

# Multitasking houseman gets job done

Youth leader  
draws on student  
experience to  
manage  
demanding role

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SINCE July, Raja Nur Shahkeerah has been working an average of 14 hours per day with only a day off each week.

As a houseman at Hospital Tengku Ampuan Rahimah in Klang, Selangor, she is responsible for reviewing patients and providing suggestions to medical officers and specialists regarding their treatment plans.

The challenge intensifies during solo night shifts, when only one houseman is assigned to cover the entire ward, which has a total of 52 patients, she told *StarEdU*.

Citing her second night shift as the most memorable, she recalled participating in an active resuscitation as soon as her shift began.

"On top of that, I had to handle many new admissions. It really tested me to my limits, but I am grateful to have friends from other wards who helped me with some of my tasks," she said.

With such a demanding schedule and heavy responsibility, the 25-year-old has been drawing on her multitasking experience as a student at IMU University, from which she graduated in November last year, to help her cope.

An orator, she presented at the 16th International Medical Education Conference 2023 and the International Academy of Medical Specialists 2nd World Congress 2023.

Her passion for policy-making has also earned her recognition



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in competitions, including first place at the Malaysian Youth Policy Symposium 2019 for advocating the compulsory National Immunisation Programme.

In 2022, she worked with IMU Cares and UNHCR Malaysia on a healthcare policy championing education for refugee children in Malaysia.

Shahkeerah's dedication to both healthcare and community service has led to several accolades, including the Malaysian Medical Association Wilayah Persekutuan Award for Professionalism and Leadership 2023, the Dr Tan See Leng Award of Leadership 2023 and the IMU University Aflame Student Award 2023.

"Balancing academics, competitions and conferences taught me valuable time management skills that I now apply to my housemanship role. It is important to always have a strategy when meeting deadlines and organising priorities," she said.

In fact, Shahkeerah has devised a monthly strategy to achieve her goals during her two-year housemanship.

"In the first month, I focused on familiarising myself with procedures like venepuncture (drawing blood), requesting ultrasound and CT scans, making referrals to other departments, and tasks like central and femoral vein cannula insertions for chronic kidney disease patients, providing cardiac life support such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and assisting in pleural tapping, toileting and suturing.

"In the second month, my goal was to confidently diagnose patients and create holistic and systematic management plans for them.

"By this month, I aim to manage patients independently, and by the fourth month, I hope to become a reliable mentor for my juniors," she shared.

Shahkeerah added that she has found effective communication and critical thinking – skills she honed through her involvement in various activities in university – to be essential in her housemanship.

She also emphasised the importance of living in the moment rather than constantly reflecting on the past – a lesson she learnt as a medical student.

"For instance, after a competition, you shift your focus to the next challenge. This principle applies to professional life as well.

"Prioritising mental health means recognising that after work, I am just a regular person – a child to my parents and a sibling to my brothers and sisters. If we keep living in the past, we can never be successful," she asserted.

Reflecting on the transition from medical student to houseman, Shahkeerah said she is now involved in the practical aspects of patient care and sees the inner workings of a hospital.

"In medical school, we reviewed scans and test results provided to us. Now, we are responsible for obtaining these tests, understanding their relevance and importance to our patients, and preparing and explaining procedures to them.

"This hands-on experience is a major shift from the theoretical knowledge we gained in school. It helps me enhance my clinical skills."

She added that revisiting her medical knowledge helps her handle complex cases, such as acute transverse myelitis and renal tubular acidosis, and better understand patient management.

"It's very rewarding when my management plans are agreed upon by medical officers and specialists. My sense of accomplishment comes from seeing patients recover and be discharged," she said.

Taking inspiration from her previous policy work, Shahkeerah has identified areas for improvement in the healthcare system.

"Long waiting times in hospitals, resource shortages, and limited health literacy contribute to various medical issues, particularly diabetes mellitus, hypertension and dyslipidemia.

"Addressing these modifiable risk factors could enhance the health of our population. Society should be exposed to healthier lifestyles, such as exercising and consuming nutritious food," she said.

To aspiring medical students,

With the theme of the article in mind, carry out the following English language activities.

**1** Would you consider becoming a doctor? Why or why not?

**2** Imagine you have the chance to interview Shahkeerah. What questions would you ask? With a friend, brainstorm possible responses she might give, and then role-play the interview.

**The Star's Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NIE) programme promotes the use of English language in primary and secondary schools nationwide. For Star-NIE enquiries, email [starnie@thestar.com.my](mailto:starnie@thestar.com.my).**

Shahkeerah stressed the importance of thoroughly considering this career path, as it demands both physical and mental resilience.

"Starting out is always the hardest part. When I began, I was unsure of how to balance my medical studies with extra-curricular activities.

"Finding a mentor and striving for growth are essential. We only discover our readiness when we step out of our comfort zones," she said.

Li Lian, 19, a student in Kuala Lumpur, is a participant of the BRATS Young Journalist Programme run by *The Star's Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NIE)* team. For updates on the BRATS programme, go to [facebook.com/niebrats](https://facebook.com/niebrats).