

news

ONG JING MIN

Even past his retirement age, Dr Aw Yong Keong Poh, 72, still felt there was room for improvement and time to upskill himself.

The traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) physician graduated from the Singapore University of Social Sciences with a bachelor's in Chinese language and literature on May 4.

Despite working at Singapore Thong Chai Medical Institution for eight years and having been in the TCM industry for 18 years, he enrolled to study part-time in the university in 2016.

Dr Aw Yong, a grandfather of four, told The New Paper: "I wanted to gain formal qualifications to write better patient cases and good TCM essays for publication, to give myself a chance to advance and to fulfil my childhood dream of graduating from a local university with a degree.

"Age should not be a main factor. I strongly believe it is based on one's ability to study. I never disqualified myself."

His pursuit of knowledge ended up being applicable in the workplace, as it led to him being promoted to senior attending physician in 2019.

Another recent senior graduate is Ms Ng Joon Lin, 60, who has accumulated a total of two

Age cannot stop us from learning, say senior grads

These lifelong learners, aged 72 and 60, have just graduated from SUSS and Temasek Polytechnic respectively

licences and 51 certificates in areas ranging from human resources to environmental services.

On Tuesday, she received her specialist diploma in gerontology (optimal ageing practice) from Temasek Polytechnic, which she took up so that she could better care for her 87-year-old mother who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Ms Ng told TNP: "As dementia patients struggle with expressing themselves, I could not understand her at the start and there were times when I would get upset at her.

"But this course has taught me to understand and meet her needs and prepare me for



changes in her behaviour as her dementia worsens."

She runs 5 Spices & 2 Cultures and Joon Kitchen, home-based food businesses that sell both Peranakan and Hakka cuisine, which she launched in March last year.

She is also pursuing a specialist diploma in gerontology (nutrition for ageing well) at Temasek



(Left) Dr Aw Yong Keong Poh with his mother after graduating on May 4. (Above) Ms Ng Joon Lin with her mother, who has Alzheimer's disease. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF AW YONG KEONG POH & NG JOON LIN

Polytechnic, as she sees the importance of a proper diet for her, her family and her customers.

Behind Ms Ng and Dr Aw Yong's achievements are hours of hard work and discipline as both juggle work and studies.

He said: "Going to campus and in class, I was quite conscious of my age.

"But the only thing that made me uncomfortable was the fear of failing the exams. I had to sacrifice most of my rest time to go to class at night and catch up with homework over the weekends.

"At the same time, I met a group of like-minded students who gave me recognition and made me feel I was not alone."

Despite the obstacles they faced, they continue to be strong advocates of lifelong learning, which "is good for anyone who wants to age well as you can keep your mind active and life will be more meaningful", said Ms Ng.

Dr Aw Yong added: "Everyone needs to remain competitive in the workplace. I advise all seniors who want to remain relevant in their workplaces to update their skills by earning certifications, continuing with education credits or even advancing to degrees."