My PhD Journey: Fundamentally Elementary

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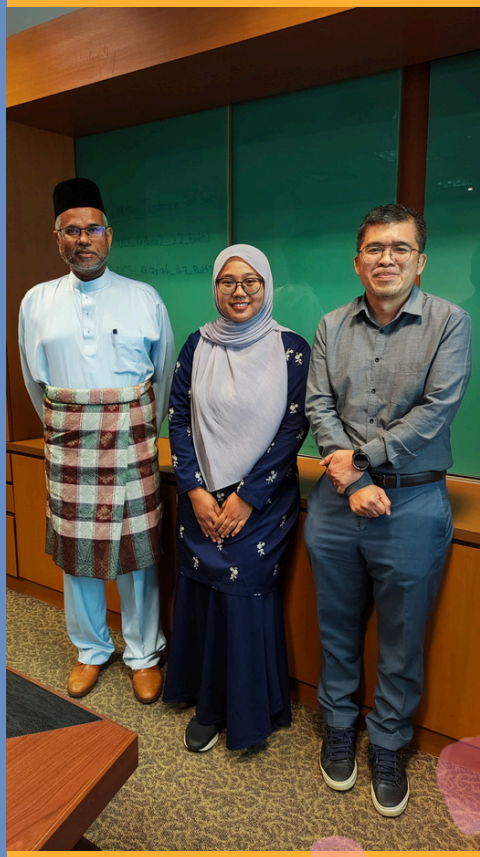
A PhD journey is never linear –it's a tapestry of curiosity, setbacks, late-night breakthroughs, and moments of quiet triumph.

My research focused on understanding the interactions responsible for the non-sedating effect of levocetirizine by analysing drug–amino acid interactions in aqueous solutions, using thermodynamic data to model how certain molecules interact with proteins as they attempt to cross the blood–brain barrier (BBB).

Then came the COVID-19 lockdown.

Like many, I faced unexpected hurdles including lab closures and material delays. However, one of the most impactful challenges was making my research stand out. I struggled to convey the significance of my study to research committees, as my work was mostly data-driven and less hands-on experimentation compared to my peers who were generating visually dramatic results in the lab. This made my research feel less exciting or impactful at times, leading to early demotivation.

Momento



From right: Prof. Dato' Dr. Abu Bakar Abdul Majeed, Dr. Farahanee Zulkiflee, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Meor Mohd Redzuan Meor Affendi

Fortunately, under the guidance and encouragement of my supervisor, AP Dr. Meor Mohd Redzuan, I learnt that fundamental research is equally important as groundbreaking discoveries. The key lies in how we present and frame our data. With renewed perspective, I learned new research tools, exchanged ideas with fellow postgraduates, and found creative ways to transform complex data into tangible forms.

Turning complex data into meaningful insights brought immense satisfaction. My study gained recognition at conferences, and I received queries from researchers who found my published papers interesting and relatable. It was incredibly rewarding to know that my data—and the effort behind it—could resonate with others in the scientific community.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of my PhD was the opportunity to collaborate with others. By working on faculty projects, I applied my skills to real-world problems, gained new knowledge, and built valuable connections. Integrating my research into collaborative projects and witnessing its impact on larger scientific conversations was particularly gratifying.

This journey has taught me more than just academic knowledge. I've learnt resilience, effective teamwork, and the power of perseverance—lessons that will stay with me throughout my career. My PhD experience has shown me that every contribution, no matter how small, plays a crucial role in advancing our understanding of the world.