Doctor with a heart

SOBANA Muthu, a final-year medical student at UCSI University, was rushing one day to the orthopaedic department when she saw someone she recognised approaching her.

"I saw this aunty running towards me. I knew her – she sells curry mee in Chinatown, and I often frequent her stall," said Sobana.

The aunty explained she had broken her leg and was in pain. Puzzled, Sobana explained that it was unlikely that she had broken her leg as she could still run, and accompanied her to the doctor.

In halting English, the aunty introduced Sobana. "This is my daughter, you tell her." True enough, the doctor said it was merely a pulled tendon. Sobana then called over a Chinese colleague to translate, and the old lady hugged Sobana in relief.

"It was a very humbling and touching experience, because she introduced me as her daughter, although she is Chinese and I am Indian. And all I did was stop and get someone to translate," she said.

Among many dramatic and heart-stopping incidents at the hospital, this one remains Sobana's favourite memory.

It is no surprise that patients are and remain Sobana's main motivation in becoming a doctor.

While empathy is an integral part of being a good doctor, it is not enough to have just that. Life as a doctor is challenging, particularly during the mandatory one-year housemanship and following three years compulsory service.

The hours are long, deadlines short and pressures high. Empathy needs to be coupled with intelligence, patience and determination not to give up.

For this, Sobana is grateful that UCSI's Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences understands and has tailored its Doctor of Medicine programme to focus on giving students maximum clinical practice at the hospital.

The students start their day at the hospital at 8am. They break at noon for lunch and have classes from 2pm to 6pm.

Recurrently, the students will also be on call from 7pm to 7am. On these occasions, they will still have to continue their usual hospital work the next morning. On weekends, they practise their skills on campus in the medical lab.

As the field of medicine has no room for error, UCSI University makes no compromise when it comes to medical standards. At the university, students are guided by lecturers who are doctors or nurses, while at the hospital, they are guided by experienced staff members.

The students are also required to present a case write up every day to their supervisor, who will guide and correct them if needed. Each student is also assigned a mentor.

With only two months to go before completing her Doctor of Medicine degree, Sobana has spent two years in the UCSI Kuala Lumpur campus and three in the Kuala Terengganu campus.

Having enjoyed her time in Terengganu, she wants to do something for the community.

"I hope to set up a hospital here one day. I know it's a long shot, but if I can find the funds, I would love to make it a free hospital," she said with a shy smile.

Since her favourite patients are the old people, Sobana is also considering setting up an old folks home one day. As a tribute to her parents, she intends to name the hospital and old folks home in their honour.

One thing Sobana is certain – her hospital must have a multi-racial staff.

She said, "Who will take care of patients like my 'curry mee aunty' if we all only spoke English?" Spoken like a true doctor – with her patients' interest at heart.

To find out more about UCSI University's Doctor of Medicine and Health Sciences programmes, contact 03-9101 8882, e-mail www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry or drop by at its Open Days on Sept 7 and 8 (9am-6pm).
It was the humbling experience of having her Chinese patient (right) call her ‘daughter’ that convinced Sobana that her patients will always be her focus as a future doctor.