

“I felt honoured to meet the Queen in person, as we usually only get to see her on television. She was elegant, pleasant, and friendly to everyone she met. The experience made my 3-year stay in Britain more complete!”

Heidi Tan Siew Khoon's memorable meeting with Queen Elizabeth took place in 1998 at St. Loye's School of Occupational Therapy. As patron of the school, the British monarch was visiting during Heidi's final year of undergraduate studies.

That meeting was undoubtedly Heidi's highlight of her overseas education in Britain, though she had plenty of other memories to cherish. “I enjoyed doing grocery shopping via cycling, picking raspberries from my own garden, and celebrating Chinese New Year with my English friends and lecturers in school. It was a wonderful time!”



The Enabler

Heidi Tan Siew Khoon

As an **occupational therapist**, Heidi Tan Siew Khoon helps patients to perform daily tasks, and adapt to disruptions in their lifestyle, so they can regain their independence.

University: St Loye's School of Occupational Therapy
Degree: BSc(Hons)Occupational Therapy

A Life Less Ordinary

If Heidi's experiences seem a little out of the ordinary, that is only in keeping with her less well-known profession.

The former Chinese Society member and basketball player at Hwa Chong Junior College opted for a career in Occupational Therapy “to help patients cope with their daily lives after their injuries.”

Therapeutic Pottery

Taking up a PSC Overseas Specialist Award (now called the MOH Health Science Scholarship), Heidi studied Occupational Therapy at St. Loye's School, one of the top universities in the field in the U.K. Besides regular classes, she also went on clinical placements all around England, practiced pottery and other crafts as a therapeutic medium, and even participated in a showcase of her craft projects. While most of her peers spent their vacations holidaying, she visited Germany and Brazil on mission trips.

“I learnt to be independent in learning, and in taking care of myself. Interacting with people of different cultures helped me gain confidence in social interactions.”

Upon her graduation, Heidi joined Tan Tock Seng Hospital as a Junior Occupational Therapist. To help in her patients'

rehabilitation, she would simulate certain work activities related to their job. For instance, she would ask an injured construction worker to simulate hammering nails, laying bricks, or sawing wood to train his work abilities during his rehabilitation.

“My primary responsibilities are to rehabilitate injured patients and help them return to work, and to liaise with other healthcare professionals regarding patients' treatment. I also give public and corporate educational talks, and supervise 10 staff, including therapists and support staff.”

After 3 years, she was promoted to Senior Occupational Therapist, and was sponsored by the hospital for a Masters in Ergonomics at the University of Queensland. Returning from Australia, Heidi worked in the specialised area of Work Rehabilitation and Ergonomics.

The Science of Work

“Ergonomics is the science of work,” she explains. “It explores how to fit a working person's mental and physical abilities, to match his work demands. For example, I would advise office workers with aches and pains in their body to adopt a good sitting posture, and how to adjust their workstation to improve their posture. I might also recommend suitable furniture, and teach them stretches to alleviate their pain.”

Heidi's career progression continued as she was promoted to Assistant Team Leader for a year, before taking on the responsibility of Team Leader for the past year.

“You need patience, good organisational abilities, and a genuine interest to help people, to succeed in this job,” she says.

Career Opportunities

Occupational Therapists have the chance to further specialise in the following fields:

- Burns and Plastics Rehabilitation
- Cardiac Rehabilitation
- Driving Assessment and Rehabilitation
- Occupational Health and Ergonomics
- Oncology Rehabilitation
- Orthopedics Rehabilitation

“Find out more about the job scope, and be certain that this is a profession you want to join and commit yourself to.”