

# More making mid-career switch to nursing

**Pandemic may have created more appreciation of nursing as a career**

**Charmaine Ng**

More people are looking to switch careers and become nurses through a professional conversion programme for mid-career individuals.

The number of applicants for Workforce Singapore's (WSG) Professional Conversion Programme (PCP) for Registered Nurses (Diploma) has increased three times for the upcoming intake next month, compared with the April intake.

In contrast, application numbers from the past few intakes for the programme have "generally been stable", said WSG's director of the healthcare, social and business services division, Ms Safrah Eusoff.

One of the reasons for the rising interest in nursing among mid-career individuals could be the Covid-19 pandemic, which has created more awareness and appreciation of nursing as a career, she said.

Another reason could be publicity efforts between WSG and the Health Ministry to feature mid-career individuals who have successfully made the transition to nursing, she added.

The programme was originally introduced in 2003 as the Strategic Manpower Conversion Programme, then rebranded in 2008 as the PCP for Registered Nurses (Diploma).

The degree equivalent of the programme was launched in 2018.

The current PCP for Enrolled Nurses replaced in 2014 the previous place-and-train programme for Enrolled Nurses, which was introduced in 2006.

Since 2003, more than 1,350 mid-career Singaporeans and permanent residents have taken part in the three programmes, including



70 who enrolled this year, said WSG.

One of them is Mr Nigel Leong, who at 48 years old is finally pursuing his first passion, nearly three decades after he was dissuaded by his parents from studying nursing.

This year, the former regional quality manager at a multinational company tendered his resignation and took a significant pay cut to join the PCP for Registered Nurses (Degree) in April.

He turned down lucrative job offers from other companies, including one that would allow him to relocate to Switzerland, and decided to make the switch to nursing to contribute back to society.

Mr Leong, who is single, is expected to graduate from the National University of Singapore's Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies

in 2022 as a staff nurse working for SingHealth Community Hospitals (SCH).

He is one of 18 participants of PCP for Registered Nurses programmes over the years who have been sponsored by SCH.

Mr Leong said his passion for healthcare started when he was a combat medic while doing his national service.

"It prompted me to want to pursue a degree in nursing in Sydney, but unfortunately, my parents were against it because of the stigma associated with nursing – in the 1990s, it was seen as a lowly job.

"My father asked me why he should invest so much money for me to study in Sydney to 'clean people's backsides,'" he added with

a chuckle.

He did a degree in food science instead, and remained in that industry for 23 years until he made the career switch.

Ms Stephanie Yeap, director of nursing at SCH, said the working experience of mid-career individuals provides them with a "different outlook and perspective in their care delivery", with skill sets that may complement their clinical skills.

She added that mid-career nurses also tend to have a stronger passion and drive for nursing.

"These mid-career nurses are at the stage of life where they understand themselves better and know what sort of career would suit them best," said Ms Yeap.

ngxtc@sph.com.sg

Assistant Professor Vivien Wu of the National University of Singapore's Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies (left) with first-year nursing students Nigel Leong, 48, and Pristine Lum, 24, during a lesson on Monday at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

## From flying to healthcare

After 14 years of flying with Singapore Airlines as a cabin crew member, Ms Zabrina Kng decided it was time for a career switch to nursing.

Her new career would allow her to pursue her lifelong interest in healthcare and to spend more time with her ageing parents.

She learnt about the Workforce Singapore's Professional Conversion Programme for Registered Nurses (Diploma) in 2017, and set her sights on applying for the two-year programme.

But after finding out that she had missed the intake for the year, she continued working as a cabin crew member for another year so that she could save up for the programme.

By the time her contract with SIA ended in 2018, she had saved \$12,000, which she used to supplement the monthly allowance of around \$2,000 she received from the programme.

But for Ms Kng, 34, it was still an adjustment financially. "Initially when I first started, I really had to adjust my lifestyle. I told myself that since I've made this switch to nursing, I needed to persevere."

Returning to school in her 30s was another challenge. "It was an accelerated diploma which would normally take three years to complete. So the learning curve was very steep for me."

She graduated from the programme in April and began working for Woodlands Health Campus, although she is temporarily stationed at Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

She believes her cabin crew experience has been helpful in her new role, and has taught her skills such as communication, empathy and being able to work well under pressure.

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Ms Zabrina Kng's new career has allowed her to pursue her lifelong interest in healthcare. PHOTO: WOODLANDS HEALTH CAMPUS

