An incredible three-day workshop on Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR), was held in the Faculty of Medicine (FOM) last April (4th, 5th and 9th April 2019). The workshop culminated from discussions between Young Scientist Network-Academy of Sciences Malaysia (YSN-ASM) and FOM, UM. It was officiated by our beloved Dean of Research, Professor Dr. Ng Chirn Jenn.

It was our pleasure to have a number of qualified trainers and facilitators in the workshop, including Professor Dr. Abhimanyu Veerakumarasivam from Sunway University and Dr. Chau De Ming from University Putra Malaysia (UPM), also Chair of the YSN Science Integrity working group. Familiar faces of UM's homegrown charismatic leaders are Dr. Chai Lay Ching from Institute of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Science (Chair of YSN), as well as Dr. Tee Kok Keng from the Department of Medical Microbiology and Dr. Phan Chia Wei (Co-chair of YSN Science Outreach working group) from the Department of Pharmacy, Faculty of Medicine. Eight other trainers jumpstarted conversations that trickled only at first but gushed forth thick and fast as the workshop progressed. Participants comprised researchers, academicians and clinicians of varying levels of seniority and fields in FOM.

The workshop aspired to create awareness and promote the concept of RCR, which is to inculcate, promote and sustain an environment of research integrity among academicians and researchers for the first time in FOM, UM. The conversations flying back and forth during the workshop revolved around key principles of ethics, research misconduct, authorship, peer review and publication, mentor-mentee relationship, conflict of interest, data management, financial responsibility, culture of safety, collaborative research and strategies.
research spotlight
to foster research integrity.

A distinct feature of this workshop is the active learning pedagogy that engaged even the sceptics amongst us, with case studies, team-based learning, peer-instruction and role-play being employed to the hilt. With senior professors mingling with junior lecturers, one of the role-plays tackled topics pertaining to mentor-mentee relationship and authorship in a hilarious manner, while making us contemplate the serious undertones that although the role-play may be fictional, the situation can be real and causes dire consequences when left unchecked. This is the case with research misconduct arising from poor supervision and questionable practices. This is particularly important as the incidence of reported cases of research misconduct has been increasing in academic settings nowadays. Apart from that, case studies also teased out our perception of certain grey areas in publication and conflicts of interest. Many times, the actions of researchers are led by their intentions as appropriate references and guidance are not available.

We even dabbled in painting, with each of us lovingly applying strokes of water-colours on our first ‘draft’ of a painting, but then we had to pass around our ‘masterpiece’ to another colleague who was then instructed to add on to the painting. Surprisingly, some of us turned into ‘Monets’ out of the ‘collaboration’ – hidden talents coming to the fore! However, it was not just watercolours and fun – the painting activity brought home the consequences of collaborative research, reiterating the importance of choosing the right collaborators as they can either safeguard or jeopardise our research.

The final curtain was on the reflection of strategies to foster research integrity, and to put in place the best practices, principles and guidelines on conducting research responsibly. Chair of YSN, Dr. Chai Lay Ching prompted us by saying that “change in mindsets and questionable practices will not happen if we simply wait for it; rather we should be the agents of change”. It was indeed a workshop where one entered on Day 1 and left by Day 3 with a kindled sense of purpose. It is imperative that such workshops be extended to UM’s campus community and that on a regular basis to cultivate research integrity as the very foundation of good science.