

# Her heart is in it

**Senior Staff Nurse Kristelle Lee brings her training and experience to the operating theatre**

DOUGLAS CHEW

A PASSION to pursue a career in healthcare prompted Ms Kristelle Lee to further her studies on the Health Science Scholarship after earning a diploma in nursing at Nanyang Polytechnic.

The scholarship is now known as the Healthcare Merit Award, offered by MOH Holdings, which is the holding company of Singapore's public healthcare clusters.

She went on to pursue her Bachelor of Science in Nursing Studies degree at King's College London, United Kingdom, graduating with first class honours. "The scholarship provided me a platform to show my commitment while opening up avenues for career development," she says.

## Specialised care

She now works as a peri-operative senior staff nurse (SSN) in Singapore General Hospital (SGH). Peri-operative nurses prepare patients before their operations and work in the operating theatre (OT) during the surgery.

According to SSN Lee, patients often feel particularly vulnerable prior to entering the OT. Peri-operative nurses play a critical role in helping them allay their fears, anxieties and doubts. "Our actions during this short period can make a world of difference for our patients," she says.

Providing such patient support is a prologue to her work during the operation where she assists the surgeon. While people may think that the OT is a "cold, sterile, strict and stressful" environment, she feels it

is actually "fun and exciting".

"We literally get to look into the various parts of the human body and anatomy, especially in SGH where there are many surgical disciplines," she says. "We get to learn a lot as we have to be prepared for the unexpected. We must also think fast since patients' conditions can deteriorate rapidly during surgery."

This is precisely where her training and experience comes in. Says SSN Lee: "Knowledge and experience helps you know what the surgeon is going to do next and you can prepare the instrument efficiently or at a critical point of the surgery."

Teamwork is key. "No matter how busy, fast-paced or chaotic it can become in the OT, a good team works together to ensure the delivery of safe and optimal outcomes for our patients," she says.

## Career satisfaction

Outside the OT, SSN Lee is part of the hospital-wide Research Council. Her interest in research was fostered at university.

Taking inspiration from the lively classroom discussions and the strong research culture at Kings

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senior staff nurse  
Singapore General Hospital



College, she facilitates her department's Journal Club. The monthly hour-long session begins with a presentation of journal articles she has found, followed by discussions and critiques. "The future of healthcare requires practice based on evidence," she says.

Four years into her six-year bond, SSN Lee continues to enjoy her work. In addition to the meaningful job scope which gives her a sense of purpose and fulfilment, she gets a daily boost from the camaraderie at SGH.

"I never imagined as a working adult that I could enjoy my job this much, and a lot of that has to do with my colleagues. It is like coming to work and seeing your friends every day," she adds.

The breadth of opportunities available for nurses keeps the work refreshing. There are cross-training opportunities for OT nurses like SSN Lee to work in intensive care units or other critical care areas. Prior to her current position, she worked in a surgical ward for six months. "It was a good experience as it allowed me to develop a more holistic view of the patients' journey," says SSN Lee.

Registered nurses have a career path where they progress from staff nurse to senior staff nurse, nurse clinician and beyond. Nurses are also able to pursue various career tracks with clinical, research, education and management paths. For Ms Lee, her intention is to further specialise in peri-operative nursing in the area of robotic surgery.

For those considering MOH Holdings' scholarships, SSN Lee says: "An opportunity to study further will not only provide you invaluable life experience, but also a renewed sense of humility and inspiration to embark on a journey which you will devote many years of your life purposefully."

"When you have the heart for it, a career in healthcare is a choice you will never regret."



SSN Lee continues to find purpose and enjoyment in her role as a registered nurse. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG