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School of the Arts (Sota) graduate Sonia Sheri is following in the footsteps of her brother Krish, who made history seven years ago when he became Sota's first student to be admitted to medical school at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Like her brother, Ms Sheri, 19, loves the arts, in particular literature and the performing arts. But she chose to apply to the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at NUS after completing her International Baccalaureate (IB) studies at Sota last year and has been given a place.

NUS confirmed Mr Sheri, 26, who enrolled in 2015, was the first Sota student to be admitted to its medical school, but said that since then, several other Sota students have been admitted to the school, which takes in about 300 students a year.

The majority of the students admitted have completed their A levels or IB diplomas in junior colleges and Integrated Programme schools.

Besides Sota, students coming through other non-traditional routes include those from the polytechnics and the Singapore Sports School. NUS said 12 students from Sota and the Singapore Sports School have been accepted into NUS Medicine since 2015.

It also said that the number of polytechnic students who join NUS Medicine each year has been increasing. A total of 13 students from the polytechnics have been accepted across 2020 and last year.

Mr Sheri, who plays the tabla, an Indian percussion instrument, said his interest in music was kindled after his parents – Mr Bhart Sheri, a stockbroker, and Mrs Preeti Sheri, a teacher – enrolled him in tabla classes when he was nine years old.

He continued to pursue his interest in music and the other arts during his years at Sota, which offers an integrated academic and arts programme for those who have interest and show early talent in the arts. Sota also caters to students with an interest in pursuing medicine, like Mr Sheri, by allowing them to take up two science subjects – biology and chemistry – at a higher level for the IB diploma.

But despite doing fairly well in their IB exams, the siblings were worried whether they would be able to get into the highly competitive NUS medical school – those who get into medicine tend to have high-to-perfect scores in the A levels or IB exams.

Mr Sheri, who had an IB aggregate score of 41, said: "When I applied, I heard that the minimum to make the cut for the interview that year was 43, so I was worried. But I think what secured me a place in medicine was my unusual background in the arts. During the interview, I took pains to point out how studying the arts helps doctors in their practice of medicine."

"Music, for example, focuses attention on active listening, which is important for doctors. Literature challenges readers to see the world from the perspective of another person and develop empathy for the characters."

Mr Sheri, who is currently a full-time national serviceman, hopes to specialise in palliative care.

Ms Sheri, who attained an aggregate score of 43, just short of the perfect score of 45, echoed her brother's comments when she said the arts fosters essential skills related to healthcare, including observation, critical thinking, self-reflection and empathy.

She said her love for the performing arts was kindled through her school activities at Pasir Ris Primary, the neighbourhood school her brother attended as well.

She became interested in

medicine after attending to her grandmother when she was ill.

Sota principal Mary Seah said the school's students have gone on to further their education in a wide variety of fields, including non-arts fields such as law, medicine, engineering, business and finance. She

also noted that the school constantly reviewed its subject offerings to keep up with university and career requirements.

Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, said its students hailed from a variety of backgrounds as

they are assessed on their individual academic merits, character and values, regardless of the institution they came from.

He added: "They are shortlisted through interviews and other tests, so that we select those who have the potential to become caring,

competent and compassionate doctors. Over the years, we have seen students enter the school from increasingly diverse pathways."

Prof Chong said that although medicine is known to be science-centred, doctors also need to take a more humanistic approach.

He added: "The mark of a good doctor is one that is able to marry sound, science-based knowledge with a softer, humanistic approach – practising medicine requires heart, as much as it is a science."

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# Sister follows brother from School of the Arts to NUS Medicine

They believe an arts background gives them essential skills that will help in their practice



Siblings Krish Sheri and Sonia Sheri are among a growing number of students who enter medical school via non-traditional routes, including polytechnics and the Singapore Sports School. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

STUDYING THE ARTS HELPS DOCS

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MR KRISH SHERI, the first Sota graduate to be admitted to the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.