast Cancer Research Fund, which will be administered by the NUS. The money will be used to support basic, clinical and behavioural research in areas where research funding is needed. Donations are tax-exempt and will attract a one-to-one matching amount from the Singapore Government.

Ends
For more information on The Long Ride, visit www.longridess.com

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About the National University of Singapore (NUS)

A leading global university centred in Asia, the National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore’s flagship university, which offers a global approach to education and research, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise.

NUS has 16 faculties and schools across three campuses. Its transformative education includes a broad-based curriculum underscored by multi-disciplinary courses and cross-faculty enrichment. Over 37,000 students from 100 countries enrich the community with their diverse social and cultural perspectives.

NUS has three Research Centres of Excellence (RCE) and 23 university-level research institutes and centres. It is also a partner in Singapore’s fifth RCE. NUS shares a close affiliation with 16 national-level research institutes and centres. Research activities are strategic and robust, and NUS is well-known for its research strengths in engineering, life sciences and biomedicine, social sciences and natural sciences. It also strives to create a supportive and innovative environment to promote creative enterprise within its community.

For more information, please visit www.nus.edu.sg

About the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM)

Established in 1905, the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine was the first institution of higher learning in Singapore and the genesis of what would become the National University of Singapore. The School offers one of the finest undergraduate medical programs in the Asia Pacific region and commands international recognition and respect.

The latest university rankings from Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) have again rated the School as Asia’s best for the third consecutive year. Globally, it is now ranked 20th, up one spot from its 2012 ranking.
The School admits 300 students to its medical undergraduate degree programme annually. The School strives to fulfil its tripartite mission of providing excellent clinical care, training the next generation of healthcare professionals, and fostering research that will transform the practice of medicine. It plays a pivotal role in producing future leaders in healthcare delivery, discovery and public service as well as in Singapore’s Biomedical Sciences Initiative and Singapore Medicine, a medical tourism initiative.

The School’s 16 departments in the basic sciences and clinical specialties work closely with the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies and the Centre for Biomedical Ethics to ensure that teaching and research are aligned and relevant to Singapore’s healthcare needs.

For more information about the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, please visit http://medicine.nus.edu.sg/corporate/

About the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH)

Established in October 2011, the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health builds upon 60 years of experience in research, teaching and practice as a Department of Epidemiology and Public Health. Moving beyond the traditional domains of chronic disease aetiology and risk factors, the SSHSPH emphasizes new technologies and methods to measure and monitor exposure and disease, as well as new approaches to develop and implement public health programmes and policies. With a distinctly Asian focus, SSHSPH’s existing strengths include chronic disease epidemiology, statistical genomics and workplace health as well as a well-developed Master of Public Health programme.

For more information, please visit http://www.sph.nus.edu.sg/.