

Diploma holder, working student among NUS medical graduates



Darren Chua Wei Quan, 27, the only polytechnic graduate in his batch in the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, did his residency at Changi General Hospital. Photo: Low Wei Xin

Darren Chua was faculty's sole poly grad, while Sharon Tan held various part-time jobs

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(PAGE 1 OF 1) - PAGINATE

SINGAPORE — Most graduates are excited or relieved after finishing their years of study in university, but medical graduate Sharon Tan Si Heng felt a tinge of regret, on top of happiness.

The 24-year-old doctor regrets missing classes during her five years at National University of Singapore's (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine — albeit with good reasons.

After losing her father to colorectal cancer in 2004 when she was 13 years old, Dr Tan started taking on part-time jobs to support herself financially, contribute to household expenses, and help pay some of her late father's medical bills.

Dr Tan's mother also left her role as a housewife and took on jobs at a yogurt shop and a bakery to relieve the financial burden.

While juggling the heavy workload of medical school, Dr Tan donned many hats. She was a waitress, a cinema service crew member, and a tutor.

She leaves home at 7am and gets home at 11pm, but her day does not end there: She catches up on the lectures she missed over the week and pores over her tutorial notes.

Her hard work was not in vain. The orthopaedics resident at National University Hospital will be graduating on Sunday with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery.

She is among the more than 10,000 students graduating from NUS this year. The first of 23 commencement ceremonies will take place over nine days starting today.

President Tony Tan Keng Yam, the university's chancellor, will preside over the main commencement ceremony at Kent Ridge Campus later today for graduates of the NUS Business School's Department of Accountancy.

As Singapore marks its 50th year of independence, the NUS business school is also celebrating its 50th anniversary, while NUS commemorates its 110th year of founding.

And just like Dr Tan, fellow medical graduate Darren Chua Weiquan will trade in his scrubs for a graduation gown on Sunday. Dr Chua had consistently scored C5s during his years at New Town Secondary School before he found his passion in biology.

"I felt more pressure to excel because I was the only polytechnic graduate who entered the NUS medicine faculty in 2010, and also because I hadn't done any serious studying for a couple of years prior to entering NUS as I was serving National Service," the 27-year-old general surgery resident at Changi General Hospital said.

Dr Chua also lost a family member to cancer. His grandfather passed away in 2010, a few months shy of him completing his National Service and entering NUS.

Although his grandfather will not witness his graduation, Dr Chua's parents and younger sister will join him at the NUS University Cultural Centre to see him receive his degree in medicine and surgery (with honours).

With her keen interest in the musculoskeletal system, Dr Tan hopes to become an orthopaedic surgeon.

"If you are struggling, you have to remember your goal at all times. For me, I want the best for my patients and if you persevere, work hard and try hard enough, you will achieve anything you want," said Dr Tan.