

A will to serve

Healthcare Merit Award beneficiary Rachel Goon finds fulfilment in caring for the frail and elderly

TEO KUAN YEE

FOR staff nurse Rachel Goon Bao Xian, service comes from the heart, and the youngster is unfazed by the challenges of gerontology.

Attached to the geriatric hip fracture unit (HFU) at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH) in her first posting, the 23-year-old nurse, a recipient of the Healthcare Merit Award, says: "I chose geriatric care because during my clinical attachment in my diploma days, the patients that I interacted were mostly above 65 years of age. It was through our interactions and chats that I developed my interest in geriatrics."

Nursing is not an easy job — it can be physically and emotionally demanding at times. But tough times don't last. A simple 'thank you' and a sweet smile from my patients when they go home give me a great sense of satisfaction and appreciation.

MS RACHEL GOON BAO XIAN
 staff nurse
 Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

Ms Goon has vivid memories of her maternal grandparents being admitted to the hospital when she was six.

"Even today, I have this image of the gentle and caring nurses performing laryngectomy suctioning for my grandfather (who

had cancer) while trying to reduce his discomfort," she says.

In 2007, her paternal grandmother suffered a stroke; she was also diagnosed with dementia, which made caring for her tougher for the family and helper. Ms Goon witnessed how difficult it was for the nurses, several of whom were punched by the patient when she turned temperamental.

Ms Goon's childhood experience made her determined to pursue a career in nursing. She joined the St John Ambulance Brigade while studying at the former Chestnut Drive Secondary School, and graduated with a Diploma in Nursing from Nanyang Polytechnic in 2014.

"I really enjoyed my nursing school days, especially the pharmacology and pathophysiology modules," says Ms Goon. "They set me thinking, linking and rationalising the purpose of the investigations for the various medical conditions."

Sure of her choice of career, she applied for and was awarded the Healthcare Merit Award (HMA) scholarship in 2014.

The HMA scholarship covered her school fees and provided her with an overseas allowance and monthly stipend. In addition, MOHH has also provided her with leadership training and opportunities to serve the community such as delivering meals to the elderly who live alone.

At the Singapore Institute of Technology, Ms Goon pursued a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Practice with University of Manchester in the United Kingdom.

For the Leadership in Action module, Ms Goon attended clinical attachment and programmes.

During a three-week stint at the Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust hospital, she got to understand the differences in the culture and delivery of care between Singapore and the UK.

The elderly patients left a deep



Ms Goon says the satisfaction of nursing outweighs the heavy responsibilities. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

impression, including a challenging dementia patient she cared for for about two weeks.

"I felt a sense of achievement when I managed to convince her to eat and have a sponge bath. Sadly, she deteriorated a week later and passed away. I did not expect it, and broke down when I heard the news; my colleagues comforted me. A few days later, her son-in-law returned with chocolates and a thank-you card. We were touched that the family appreciated our care for their late mother, and glad they are coping well after her death," she says.

The HMA scholarship has also given her the opportunity to form a network with members of the healthcare industry, and

learn from their experience.

"Through this scholarship, I have made friends with fellow scholars who are physiotherapists, occupational therapists, radiographers and nurses. We meet up regularly, sharing our work challenges and spiritually supporting one another," says Ms Goon, who graduated with honours in 2016.

Go with the flow

Ms Goon, who joined KTPH that same year, is soaking up her work experience in the HFU.

"The ward combines general geriatric medicine and orthopaedic surgical disciplines, helping geriatric patients with hip fractures. Being in HFU widens my exposure and knowledge to

manage the geriatric conditions such as delirium and dementia," she says.

One frequent challenge the passionate nurse faces is managing patients who turn delirious, or get restless, agitated or even violent.

In such situations, Ms Goon tries to calm the patients down before re-orienting them. She and her colleagues position themselves near the patients to prevent potential falls, and at the same time, refrain from aggravating them.

Ms Goon adds that she has also learnt that not all patients who present symptoms of delirium have dementia. Various factors can contribute to their delirium, including a change in environ-

ment, and electrolyte imbalance due to poor nutrition.

To aspiring scholars keen on following in her footsteps, Ms Goon says the satisfaction of nursing outweighs the heavy responsibilities.

"Nursing is not an easy job — it can be physically and emotionally demanding at times," she concedes.

"But tough times don't last. A simple 'thank you' and a sweet smile from my patients when they go home give me a great sense of satisfaction and appreciation."

She adds: "Life can be unpredictable. So, if you have a burning passion for nursing, follow your heart."