

Child with heart issue grows up wanting to take care of others

She is among 108 aspiring healthcare workers who received scholarships

Natalie Tan

When she was 13, Ms Sarah Anyssa Nor Azmi had a pacemaker implanted to keep her heart beating at the right pace.

She was diagnosed with ventricular septal defect, or a hole in the heart, when she was around six months old. Despite undergoing multiple operations, her heart rate did not return to the normal range, and she had to get a pacemaker.

Having spent a considerable amount of time in hospitals since she was a baby, Ms Sarah's early exposure to the world of healthcare sparked her interest in joining the industry as a provider of such care, rather than as a patient.

On July 26, the 22-year-old received the Healthcare Merit Award for Nursing at the Healthcare Scholarships Award ceremony from the guest of honour, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung.

Ms Sarah was one of 108 recipients of the healthcare scholarships, awarded to aspiring public healthcare workers from 13 health science and healthcare disciplines by MOH Holdings.

This is down from the 161 scholarships awarded in 2023.

Ms Sarah is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science (Nursing) at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, and will be entering her third year in August.

She sees nursing as a profession that allows for the most hands-on interaction with patients, supporting them through their journey from admission to discharge. She was also drawn to nursing's diverse and holistic curriculum.

"Nurses are the middlemen between the doctor and the patient; they are the ones who respond directly to the patient," she said, noting that her parents always recounted positive experiences of nurses assisting her when she was younger.

But more than anything, she hopes that people see patients beyond their medical conditions or disabilities: "I believe at the end of the day, it's also very important to look at people... and focus more on what they can contribute to society despite their challenges."

Mr Ong told the scholarship recipients at the event held at Raffles City Convention Centre that they are entering the healthcare sector at an "exciting time of change", when Singapore is facing one of its biggest social transformations – a

rapidly ageing population.

Not only is the Republic becoming a super-aged society, but healthcare technology is also advancing rapidly – with precision medicine enabling doctors to intervene at the cellular and genetic levels, he said.

"These are powerful forces, driving us to transform our healthcare system to leverage the tools of the future to meet the needs of tomorrow," he added, pointing to national initiatives Healthier SG and Age Well SG, which "invest heavily in preventive care, reshaping the lifestyles of people".

He noted that there are diverse opportunities for the scholarship recipients to work in multidisciplinary care teams across different settings, from hospitals to polyclinics to community care.

Mr Ong said what makes a career in healthcare special is the sense of mission, and it is this sense of mission that propelled scholarship recipient Andrew Chew Chuan Yang into the sector.

Mr Chew, 21, developed an interest in pharmacy in secondary school, when he became the caregiver to his grandmother, who was diagnosed with cancer.

Since then, his life has become "quite intertwined with the healthcare industry". Through accompanying his grandmother to her clinical check-ups at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, he gained a deeper admiration for healthcare professionals.

He remembers one visit where his grandmother was in such great pain that she asked her doctor to euthanise her to "get it done and over with", but the doctor made sure that his grandmother felt loved and reassured.

"I don't know how she (the doctor) did it, but she managed to calm her down... and keep her going. So I really admire that particular aspect of healthcare professionals," he said.

Mr Chew, who will be pursuing a Bachelor of Pharmacy (Honours) degree at NUS, hopes to educate patients on how to better cope with their illness. He is also drawn to the way it integrates his interests in science, healthcare and patient-centric care.

Mr Chew is looking forward to the mentorship programmes and learning journeys that the scholarship provides, as well as hearing from past scholarship recipients who are already in the industry.

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Scholarship recipient Sarah Anyssa Nor Azmi will start the third year of her Bachelor of Science (Nursing) studies in August while Mr Andrew Chew Chuan Yang will be pursuing a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE