

First poly entrant graduates from NTU med school



Mr Russell Chuah, part of the second batch of medical graduates from NTU's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, is now a house officer. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

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26-year-old was inspired to pursue medical career while studying at Singapore Poly

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When Mr Russell Chuah enrolled in the biomedical science course at Singapore Polytechnic (SP) in 2010, he wanted to pursue a career in research.

But that changed after his stints in the medical field during his studies.

Besides an overseas internship in Boston, where he was a research assistant at a laboratory in Harvard Medical School, he did a three-week work attachment at a local polyclinic, where he drew blood from patients.

"From my short interactions with the patients, I felt like I was a small part of their journey. It was so satisfying to help someone you see face to face," said Mr Chuah. "I went to poly, thinking of doing research as a career. But it was missing the human touch... I wanted to have a direct impact on other humans."

After graduating from SP in 2013 with a near-perfect grade point average of 3.96 out of four, Mr Chuah applied to study medicine at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

While he was rejected by NUS, he was accepted by NTU's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) and enrolled in the five-year undergraduate programme in 2014, becoming the first polytechnic graduate to be admitted into the school. On Saturday, Mr Chuah, now 26, graduated with a bachelor's degree in medicine and surgery. He was part of a cohort of 75 - the second batch of medical graduates from LKCMedicine.

Despite being the first and only polytechnic graduate at the school, Mr Chuah never felt intimidated by his classmates who were from junior colleges. In fact, he was motivated to work harder when he saw how driven his peers were.

"Ultimately, we all had the same end goal and dream, so we helped each other," he said.

Mr Chuah, whose father is a hotel portfolio manager and his mother a freelance pre-school teacher, took out a bank loan for his five-year course. His mother Brenda Pereira, 53, said: "Whenever he decides to do something big, he will fork out the money himself. School fees were a concern but when he did get in, that was really the best news."

Mr Chuah, who has a younger brother studying physiotherapy at the Singapore Institute of Technology, is now in his third month as a house officer at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, where he is on the paediatrics rotation.

While he mostly works with children now, he plans to "continue keeping his options open while he explores different departments" during the one-year housemanship.

With more polytechnic graduates reading law and medicine in university, Mr Chuah finds it encouraging that the polytechnics are now viable routes to get into these competitive courses.

"It's a mark of the quality of education that the polytechnics here provide, and the recognition that a polytechnic diploma holds today."