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MS MELANIE TAN MEI LING
nurse clinician
National Cancer Centre Singapore

Nurse clinician Melanie Tan benefited greatly from SIM GE's Bachelor of Nursing (Post-Registration), especially the module on Clinical and Patient Education. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

A commitment to care

SIM GE's Bachelor of Nursing degree course provides nurses with the comprehensive knowledge and skills to excel in their careers

MEREDITH WOO

FEW people now would believe that Ms Melanie Tan Mei Ling did not have a burning ambition to be a nurse while she was growing up.

After all, she seems to have been born for this job.

The nurse clinician has won many awards in her career, including the Singapore Health Quality Service Award in 2011 (Silver Award) and 2012 (Gold Award), the Healthcare Humanity Award in 2015 and, more recently, the Singapore Health Quality Service Award (Super Star Award) this year.

The truth is that it took losing two grandparents to illness — her paternal grandfather died from a chronic obstruction pulmonary disease and her maternal grandfather from pancreatic cancer — for her to give nursing serious thought.

"It really struck home how life can be so fragile," says Ms Tan, 42.

She recalls: "It took some courage, but I was determined to become a nurse."

"Initially, my parents were surprised. How could they know back then that nursing would change me as a person, as well as a daughter, and allow me to touch many lives in Singapore?"

Honing her skills

In 2006, she joined the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) and worked in Oncologic Imaging as a radiology nurse.

Six years later, she earned an advanced diploma in oncology nursing and discovered her special interest in caring for patients with breast cancer. But she was still keen to go further professionally.

In 2014, Ms Tan found out about the Singapore Institute of Management Global Education's (SIM GE) Bachelor of Nursing (Post-Registration) course through the NCCS Nursing Administrative Unit.

To her delight, her employer offered her a nursing scholarship.

She was enthusiastic about signing up for the course as the modules were relevant to her work and would benefit patients under her care.

In addition, she would grow professionally through upgrading her knowledge, clinical skills, leadership management and research practice.

The committed nurse felt that pursuing the degree would also be in line with the SingHealth

Group's pillars of service, education and research.

The fact that the programme was accredited by the Singapore Nursing Board sealed the deal.

As a healthcare professional, she wanted to be sure that she was investing her time and her organisation's money in a programme that is recognised for its quality.

She says: "It is well-established and has had a good reputation over the past 20 years as an impressive collaboration between SIM GE and the University of Sydney."

She was also struck by the high calibre and commitment of the university's lecturers — mostly professors or senior faculty members in their respective fields — who flew in regularly to personally meet and teach the students.

Encouraged by her husband, in-laws, friends and supervisor, Ms Tan became a SIM GE undergraduate (part-time) in February 2015.

Well-structured and relevant

Going back to school is never easy, but it helps to have clear outlines and expectations of each module.

Ms Tan feels guided and supported by the lecturers, even during discussions on the Sydney E-learning platform.

The study blocks, assignment submissions and exam schedules are also well planned. This allows her ample time to read course materials, prepare for assignments and exams, and interact with her family and friends.

She has even managed short post-exam vacations.

Ms Tan feels that the course challenges her to think out of the box and hone her analytical skills.

Her favourite modules are Nursing Management and Clinical Governance, and Clinical and Patient Education.

"I learnt that leadership is not just about management and giving directions, nor is it about being loud and intimidating."

"It is about the ability to direct and develop an organisation or a nursing unit, render support to staff and to be a positive influence," she says.

The module on Clinical and Patient Education, taught by Dr Jennifer Green, has been an eye-opener for her.

Ms Tan's patient education sessions (for example, what a

patient should do after surgery) were observed, and gaps in care and communication were identified.

She has also found good friends among her coursemates.

They have set up a WhatsApp chat group named "We will get there!", where they exchange information, articles and ideas, and support one another during assignments and as they study for their exams.

Ms Tan will graduate in September this year.

Coming full circle

Thanks to her studies, Ms Tan is now better equipped to provide pre-operation counselling and post-operative care.

Other nurses also turn to her for advice when they encounter clinical issues in managing patients with cancer-related symptoms or complications during treatment.

In addition, she teaches staff, patients and their families about breast cancer treatment options, and provides care to patients who need psychosocial support.

She encourages other nurses, especially those with working experience in both inpatient and outpatient settings, to take up the SIM GE course.

"It is comprehensive and applicable, and instils the knowledge and skills that are important building blocks in a nursing career," she says.