

ADVERTORIAL

WALKING with patients EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

Inspired by their resilience on the road to recovery, this Community Care scholar wants to help them regain strength and confidence

Scooping rice may seem like a simple task, but for one of Mr Low Hsien Loong's patients, this posed a formidable challenge.

The patient was undergoing rehabilitation at St Luke's ElderCare where Mr Low was doing a seven-week clinical attachment. A stroke had impaired her ability to perform fine motor movements, making it difficult to execute tasks that involve precision and coordination.

Guiding her through her recovery journey in late 2023, Mr Low was moved by her perseverance in carrying out the exercises, which involved simple activities such as taking a water bottle from a table while seated on a chair and using a damp cloth to wipe a window in up-and-down motions.

Her story – and those of other patients – reinforced his conviction that he has picked the right career path.

Currently in his final year pursuing a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Occupational Therapy at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), he was awarded the Community Care Scholarship (Mid-Term).

"A simple task that many take for granted has such a significant value to the patient," says the 25-year-old. "Seeing her make progress day by day was really rewarding and inspires me to help those who are struggling to regain their independence."

After he graduates in September 2024, he will serve his four-year bond at Ren Ci Community Hospital where he will be working with patients with varying medical conditions – including orthopaedic injuries, dementia and stroke – to help them improve physical strength and regain independence in daily living.

Customised care and support
 After he graduated from polytechnic, he explored a range of jobs in the healthcare sector and came across a quote about occupational therapy – "Living life to its fullest despite difficulties in doing so".

"I felt a connection with that quote – about wanting to bring out the best in people," says Mr Low.

To better understand the role of an occupational therapist, he took up a six-month patient service associate job at the outpatient Occupational Therapy Clinic at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in 2018.

There, he saw first-hand how occupational therapists support patients through customised care programmes based on each patient's lifestyle and living environment.

“A simple task that many take for granted has such a significant value to the patient... Seeing her make progress day by day was really rewarding and inspires me to help others who are struggling to regain their independence.
”

Mr Low Hsien Loong
 Recipient of the Community Care Scholarship (Mid-Term)

GROWING DEMAND FOR REHABILITATIVE CARE

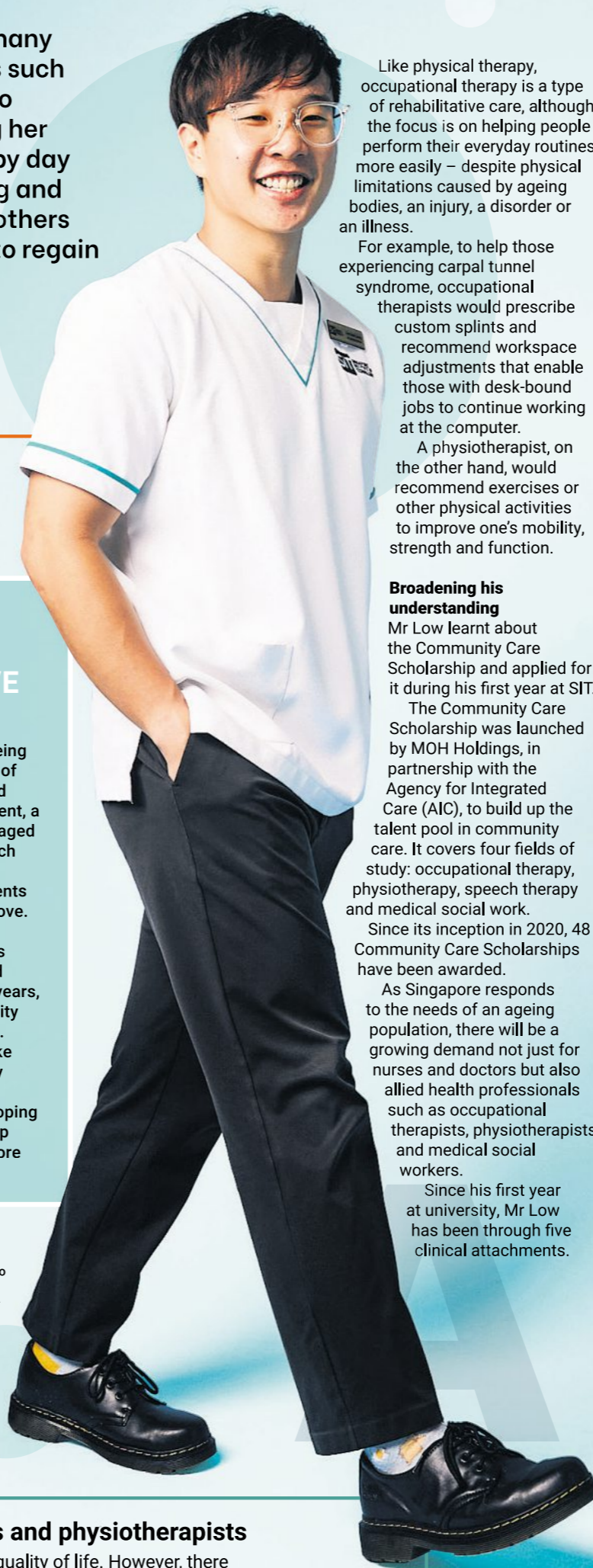
Singapore's population is ageing rapidly. When the proportion of individuals aged 65 years and older reaches about 21 per cent, a country is considered super-aged – a status Singapore will reach in 2026.

