

Source: Tabla!, Page 5
Date: 18 September 2020

Nursing gives Suresh purpose in life

K. JANARTHANAN

Now on the front line in the battle against Covid-19, he was once a wayward teen.

A graduate nurse working tirelessly, dealing with life, blood and death daily at the National University Hospital's intensive care unit, Mr Suresh Rajasekaram finds "immense satisfaction" in helping patients.

Nursing has given him a purpose in life, he says. He wants to pursue a doctorate in nursing.

It's a sea change for someone who thought of taking up nursing only because the idea of wearing a uniform appealed to him.

Mr Suresh, 31, was a wayward teen from a broken home who hung out with bad company.

His transformation began when he was admitted to the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

That helped him turn over a new leaf. That's how he became a nurse. Now he can help others get well because he had help himself to mend his ways.

Before that, he was drifting aimlessly. He had gone astray after his parents divorced when he was 13.

"Things started going downhill in Secondary Two", said Mr Suresh, who grew up with two sisters.

"I was pushed from Express to Normal Academic due to poor results. I became even more disinterested. I did not make it to Secondary 5. I was not even keen on going to ITE, the only option I was given."

For about a year, he spent his time doing odd jobs and drinking with friends. The turning point came when his elder sister Ms Thilagavathi, now 34, sat down with him one day and went through the options he had.

"My sister told me to strike off what I did not like," he said. "Finally it was down to nursing and sports science management."

He decided to try nursing because he liked the idea of wearing a uniform. But he would quit, he told his sister, if he didn't find it interesting.

Mr Suresh, who used to dye his hair and wear earrings, did not attend the admission interview with any high hopes or expectations.

Yet, Mr Tay Wei Sern, deputy director, health sciences and allied health, ITE College East, decided to give him a chance.

"His mother (Ms Selva Rani Rengasamy), who was with him during the interview, appeared deeply concerned about his future," Mr Tay told tabla!

"Also, when Suresh asked me to give him a chance, I saw the sincerity in his eyes that yearned for just one chance and I instinctively felt that I should let him take this opportunity. Ultimately, the decision proved correct."

Mr Suresh considers Mr Tay his "mentor". "After I asked him to give me a chance, I was determined to push ahead," said Mr Suresh.

He scored a GPA of 3.76 in his NITEC course from 2006 to 2008.

Then he enrolled in Ngee Ann



Polytechnic's nursing programme from 2008 to 2011 and scored a near-perfect 3.98. He also won a silver medal.

He later completed his nursing degree (2013 to 2016) from the National University of Singapore (NUS) with a near-first class honours CAP score of 4.48.

Internships and practical work helped him cover his personal expenses throughout his education.

"ITE gave me a strong practical foundation," said Mr Suresh, who did better than students from other polytechnics and junior colleges at NUS.

"Nothing comes easy. For peace and stability, discipline and delayed gratification are much needed," said Mr Suresh, who later married his university mate, who is also a nurse.

He feels the struggles he faced prepared him for the challenges of being a healthcare professional during the Covid-19 crisis.

"It is a war situation on the medical front," he said.

Describing what it's like to be working in the pandemic, he said: "From people I used to know during my youth to migrant workers of all nationalities, my team members and I see people from all walks of life undergoing similar cycles of anxiety and relief."

"As part of my job, I have to vigilantly attend not just to their medical needs but also guide, support and provide information and advice to them."

He added: "Patient management is definitely not for the faint-hearted. Yet, it is immensely fulfilling."

"To convey accurate information to the anxious patient and his family is an art I have been consciously cultivating for the past four years."

"It has been immensely valuable during the present pandemic."

He has made his family proud.

"I had hoped he would eventually understand how important education is to one's future, that was what kept me encouraging him," said his sister, Ms Thilagavathi.

"I was already very proud of him when he took the first step to go to school. The effort and sacrifices from then on are due to his hard work and passion for nursing."

Mr Suresh's advice to youngsters is to never give up.

"Some of you may feel lost and aimless," he said.

"I was lucky to find my passion. But, even if you don't in the first try, please do not stop trying to find what drives you."

➔ janark@sph.com.sg



Nurse Suresh Rajasekaram with his mother Selva Rani Rengasamy and mentor Tay Wei Sern. (Far left) With his sister Ms Thilagavathi. PHOTOS: SURESH RAJASEKARAM



"It is a war situation on the medical front. From people I used to know during my youth to migrant workers of all nationalities, my team members and I see people from all walks of life undergoing similar cycles of anxiety and relief."

— Nurse Suresh Rajasekaram