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FROM NURSING TO MED SCHOOL



Jane Ng
Senior Correspondent



BEYOND THE BOOKS

When studying, I'm not just memorising slides; I can picture a real patient. I understand first-hand how his or her treatment progresses and how it affects him or her.

CHARMAINE CHENG

Charmaine Cheng was from Nanyang Polytechnic's nursing diploma course and is now a second-year student at NUS Medicine. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

More nursing diploma holders enter NUS Medicine in recent years

More nursing diploma graduates have gained admission to medical school at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in recent years, including a record cohort of five from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) in 2026.

Although the pathway for polytechnic diploma holders to enter NUS Medicine has been in place since 2007, it is only in the past eight years that applicants with nursing diplomas have been admitted.

According to Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), its first nursing graduate admitted to NUS Medicine was from the Class of 2018.

Meanwhile, NP saw its first nursing graduate admitted in 2022. A total of 15 NP nursing alumni have since entered the programme, including five in 2026. Among the five polytechnics, only NP and NYP offer the nursing diploma.

A spokesperson for the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine notes that nursing diploma holders represent a small fraction of each medical cohort, with the numbers admitted in the 2025 and 2026 academic years "broadly similar".

To date, Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, the only other medical school here, has not enrolled a nursing diploma graduate.

In 2026, NTU admitted four polytechnic graduates out of an intake of 190 students, a slight increase compared with each of the past three years.

NTU's vice-provost (undergraduate education) Gan Chee Lip says most of its medical students from the diploma track are from the biomedical sciences course, with some from courses such as biotechnology.

In NUS, 17 of its intake of 286 students in 2026 are from polytechnics.

Among the five NP nursing graduates admitted to NUS Medicine in 2026 is Amir Aryan Danish Sudirman, 20, who says he started considering medicine in the second year of his diploma studies, inspired by interactions with doctors during his clinical postings.

Because nursing students have hospital attachments from Year 1, he had the opportunity to work alongside healthcare professionals and observe them across different specialties.

"Through these experiences, I became increasingly curious about the reasoning behind medical decision-making and wanted to deepen my understanding of human health and disease," says the first-year medical student.

Having seniors from the nursing pathway successfully transition into medicine reassured him.

"Seeing people with similar backgrounds achieve that goal gave me confidence that it was possible," he adds.

Fellow NP nursing graduate and first-year medical student Mel Cheryl Yang, 22, says a job shadowing stint during her nursing diploma opened her eyes to the complexities of patient care.

She was particularly impressed by the highly consultative and patient-centred nature of medical treatment planning.

She observed doctors openly discussing treatment options, risks and recovery plans with a patient.

"What stood out to me was the time taken to ensure that the patient understood his condition and treatment plan. The doctors respected the patient's autonomy, which I admire and want to be able to do the same for my patients," she says.

One of the most challenging aspects of medical school was adapting to the theoretical biochemistry modules, which were not covered in nursing school, she says.

She coped by forming study groups with friends, reading supplementary materials online and consulting her professors.



(From left) NP nursing diploma holders Amir Aryan Danish Sudirman, Ng Xiao Jun, Mel Cheryl Yang, Yang Soohye and Kou Zi Qian entered NUS Medicine in 2026. PHOTO: NGEE ANN POLYTECHNIC



Uzer Danial Sukari worked as a staff nurse for one year before applying to medical school. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

LESSONS FROM NURSING

Nursing taught me the importance of teamwork and helped me appreciate the different roles that healthcare professionals play in caring for patients.

UZER DANIAL SUKARI

DIPLOMA COURSE PROVIDES HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION

Both polytechnics say their nursing diploma course provides rigorous practical training and extensive clinical exposure.

NP says its nursing students complete 480 hours of practical training and 32 weeks of clinical postings across a range of healthcare settings.

NP's deputy principal Mah Wee Beng explains that while its nursing programme is primarily designed to prepare graduates for professional nursing practice, it also equips them with foundational clinical knowledge that inspires some to pursue medical degrees.

Through their clinical postings, students get first-hand insight into patient care and the day-to-day realities of healthcare practice.

"NP's nursing graduates care for patients, work alongside multidisciplinary healthcare teams and develop skills in communication, critical thinking and problem-solving," he says.

NYP similarly highlighted that its nursing students work in clinical settings alongside doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals.

They learn to communicate effectively with vulnerable patients, respond to changing needs and work within professional and safety standards, says its spokesperson.

"Combined with their grounding in anatomy and physiology, health assessment and clinical decision-making, they graduate equipped with both the technical foundations and the human side of care that can support further studies in medicine," she adds.

Beyond the curriculum, NP also supports students who aspire to pursue medicine through its medical interest group.

Its members take part in hospital visits, learning journeys, volunteering opportunities and sharing sessions by NP alumni.

They also receive mentorship and support for medical school applications, including interview preparation and guidance on the application process.

Mah notes that the interest group complements academic learning by providing additional avenues for students to explore healthcare careers.

BRINGING CLINICAL COMPETENCIES TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

Nursing diploma holders in NUS Medicine say their background provides experience and insights that help with their transition into medical school.

Second-year medical student Charmaine Cheng, 22, says even though she found medical school tough, her nursing experience in NYP has made it easier to connect certain concepts because she had already cared for patients with those conditions.

"When studying, I'm not just memorising slides; I can picture a real patient. I understand first-hand how his or her treatment progresses and how it affects him or her."

Even small details like medication's side effects are easier to remember because she has seen patients experience them and helped manage those effects, she adds.

A fellow NYP nursing graduate who is also in the second year of medicine, Uzer Danial Sukari, 29, graduated from NYP nursing and worked as a staff nurse for one year. He says nursing gave him a perspective that he would not otherwise have had going straight into medicine.

"Nursing taught me the importance of teamwork and helped me appreciate the different roles that healthcare professionals play in caring for patients," he says.

He adds that nursing also taught him to view the patient holistically, rather than focusing solely on a medical condition.

"A patient's health is affected by his or her family, social circumstances, ability to cope and many other factors," he says.

Yang says her nursing diploma training provides foundational knowledge for medical school, in areas like studies of the human anatomy, practical clinical skills like inserting a catheter and effective patient communication.

"Nursing has taught me the soft skills to communicate with my patients and to create that safe environment for them to share their thoughts and feelings. Moving forward, that will be very helpful," she says.

Meanwhile, Danish says seeing how overwhelming medical information can be for patients and their families has inspired him to be a voice for those who find healthcare complicated to navigate.

"Whether it is through patient education, advocacy or clinical practice, I want to help bridge the gap between healthcare professionals and the communities by making healthcare more understandable, accessible and less intimidating for people from all walks of life," he says.

janeng@sph.com.sg

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