



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HEALTH SYSTEM

HELPING PATIENTS FIND THEIR VOICE

Communication comprises the fabric of life and our relationships. For those who struggle to communicate, Speech Therapists help them find their voice again. National University Hospital (NUH) Speech Therapist Weng Wanxin tells us more about her rewarding career in Speech Therapy.

By Chai Fook Tien

In the Rehabilitation Ward of NUH, Weng Wanxin can be seen working with patients with difficulties in forming words and making themselves heard. Wanxin knew that she wanted to pursue a degree in healthcare, and she found herself attracted to the field of speech therapy because she wanted to help people afflicted with communication disorders experience the joy of communication.

The Healthcare Merit Scholarship enabled her to pursue her calling as a Speech Therapist. "I enjoy communicating with people, so it's only natural that I want to work with people who have communication difficulties and help them communicate again," Wanxin says cheerfully.

As she pursued her interest, Wanxin discovered that the field of speech therapy was not just restricted to communication disorders. For instance, there are patients who experience difficulties in basic functions such as the act of swallowing. The ability to speak and swallow are privileges that many take for granted, not knowing that there are people who struggle in these areas on a daily basis.

We speak with Wanxin to learn more about her job as a Speech Therapist and how the Healthcare Merit Scholarship has helped her to achieve her goals.

WHAT LED YOU TO APPLY FOR THE HEALTHCARE MERIT SCHOLARSHIP? WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE SCHOLARSHIP?

Weng Wanxin: I applied for the Healthcare Merit Scholarship because I wanted to pursue a

degree in healthcare. Taking up this scholarship allowed me to pursue my dreams. I found out about the scholarship through scholarship talks and pamphlets that were circulated in school during my Junior College (JC) days. The opportunity to be considered for a job which would allow me to help people appealed to me greatly. Furthermore, I had heard positive things from friends of my elder sister who were also Healthcare Scholars, and this reaffirmed my decision to apply for it.

PROVIDE US WITH MORE DETAILS ABOUT YOUR JOB. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

Wanxin: I am currently based in a Rehabilitation Ward where I work with the adult population.

I help patients with swallowing and communication disorders that arise from stroke, brain injuries, neurological disorders, spinal cord injuries or tumours. I assess the extent of the problem and provide the necessary interventions – this may include modification of food or fluid consistencies, swallow rehabilitation, speech-, language-, cognitive-communication rehabilitation and the provision of alternative forms of communication.

In addition, I perform videofluoroscopy examinations of swallowing in order to observe the patient's swallowing mechanism through an X-Ray. This aids our patient management and also helps us plan for rehabilitation.

I also provide caregiver training where I coach caregivers on safe feeding techniques and the

suitable therapy activities that can be done at home. This encourages continuous care and therapy for patients at home, which will be immensely beneficial for the patients' recovery. Besides specific caregiver training, I educate the families of patients to help them understand the condition of their loved ones better. This will help them move in the same direction as us during the course of patient rehabilitation.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB? WHAT IS THE MOST FULFILLING PART OF IT?

Wanxin: I enjoy interacting with patients the most. I get to communicate with them, help them understand their condition, support them through their course of rehabilitation and eventually see them progress and make gains. This interaction process is extremely fulfilling.

I also get to see a wide range of conditions in my work. I help adult patients cope with swallowing problems and a range of disorders such as aphasia, dysarthria and cognitive-communication deficits. I am glad to be able to reach out and help patients stricken with a variety of disorders improve their quality of life.

WHAT ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES HAVE YOU ENJOYED AS A HEALTHCARE SCHOLAR?

Wanxin: Before I left for my studies, there were several activities which allowed me to meet up with other scholars from my batch, including

those driven by Outward Bound Singapore (OBS). The friends I made from these activities eventually became my support network while I was studying overseas.

There was also the mid-term work attachment which took place in my second year of university. It helped me stay updated on key issues in the healthcare system and the practices and scope of healthcare work in Singapore.

SHARE WITH US A COUPLE OF HIGHLIGHTS FROM YOUR JOURNEY WITH THIS SCHOLARSHIP.

Wanxin: I recall a patient who suffered from severe apraxia of speech – a motor-programming speech problem. We were practising some sounds but she was having difficulties even initiating her voice. We eventually managed to help her say the words "I love you" to her husband during that session, moving him to tears.

It is extremely gratifying when my patients are able to prevail over their injuries or illnesses and enunciate meaningful words. These

moments truly comprise the highlights of my day and make up the important memories of my career as a speech therapist.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR STUDENTS WHO WISH TO FOLLOW IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS?

Wanxin: Aspiring Healthcare Scholars can look forward to a career with many opportunities. There may be up's and down's along the way, but there are truly magical moments when you see your patients smile and make small but incremental progress. These are the things that show you that this path is a fulfilling one and one that you will not regret choosing.

You should also be fully aware of what your decision entails if you plan to walk this path. A career in healthcare can be very fulfilling, but it can also be very emotionally-challenging. It is very important to possess a genuine passion for healthcare before embarking on this journey as a healthcare professional. The gains we derive may not be as immediate and tangible as compared to some other careers, but it is a profession that is infinitely more meaningful. ■

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Healthcare Scholar

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