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 Shereen and Sheryl Sati, are among a growing number of students to enter medical school’s non-traditional route, including polytechnics and the Singapore Sports School. ST Photo: Lee Yulin

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School of the Arts (Sota) graduate Siti Shereen is following in the footsteps of her brother Khalil, 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 Siti, 19, loves the arts, in particular literature and the performing arts, but 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 place.

NUS confirmed Ms Siti, 19, who enrolled in 2022, was the first Sota student to be admitted to its medical school, but said that since then, several other Sota students have also 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 diplomas in junior colleges and independent programmes or schools.

Besides Sota, students coming through other non-traditional routes include those from the polytechnics and the Singapore Sports School. NUS said 42 students from Sota and the Singapore Sports School have been accepted into NUS Medicine since 2002.

It also said that the number of polytechnic students who join NUS Medicine each year has been increasing. A total of 14 students from the polytechnics have been accepted over 2022 and last year.

Mr Sheryl, who plays the tabla, an Indian percussion instrument, said his interest in music was kindled after his parents—Mr Bilal Sheryl, a stockbroker, and Mrs W 이렇 Sheryl, a teacher—enrolled him in tabla classes when he was six years old.

He continued to pursue his interest in music, and the other arts, studying his own arts at Sota, which offers an integrated academic and arts programme for those who want to pursue the arts and other academic subjects.

Mr Sheryl is also interested in pursuing medicine. He chose Medicine, Mr Sheryl said, allowing him to take up two science subjects—biochemistry and chemistry—while pursuing the fine arts.

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

Mr Sheryl, who had an IB aggregate score of 43, said, “When I applied, I heard that the minimum to make the cut for the interview that year was 43, and I was worried. But I think what assured 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 develops empathy for the characters.”

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

Ms Shereen, who attained an aggregate score of 43, just short of the perfect score of 42, echoed her brother’s comments when she said the arts furnish essential skills required to healthcare, including observation, critical thinking, self-reflection and empathy.

“Secondly, the performing arts was kindled through her school activities at Pasir Ris Primary, the neighbourhood school her brother attended, she became interested in