

Combining modern science with the art of patient care

This SIT scholar leverages her technical expertise and empathy to make a difference in healthcare

Donning the scrubs of a radiation therapist is a childhood aspiration fulfilled for Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) Scholarship recipient Tan Lele.

When she was 13 years old, Lele spent a lot of time in the hospital visiting her grandmother who was warded for a few months and underwent treatment for various health issues, including cancer.

As she observed the busy healthcare staff running around, she thought maybe she could one day work in a hospital too.

Lele went on to study the sciences through secondary school and junior college. For university, she knew she wanted to pursue a degree related to healthcare.

Now 23, Lele works at the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) where she is with the division of radiation oncology.

"I treat cancer patients by accurately administering a prescribed dose of radiation to eliminate cancer cells," she explains.

"I have to be very precise and zap only the malignant cells so I don't damage the healthy cells nearby."

The work demands precision and accuracy, including making sure all the equipment is working perfectly,

properly positioning patients for treatment and administering the right dosage of radiation for each patient.

Lele may only be in her third month at NCCS currently, but she is already familiar with the job scope, thanks to her undergraduate studies at SIT, which involved an applied learning pedagogy combining academic knowledge and practical skills.

SIT's four-year direct honours degree programme in radiation therapy is the only bachelor of science radiation therapy programme offered by an autonomous university in Singapore.

Alongside academic modules, the programme also required Lele to complete around 1,000 hours of clinical placements.

Over four years, she completed five stints at NCCS, National University Hospital and Mount Elizabeth Hospital.

As an SIT scholar, Lele also contributed to raising awareness about cancer treatments.

"I had ambassadorial duties, like speaking to students at junior colleges and polytechnics about radiation therapy and SIT, as well as engaging with prospective students during the SIT Open House," she says.

"The profession of radiation therapist resonated with me



Tan Lele is part of the division of radiation oncology at the National Cancer Centre Singapore, where she administers radiation therapy for cancer patients. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

“As radiation therapists, we also provide **emotional comfort to patients throughout their treatment journey.**”

Tan Lele
 Recipient of the SIT Scholarship

because it offered the opportunity to combine my love for science with my desire to support those battling serious illnesses," says Lele. "I want to play a part in cancer treatment."

Emotional support for patients

While the hard skills of the scientific and technical aspects of her work are demanding, Lele finds the soft skills to be equally challenging as well.

"As radiation therapists, we also provide emotional comfort to

patients throughout their treatment journey," she says.

Currently treating breast cancer patients, Lele sees an average of 20 patients each day.

"Some patients are optimistic and quite jovial so it's not as depressing as everyone thinks," Lele says.

But there are other instances that are seared in her memory. She recalls one patient who told her to "just let me go to sleep forever".

"I told her she was very brave for coming to treatment and that she was already doing her best - so I will try my best, together with her," says Lele.

She knows the value of empathy in her line of work and has actively cultivated this quality throughout her journey.

Her final thesis - which examined how students of allied health professions could benefit from a humanities-based workshop designed to cultivate empathy - earned her the Singapore Society of

Radiographers Book Prize in Honours Thesis for Radiation Therapy.

Just as how her 13-year-old self was there for her own grandmother undergoing cancer treatment, Lele is determined to be a pillar of support for her patients.

"I would like to be involved in advancing the field of radiation therapy as this will lead to improved patient outcomes and help patients who are battling cancer," she says.

"Being able to help them achieve their treatment goals - whether that means curing the disease, controlling it or providing symptom relief - is the most rewarding experience any healthcare worker can have."



Scan for more on the SIT Scholarship.

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