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SCHOLARS' EXPERIENCE DETAILS



GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES AS A MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKER ABOUND IN THE COMMUNITY CARE SECTOR

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Photo Caption: Ms Tan's own childhood was marked by frequent visits to the doctor to treat her eye condition and her mother's meningitis, so she fully empathises with those who have sick family members and understands the challenges they face.

By Goh Hwee Koon

Many often hold the mistaken belief that social workers are volunteers, but Ms Tan Ying Yan, 36, a principal medical social worker at St Luke's ElderCare, is quick to correct the misconception.

"We are professionals trained to make assessments and interventions to alleviate issues, and we work with multi-disciplinary teams that include other allied health professions, nurses and doctors to provide holistic care," she explains.

"As a medical social worker, I have the privilege of walking alongside the elderly and their caregivers in their respective journeys towards better healthcare and caregiving. I provide psychosocial support through care planning, resources linkage and psychoeducation on the disease, and when relevant, aid in managing expectations for both the patients as well as their caregivers."

Ms Tan, who works in the centre's care and counselling department, has always had a strong interest in healthcare since she was young. Having gone through a childhood marked by frequent visits to the doctor to treat her eye condition and her mother's meningitis, she fully understands the stresses and challenges confronting a family who has to deal with a loved one who is ill.

This inspired her to explore a healthcare career in community care services, which is typically required for those who need further care after being discharged from an acute hospital or frail seniors who may need someone to help them with their daily needs while their family members are away at work.

Expanding her knowledge and skills

After graduating from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Social Sciences on a social work training scholarship from the National Council of Social Service in 2008, Ms Tan joined Ang Mo Kio-Thye Hua Kwan Hospital as a medical social worker.

During the course of her work, she realised that her team often needed to provide basic counselling to address the stress of caregivers and elders adjusting to their limited physical functions as well as mediate in their key healthcare decisions.

This motivated her to pursue a year-long graduate diploma in counselling practice in 2012 on a part-time basis at Counselling and Care Centre, where she received hands-on experience to enhance her skills and knowledge essential for competent counselling.

Exciting growth opportunities

The decade she spent working at the hospital honed Ms Tan's leadership skills and helped her rise through the ranks to become its head and principal medical social worker.

"This sector is where elders and caregivers spend the longest time as community care stretches from the community hospitals to senior care centres and nursing homes," she says. "From improvised services and new initiatives to meet evolving needs, I look forward to developing meaningful eldercare solutions for future cohorts."

Since Ms Tan joined St Luke's ElderCare in 2018, she has been leading a team of counsellors and social workers to deliver vital psychosocial care and support in community care, offering case management support for elders and caregivers while providing strategic direction to her team. She also works with other medical social workers to craft competencies for those involved in rehabilitation work.

As a leader, Ms Tan makes it a point to check in regularly with her team so that they do not get overwhelmed by demands, especially with the constant changes during the pandemic.

Despite the chaos, she has stayed resilient with strong support at work and her faith. There is even a silver lining that has emerged from it: Transformed work processes and the realisation of how agile the sector can be when people collaborate and move forward together.

Find out more about the Community Care Scholarship [here](#).