

Singapore Polytechnic students (from left) Loh Hong Rong, Amanda Chia and Ahmad Abdurrahman – a former madrasah student – have been accepted into NUS' Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

# NUS medical school takes in first former madrasah students

## Duo join select group who take poly route to enter competitive course

By AMELIA TENG

TWO former madrasah students have become the first to be offered places in a medical school here.

Ms Amalina Ridzuan and Mr Ahmad Abdurrahman, who each spent the full 10 years in Islamic religious schools, have made the cut to enter the National University of Singapore's (NUS) highly competitive Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

There are six full-time madrasahs here. In recent years, they have placed more emphasis on raising academic standards by helping students balance the demands of the religious and secular curricula.

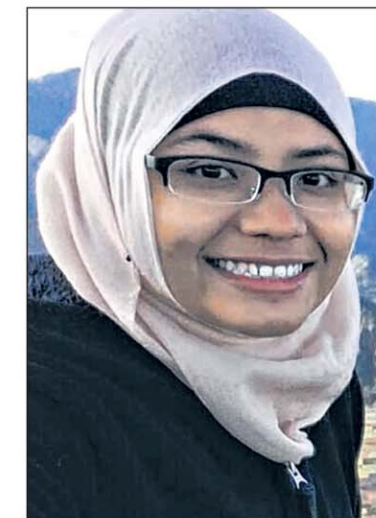
The duo also join the ranks of a select number of students who took the polytechnic route to be accepted into medicine. Last year, for instance, only 10 or so polytechnic graduates were offered places at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

Ms Amalina, 22, who has four siblings aged 12 to 20, grew up playing doctor with them.

While in secondary school, a newspaper article about a cancer patient struck her. "I really didn't want to see (others) having to go through the same pain. That's why I felt compelled to do something... to do my part to alleviate their pain," she said.

But the former student of Madrasah Al-Ma'arif Al-Islamiah in Geylang took longer than expected to make it to medical school.

After graduating from the madrasah, she entered Serangoon



**FOLLOWING HER HEART**

*I considered doing a private degree, but I was very interested in medicine and didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing something I didn't like, or any other degree.*

– Ms Amalina Ridzuan (above), 22, who took longer than expected to make it to medical school, via the polytechnic route, after not doing well in junior college

Junior College but did not do well.

"I considered doing a private degree, but I was very interested in medicine and didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing something I didn't like, or any

other degree," said Ms Amalina, whose 45-year-old father is a material handler and 44-year-old mother, a management support officer.

So she enrolled in a biomedical science course at Temasek Polytechnic and worked hard. She will graduate on Wednesday with a grade point average of 3.98 out of 4.

NUS does not comment on individuals accepted into its medical school, but has said it looks for attributes such as compassion, empathy and the ability to relate to people from all walks of life.

Mr Ahmad will be graduating from Singapore Polytechnic on Thursday. The 19-year-old, formerly from Madrasah Aljunied Al-Islamiah, also studied biomedical science in polytechnic.

His 46-year-old mother, an allied educator in a primary school, and 54-year-old father, who is self-employed in the vehicle business, enrolled all four of their children in madrasahs so that they would have a solid foundation in religious knowledge.

Mr Ahmad said: "Being in a madrasah taught me time management and how to study smart, because we had so many subjects."

At one point, he was taking 14 subjects, including mathematics, history and others on Islamic law and etiquette.

His polytechnic course and internships have given him a glimpse of his career ahead.

One incident that struck him during a stint at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital was when a doctor asked him to comfort a patient during a painful procedure. "I wasn't sure what to do, so I just held her hand and looked into her eyes. Somehow, that small gesture helped."

ateng@sph.com.sg

## Troubled teen on track to becoming a doctor

MS AMANDA Chia, who is graduating from Singapore Polytechnic (SP) on Thursday, is on her way to becoming a doctor after a rocky start as a teenager.

In Secondary 2, she dropped out of the Express stream and was placed on the Normal (Academic) track after failing all her subjects. She picked up smoking and drinking and fell foul of the law for offences such as stealing hair dye from a supermarket.

But she made a turnaround and has been accepted this year by the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

"I cried when I saw that I had been given a place. I did not expect it," said Ms Chia, 20, who is

graduating from SP's nutrition, health and wellness course with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.97. Today, she will also receive the Toh Chin Chye Gold Medal, awarded to top SP students.

The thought of becoming a doctor never crossed her mind when she was younger.

"I mixed with bad company in school and never really attended classes in lower secondary," said the former Holy Innocents' High School student, whose father is a part-time electrician and mother a travel consultant.

It was after she was hauled to a police station one night for theft that things changed.

"My mother was there waiting for me, even though it was

around 3am and she had to go overseas for work later that day," said Ms Chia, who has an older sister and a younger brother.

While she was studying nutrition, her interest in topics such as cell biology and immunology grew. "I realised I could help people beyond managing their diet and food, so I thought of venturing into medicine," she said.

Another SP student, Mr Loh Hong Rong, 19, is the first from his biotechnology course to get into the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine this year. "I hope that by studying medicine, I can impact others some day," said Mr Loh, who scored a near-perfect GPA of 3.98.

AMELIA TENG