

# Helping others is a joy

## NANCY KOH

A NURSE may be the only thing between a patient and the grave. This sombre thought is what spurred Mr Benjamin Jeremiah Wee, 24, to bust gender stereotypes and plunge into nursing.

Now working as an assistant manager at the Northeast Medical Group, he graduates this September with a Bachelor of Nursing. This is a part-time programme offered at SIM Global Education (SIM GE) and awarded by the University of Sydney.

Society, in the not-so-distant past, saw male nurses as anomalies. But now, people recognise that nursing is not domestic work, but a profession, says Mr Wee.

"Men can contribute, both in strength and in perspectives," he adds.

As a child, the pet lover had always wanted to work with animals, but his dream was squashed as universities here do not offer a veterinarian degree course. He did the nursing course at Ngee Ann Polytechnic instead so that he can make "an actual difference in people's lives".

He recalls his broken 10-year-old self being immensely touched by nurses who comforted him when his grandfather passed away in hospital.

"Grandpa's death shattered me. The nurses were really sympathetic and took turns to cheer me up. They were not obliged to, but they did, and that memory has been deeply etched in me," he says.

That experience, along with others, moulded him into someone who finds joy in helping others, he adds.

## Learning opportunities

Other than his belief that nursing is one of the few professions that encourage traits such as compassion and empathy, there are many learning opportunities in the field



**Mr Wee learnt crucial time-management skills, how to prioritise and identify what is relevant.** PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG

and that fulfils his desire for a career that offers constant mental stimulus.

For Mr Wee, what makes SIM GE special is the partnership between SIM and partner universities. He enjoyed having lecturers from the Sydney campus teaching and sharing their experiences. The research-oriented course included long reading lists.

"I learnt crucial time-management skills, how to prioritise and identify what is relevant," he says.

As for the gender ratio in the course, male students made up 30 per cent of the cohort — more than he had expected.

His friends initially felt that being a male nurse went against social conventions.

"Now, they ask me for medical advice," he says.

His family, at first apprehensive, has grown to respect his career choice.

"Any parent would be concerned when their child chooses a job that does not conform to cultural expectations" he adds.

He counts his lecturers as role models who showed how nursing

goes beyond knowledge and how small gestures can impact people.

For instance, small acts, such as calling patients by name can help ease their transition into the hospital and aid in faster recovery.

At work, the most difficult part for him is when patients do not understand the benefits of their treatment.

"To nurses, quality care is when the patient recovers and is discharged without complications. To a patient, care is defined by his treatment in hospital," he says.

On dealing with patients daily, he says: "You improve skills like dressing wounds and administering injections. You also improve in communication, which is important because people can get nasty when they don't get what they want."

He feels that aspiring nursing candidates should have a passion for people, emotional strength and a meticulous work ethic.

These are high ideals, but for Mr Wee, that is how nurses in Singapore can achieve recognition and respect.

As for the future, he wants "to help the elderly cope with post-discharge and daily life".