

As an undergraduate in University College London, Melissa Chua spent her vacations travelling around Europe. Her trips to non-English speaking countries like France, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Greece not only broadened her worldview, but also gave her an insight into how it felt to have difficulties communicating with people.

That experience was to serve Melissa well when she began her career as a Speech Therapist six years ago.



The Communicator

Melissa Chua

A Speech Therapist, Melissa Chua helps patients with speech, language, or swallowing difficulties to rehabilitate and find their voice.

University: University College London
Degree: Bachelor of Science (Speech Sciences)

Patience and Passion

"A good speech therapist is patient and passionate in working with people of all ages," says the Head of Department of Speech Therapy in Singapore General Hospital. "Empathy is also important. Sometimes building a genuine bond with your patients is more effective in their rehabilitation than merely administering professional treatment."

As a speech therapist, Melissa sees patients with speech, language, or swallowing difficulties. Such conditions could be caused by a disease or an accident, or be acquired from birth, as in the case of language delay in children.

"I assess my patients' condition and provide rehabilitation to them. A fair amount of my time is spent talking to patients and their caregivers. I also ensure they are able to continue with therapy at home, and help them to understand and comply with my recommendations."

All-Rounded Development

For Melissa, a career in the Health Sciences always seemed like a logical choice, given her keen interest in health sciences and her passion in working with people of all ages.

The former Raffles Junior College student opted for a PSC Overseas Specialist Award-Paramedical, (now called the MOH Health Science Scholarship) majoring in Speech Sciences in University College London, as she wanted to contribute to society.

"I considered what I really wanted as a career. It was also important that the scholarship encouraged me to be a well-rounded person; to not only excel in my studies but also develop as an individual.

"University College London offered a well-established undergraduate programme in speech sciences. The department was also very strong in research. In addition, studying in London offered an enriching and exciting environment not only for studying, but also to grow and develop as an individual."

As part of the curriculum, Melissa had the opportunity to study a wide variety of interesting subjects in the sciences and arts, from anatomy and physiology to phonetics and linguistics. She also had to complete clinical attachments, which gave her the actual experience of working with both children and adults in providing therapy.

Lifelong Learning

Since her return to Singapore, Melissa has continued to develop her knowledge and skills through courses and study trips. In just six years, she has been promoted from a junior to a senior Speech Therapist, to the Head of Department.

"As I am in a management role, I spend part of my day attending meetings, or working on proposals to further improve the speech therapy services in the hospital. The rest of the day is spent with patients either in our outpatient clinics or in the wards. Some days are also spent supervising junior speech

therapists, or students who are on clinical placements in our department."

What advice would she give to budding Speech Therapists?

"If this is your passion then go for it! It's a great profession to be in. Enjoy the programme and interacting with your patients. They'll teach you life's many lessons!"

A Patient's Voice

Father Keith had to have his voice box removed after being diagnosed with throat cancer a few years ago. He uses an artificial voice box to communicate with people, and has been Melissa's patient for the past 3 years.

To feel that I am in the hands of somebody competent, somebody who feels for the job is very, very gratifying. To be able to talk to somebody who understands your situation is good, because sometimes strangers are very embarrassed when they're made to listen to someone like me. Whereas this lady...it doesn't worry her. I think the friendship and relationship part of it [rehabilitation] is even more effective than the professional part."

“ Think carefully about what career you would like to be in. Speak to someone who is in that profession, or arrange to observe them at work. ”