

# ‘Mum wouldn’t have believed I got into medical school’



Mr Darren Leong lost his mother to cancer nine years ago and barely made it to the Normal (Academic) stream. He went on to study biomedical science at the polytechnic and has been accepted to read medicine at the National University of Singapore. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

When Mr Darren Leong, 21, found out in May that he had been accepted to read medicine at the National University of Singapore (NUS), he was overjoyed.

Yet, there was also a tinge of regret as he could not tell his mother the good news after losing her to cancer nine years ago – the same year he took the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).

“I don’t think she would have believed me if I told her I got into NUS medicine. I really wish I could see her reaction,” said the former Normal (Academic) student from New Town Secondary. “I was very playful in primary school, I had no interest in school and my mum’s greatest concern was my studies.”

Life took an unexpected turn for the worse in Primary 5, when his mother was diagnosed with Stage 4 ovarian cancer.

Her death was a big blow to Mr Leong and his family, and he barely made it to the Normal (Academic) stream with a PSLE score of 156.

But the episode also drew his family closer, and, with encouragement from his older siblings, Mr Leong began to work hard in school.

He did well in his N levels and went on to study biomedical science at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

“I thought about what to do in future, and healthcare became an option, especially after seeing how the doctors and nurses worked while we spent time in my mother’s ward,” he said.

“I didn’t dare to say I wanted to do medicine, in case other people

FILLED WITH DOUBT

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thought I wouldn’t make it.”

But he approached doctors for shadowing opportunities during the polytechnic holidays, while learning about medical technology, anatomy, physiology and diseases in school. He graduated with a near-perfect grade point average of 3.92 out of 4, and decided to give NUS medicine a shot.

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“I tried to put those fears aside and think of myself as an equal applicant... I hope more poly students can enter NUS medicine... They would connect better with patients who didn’t have a smooth pathway in life.”

Amelia Teng