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Being the change

It's a better world because of those who are willing to go above and beyond their call of duty to make a difference. Three women were recently honoured by the *Women's Weekly* magazine as Great Women of Our Time for their outstanding achievements and their impact on the lives of others.

By S. INDRAMALAR
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Dr Christina Ng

CONSULTANT oncologist Dr Christina Ng started health NGO, Empowered, to educate under-resourced communities on cancer, in 2009.

Empowered raises awareness and knowledge on cancer and treatment options, and provides screening and treatment.

"Through my practice at a public hospital early in my career, I witnessed how wrong medical decisions made by patients, particularly those from low-income households, resulted in premature death. Many

Preventing and treating cancer

under-resourced communities don't have access to information, treatment and emotional support in dealing with cancer and I wanted to provide a structured cancer support programme for these communities," says Dr Ng, who graduated from the University of Melbourne in Australia.

Empowered, she says, hopes to save lives through early detection of cancer. As colorectal cancer is currently the most common type of cancer affecting men and the second most common cancer affecting women in Malaysia, much of Empowered's focus is on colorectal cancer.

"Risk awareness and proactive screening in Malaysia remain a challenge. Our solution is to first raise awareness about the disease and also the importance of a healthy diet and active lifestyle. Secondly, we conduct screening workshops and intervention programmes," she explains.

To make sure they reach the communities they are targeting, Empowered brings their workshops literally to the doorsteps of the people who need their services most.

"We work with community leaders not only to ensure the social and cultural values of each community are incorporated into our programmes, but also to get them to play a key role in the programmes. We literally knock on doors to disseminate information and encourage residents to participate in our screening programmes," she says.

In under-resourced communities, Dr Ng points out, health is often a lesser priority.

"For these communi-

ties, survival is their priority. Many hold several jobs just to make ends meet. They may not be so willing to spend time screening for cancer. But by bringing it to their doorsteps, we are able to make our services more accessible and increase our reach," she says.

Ng's persistence has paid off. Empowered sees better response to the screening kits handed out to communities, from a 66% return rate in 2010 to 85% in 2012.

"We collaborate with a team of doctors in government hospitals to ensure medical tests for those who have been diagnosed. All costs are borne by Empowered and we make arrangements to pick the patients up from their homes for their subsequent appointments. We also give them moral and emotional support, which is an important part of cancer treatment," she says.

So far, Empowered has reached 50,000 urban poor Malaysians in the Klang Valley, beginning with their pilot programme in Sentul in 2010.

Setting up Empowered was definitely a challenge, admits Dr Ng, who had no prior experience setting up an NGO, let alone running one.

"Thankfully I had a lot of help and support from my family, friends and colleagues. It has been a learning experience. It still is, but I think we have developed effective strategies to help us overcome challenges and achieve our goals.

"When I see the expressions on the faces of the people we serve and hear their gratitude, it is easy to forget the challenges we faced in fulfilling our mission. My goal is to run more programmes, especially in rural areas and also to target other prevalent cancers," she says.

Consultant oncologist Dr Christina Ng started Empowered to give the poor access to cancer education and treatment.

Dr Geshina Ayu Mat Saat

DR Geshina Ayu Mat Saat believes women fare better than men in her field.

"Women have better intuition and are more empathetic which I believe makes us better criminologists," says the lecturer with Universiti Sains Malaysia's Forensic Science programme. "We are also better at multitasking and connecting the dots. Criminology is seen as a man's field, but gender does not really matter. I have not found it harder as a woman.

"If anyone looks down at a female criminologist, it is their problem, not mine. I simply ignore them and let my work speak for itself."

Dr Geshina's interest in psychology was inspired by her father, psychologist and family therapist Prof Datuk Dr Mat Saat Baki.

"I think I knew since I was around five. My sisters and I used to follow my dad around when he gave psychology lectures. I actually learned a lot from hands-on experience and experiential learning from him rather

A safer Malaysia

than in classes at university," she says.

Upon completing her degree in psychology, Dr Geshina was offered a choice of postgraduate scholarship for either criminology or forensic psychology by USM. She chose criminology.

"My training is eclectic, really. As I said, I had exposure to psychology since I was young. I know about law, medicine, sociology, human resources, psychometrics, forensics, violence, victimisation, counselling ... because these are what underpin criminology. When dealing with criminals, you need to know the laws and criminal procedure codes, you need to know the psyche of criminals and their social support and networks and you also need to know their modus operandi including the tools and technology that they use. I like learning various things and this field allows me to make use of my knowledge.

"I had my practical training in Britain and my field experience in Malaysia," says Dr Geshina who was born in Australia and grew up in the United States. She moved back to Malaysia for her tertiary education before going to Britain for her graduate and post-graduate education.

Not long after obtaining her Masters in Applied Criminology, Dr Geshina and her father were called upon to help the Prisons Department create the in-house rehabilitation for sexual offenders.

Criminology, she explains, is the study of crime, criminals and their victims. To a certain extent it also covers punishment for crimes committed.

"The bulk of my work is teaching. I teach criminology, violence and society, among other subjects and I also conduct research which I enjoy very much. I have several ongoing research projects, most of which