



Ms Loy, with Dr Chew Khong Yik (left) and Associate Professor Tan Bien Keem, who were with her every day as she spent four months in hospital, enduring great pain during treatment. Prof Tan said the team was surprised by her positive attitude. PHOTO: DON WONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Taipei fire survivor wants to help other burn victims

Doctors' attentive care during her recovery reinforced teen's decision to study medicine

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Not only does Megan Loy, 19, want to be a doctor, but she is aiming to be one specialising in burns treatment or reconstructive plastic surgery.

The first-year medical student at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine was at the Colour Play Asia festival in Taiwan last year when a fire broke out, injuring 500 people and killing 15.

Ms Loy pulled through with help from Singapore General Hospital's (SGH) head of plastic, reconstructive and aesthetic surgery Tan Bien Keem, 51, and plastic surgeon Chew Khong Yik, 40.

The two doctors went out of their way to help her and were with her every day as she spent four months in hospital, enduring tremendous pain during treatment.

"Being a patient for such a long time just gave me a new perspective and helped reinforce the importance of what the doctor does. You have to be genuine and treat the patient like a human being, and not just as another problem to solve," she said.

Ms Loy now juggles class time with regular medical appointments to treat the scars on her body.

Recalling the incident, Ms Loy said she was on a celebratory graduation trip with five friends when a fireball ripped through the crowd at New Taipei's Formosa Fun Coast water theme park. She said a fortuitous turn of events saved her.

The morning after the blaze on June 27, Associate Professor Tan saw a report about the fire and wanted to know if he could help Ms Loy.

He got in touch with Dr Chew, who was in Taiwan for a conference. Dr Chew managed to get Ms Loy room on an International SOS

flight back, and she arrived in Singapore two days later, where she was attended to by SGH's burns team.

"I brought her back to Singapore with a lot of doubt," recalled Dr Chew. Throughout her four-month hospital stay, Ms Loy had to contend with the pain and confusion of her situation. This included going through nine skin grafts and showers to clean her wounds – a tedious three-hour process that included carefully taking off her bandages and replacing them, while bearing with the agony of exposing them to water.

Prof Tan and Dr Chew came by to check on her condition every day.

"As a patient at that point, you are constantly in pain, you feel like you have absolutely no control over your life any more... It really did help that the doctors were including me in their discussions, and gave me all their attention," said Ms Loy, who is still in contact with her doctors now.

Both patient and doctors drew strength from each other.

Prof Tan said the team was surprised by Ms Loy's positive attitude. "Instead of being sad about her appearance, she knows what her priorities in life are. She really wants to be a doctor, and she had the determination to chase that goal."

Ms Loy went for her medical school interviews with "zero expectations", but not once did she think that her injury would pose an obstacle to her success.

Paralympian and medical doctor William Tan, who is a cancer survivor, inspires her. She said: "Everything in life has worked against him, but he is doing extremely well... What excuse do I have for not trying to pursue what I want to do?"

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