By 2030, one in four residents will be aged 65 years and above.

To support Singapore's vision of enabling our seniors to maintain quality of life and independence in their silver years, a strong network of community care professionals is needed.

Occupational therapists like Mr Low Hsien Loong will play an integral role in providing rehabilitative care and developing customised care plans to help seniors lead healthier and more fulfilling lives.

► Mr Low Hsien Loong hopes to help his patients live their lives to the fullest. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA



Like physical therapy, occupational therapy is a type of rehabilitative care, although the focus is on helping people perform their everyday routines more easily – despite physical limitations caused by ageing bodies, an injury, a disorder or an illness.

For example, to help those experiencing carpal tunnel syndrome, occupational therapists would prescribe custom splints and recommend workspace adjustments that enable those with desk-bound jobs to continue working at the computer.

A physiotherapist, on the other hand, would recommend exercises or other physical activities to improve one's mobility, strength and function.

Broadening his understanding

Mr Low learnt about the Community Care Scholarship and applied for it during his first year at SIT.

The Community Care Scholarship was launched by MOH Holdings, in partnership with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), to build up the talent pool in community care. It covers four fields of study: occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy and medical social work.

Since its inception in 2020, 48 Community Care Scholarships have been awarded.

As Singapore responds to the needs of an ageing population, there will be a growing demand not just for nurses and doctors but also allied health professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and medical social workers.

Since his first year at university, Mr Low has been through five clinical attachments.

Each clinical rotation has allowed him to apply his knowledge while broadening his understanding of how occupational therapy influences a person's recovery.

During each stint, he would try to identify activities or routines that uplift the spirit of his patients while drawing up tailored therapies to motivate them. It could mean incorporating music, crafts or other hobbies they enjoy into their customised treatment plans.

When working with a stroke patient who was unresponsive to the standard occupational therapy exercises, Mr Low took time to discover the individual's fondness for fishing. He then integrated targeted fishing movements into the patient's exercises to motivate him.

With another stroke patient who did not respond to hand signs and pictures, he explored a different method outside of conventional occupational therapy and made use of an app that was designed to help autistic clients communicate.

His method worked. Through the app, the patient was able to communicate his feelings using an iPad.

These experiences taught Mr Low there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to connecting with and helping patients in their recovery.

"Community care lets us connect with patients, support them along their health journey and facilitate their reintegration into society, regardless of injury or disease," he says.



▲ Mr Low (left, with his classmates) got interested in occupational therapy after a stint at TTSH where he saw how occupational therapists help patients recover through customised care. PHOTO: COURTESY OF LOW HSIEN LOONG

The difference between occupational therapists and physiotherapists

Both play a vital role in helping patients recover and improve their quality of life. However, there are key differences between the two.

Occupational therapist	Physiotherapist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps individuals perform daily activities independently Uses a variety of interventions such as adaptive equipment, cognitive rehabilitation and therapeutic activities Considers one's holistic well-being, including mental health and living environment Aims to improve one's independence in everyday routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on improving physical movement and function Employs manual therapy techniques and exercises to regain strength, mobility function and range of motion Concentrates on physical aspects of healing Aims to enhance one's physical mobility and reduce pain

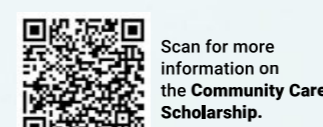


About AIC

The Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) coordinates the delivery of aged care services, and seeks to create a vibrant care community to enable people in Singapore to live well and age gracefully. AIC develops the Community Care sector in the areas of service development and manpower capability to raise the delivery of quality care. AIC is also the appointed agency for the administration of national schemes such as the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) and Merdeka Generation (MG) package.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY CARE SCHOLARSHIP

The Community Care Scholarship, offered by MOH Holdings in partnership with the Agency for Integrated Care, covers courses in the following healthcare disciplines: physiotherapy, occupational therapy, medical social work and speech therapy.



BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reproduced with permission.