



**NTU •** Convocation ceremonies go ahead with safe-distancing measures | B2

## Honour for NTU grad who cared for dad while battling disease

Osmond Chia

A semester into university, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) student Gerald Sim received news that his father had suffered a stroke.

His attention turned from his studies to caring for his father, such as accompanying him to the doctor for regular visits.

Mr Sim said: "(Nothing) could have prepared me for that. It was hard to handle and there was so much emotional stress."

The computer science graduate has Charcot-Marie-Tooth nerve disease – diagnosed when he was 15 – that leads to a progressive weakening of the muscles and affects his ability to write.

After four years of studies, Mr Sim, 26, will receive his degree at this year's NTU convocation next Monday.

Originally scheduled for July, it was postponed when the number of Covid-19 cases rose.

Mr Sim is one of 9,200 NTU graduates who will emerge from nearly two years of unconventional academic life, into a working world vastly different from when they first entered university.

This is the second in-person convocation ceremony held by NTU amid the Covid-19 pandemic, after a delayed convocation was conducted for the Class of 2020 in March.

The ceremonies are now going ahead, with the first held yesterday, attended by President Halimah Yacob as chancellor of NTU.

Mr Sim was one of 36 graduates who received the Lee Kuan Yew Gold Medal yesterday, with his parents in attendance. This is awarded to students with general proficiency in their programme and honours (highest distinction).

"I learnt that life was not in my control and to work around these tough circumstances and go with it," Mr Sim said. "It means a lot to my parents and me to be here together." His father is a researcher and his mother is an administrative staff member.

This year's convocation ceremonies are being spread over 44 sessions from yesterday to Oct 2 – held in person and streamed online from the Nanyang Auditorium.

This is roughly twice the usual number of ceremonies, to reduce group sizes and the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

Up to 500 attendees can be present at a time, and they have to provide proof of vaccination or a negative swab test result from the last 24 hours. They are spaced two seats apart and divided into 10 zones to prevent intermingling.

Yesterday's event also marked



the start of celebrations for NTU's 30th anniversary. It was commemorated with the launch of a digital time capsule that will be opened in 2041, when NTU turns 50.

Education Minister Chan Chun Sing provided its first artefact, a video letter to students who will witness its opening in 20 years.

NTU president Subra Suresh told graduates at the ceremony: "The Class of 2041 may marvel at how we thrived at a time when we were most tested in our history."

He cited students supporting peers in quarantine and pulling through the Covid-19 disruptions.

"Your unshakeable resolve and concern for one another during the Covid-19 pandemic have been remarkable to watch," he said.

Electrical and electronic engineering graduate Duan Jia Fei, 26, one of 17 recipients of the Koh Boon Hwee Scholars Award yesterday, said: "We overcame these adversities, although it was not easy."

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TOUGHING IT OUT

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**MR GERALD SIM**, one of 36 graduates who received the Lee Kuan Yew Gold Medal yesterday. The computer science graduate has Charcot-Marie-Tooth nerve disease that leads to a progressive weakening of the muscles and affects his ability to write. He also had to balance his studies with caring for his father who suffered a stroke.

Above: Yesterday's NTU convocation ceremony was the first of several that will be held till Oct 2.

Left: Lee Kuan Yew Gold Medal recipient Gerald Sim receiving his award from President Halimah Yacob, who is also NTU chancellor. ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN