

Would-be architect takes the long road to medical school



Uzer Danial Sukari's interest in healthcare deepened after he became a nurse. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

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Uzer Danial Sukari's fascination with architecture began in secondary school and he was thrilled to secure a spot in Singapore Polytechnic's diploma programme in 2014.

Architecture was the natural choice for him then, as it combined his interests in the arts, drawing and mathematics.

But after he graduated with a diploma in 2017, a national service deployment in Thailand as a public health assistant piqued his interest in healthcare.

"I realised that I enjoy helping people and found it very fulfilling," says Danial, now 29. His responsibilities in Thailand then included triaging patients and helping to manage appointments.

Returning to Singapore in July 2019 after his posting, he began seriously considering a shift in his career path. "I saw that the skills and knowledge that I used to help soldiers were very relevant to nursing," says Danial, an only child.

He discussed the idea with his mother, Rohaida Ishak, 57, an assistant nurse clinician. She says: "I was quite happy and encouraged him because nursing has good prospects."

With her encouragement, Danial enrolled in a private nursing diploma course, following in the footsteps of his mother, uncle and grandfather.

After he waited a year for the course to start in 2020, the programme was cancelled just before classes began as the pandemic worsened.

Pivoting again, he applied for a nursing diploma course at Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), which meant waiting another year for the next intake in 2021. "I was really upset because that was one year gone and I had to wait another year," Danial recalls.

Determined to make the most of the interim period, he worked at the Institute of Mental Health for over a year, helping with patient and visitor health screening and triaging.

"I wanted to contribute to the pandemic response because nurses like my mother were working tirelessly," he says.

He was assigned to a swabbing centre, working night shifts to triage incoming psychiatric inpatients. "It was an eye-opening experience. Even before starting nursing school, I was exposed to the work involved," he says.

FINDING PASSION AND PURPOSE

Danial describes his time at NYP as an enriching journey of personal and professional growth.

Being taught by experienced nurses provided him with inspiring role models. "Nursing is hard. But we were nurtured by lecturers who were nurses themselves and understood what we were going

through," he reflects.

He actively participated in student life, joining the debate club, which built his confidence in articulating complex ideas.

To prepare for the practical aspects of his nursing course, he ordered a medical mannequin from overseas to practise skills like inserting a nasogastric tube and dressing wounds.

"There were some restrictions for laboratory bookings due to the pandemic, so my classmates would come over to practise together for our assessments," he says.

His passion and hard work earned him a grade point average of 3.90, and he graduated as the top student of his cohort, garnering prestigious academic and community awards from Ministry of Health Holdings and Mendaki.

Outside of school, he started volunteering with the Pasir Ris West Citizens' Consultative Committee, participating in community outreach initiatives such as health screenings for seniors.

PIVOT TO MEDICINE

Pursuing a medical degree seemed improbable then.

PERSEVERING AGAINST THE ODDS

I had already accepted the possibility of rejection and was fully prepared to continue my career as a nurse. I was not prepared for actually getting accepted. Even to this day, it still feels a little surreal.



UZER DANIAL SUKARI, who is in his second year of medical school.

"I never thought I could study medicine," says Danial. However, his interest was ignited while pursuing his nursing diploma, when he discovered a passion for subjects like anatomy, physiology and pathophysiology.

"I often found myself reading beyond the syllabus to understand more," he says, recalling how he spent hours exploring medical journals, textbooks and online resources.

Upon graduation, he began his career as a staff nurse at the neurosurgery ward in Singapore General Hospital.

Working alongside doctors on complex cases deepened his curiosity about diagnostic and therapeutic medicine. "It made me realise I wanted to contribute to patient care in a different capacity," says Danial, who decided to apply to the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in 2025 at age 28.

Balancing full-time work and the gruelling application process was not easy. For instance, Danial had to attend his admissions interview after finishing a tiring overnight shift.

To make matters worse, a computer crash during his situational judgment test wiped out his responses, forcing him to retake the assessment that afternoon.

"I had already accepted the possibility of rejection and was fully prepared to continue my career as a nurse," says Danial, who is now in his second year of medical school. "I was not prepared for actually getting accepted. Even to this day, it still feels a little surreal."

The day he received the university's offer in 2025, he received a promotion at work, making his decision to leave his job bitter-sweet.

"I had grown to enjoy nursing and my work. I remember hesitating to tell my supervisors that I was resigning so soon after receiving the promotion," he remembers.

Although he anticipated a demanding workload, the sheer volume of material during his first year of medical school proved to be a steep learning curve. He managed the transition through daily revision.

He credits his nursing background as a solid foundation that helps him connect core medical concepts with real-world clinical experience. "Conditions I encountered as a nurse now make much more sense as I learn the underlying mechanisms and pathophysiology," he says.

At 29, Danial is years older than his peers, but he views his non-traditional path as an asset.

He hopes to keep the patient-centred approach he developed through nursing.

"I want to be a doctor who not only understands the medical condition, but also considers the patient's circumstances, concerns and priorities," he says.

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