NTU medical school welcomes pioneer batch

Health Minister: Docs have to take different approach to health care

By AMELIA TENG

EVEN before starting medical school, Mr Eden Tay was spending time in hospitals.

For six months from 2011 to last year, his Saturday mornings off from national service were spent at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, where he handled administrative work and observed how doctors treated patients.

Then in the afternoons, he was off to Bright Vision Hospital, where he helped patients in palliative care with basic things like going to the bathroom.

Yesterday, he was one of 54 pioneer students who received a white coat and stethoscope at a ceremony at Nanyang Technological University's new Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, marking the start of their journey to becoming a doctor.

"I've always had the passion to be a doctor," said the 21-year-old, who is the younger son of a retired sales manager and housewife.

"And being the first batch of students is an exciting opportunity."

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong, who was the guest of honour, urged the students to be ambassadors for the school.

He said that with Singapore's ageing population, chronic diseases and long-term medical conditions will become more prevalent.

"This changing landscape will require our health-care professionals to take a different approach to care," he explained.

He added that a doctor's job is not just to prescribe medicine or perform surgery, but to "play a greater role in promoting healthy living."

He also pointed out that there are diverse career opportunities available in the public health-care service, such as the chance to train future generations of doctors, do research and take on leadership roles.

Singapore's latest medical school is jointly set up by NTU and Imperial College London, which ranks highly for its medical and engineering degrees. More than 800 A-level and diploma holders had applied. Among those who were successful was Ms Ang Jia Wei, 19.

"Since I was young I've always looked up to doctors, but I never thought I could become one," said the daughter of an engineer and a housewife.

Coincidentally, Ms Ang's twin sister, Jia Xi, will be going to Imperial College next month to study engineering.

"I hope I can visit her there if I get the chance to go for the school's overseas programme," she said.

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