

MODELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

EP5 SEG 2 RITA V7

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Following a childhood passion for science, and witnessing a debilitating illness in her family, Rita is already on the path to her dream job.

RITA: My name's Rita and this is my story. I grew up in this house, actually, in Auburn. Both my parents are migrants so my mum came from Indonesia but she's Indonesian Chinese and my father is from Malta. My first school was in Auburn as well. It was St John of God and also I went to high school then.

I guess in high school times I saw opportunity within science but I always liked medical kind of things. I think my favourites were the ones I was strongest in so that would have been English and science. What's really great about science is that it's really broad. You don't always just sit there and listen to the teacher. You're also like running experiments, get to walk around class and fiddle with things and I always kind of liked that part of it. When I undertook the HSC I thought it was really quite stressful. I always wanted to go the university but I was never sure if I was good enough to get in or what it's like when you're there.

I guess with your first degree what I found is that you really don't know what you're in for and the best way is just to jump in and just have a look and just see. I applied for a Bachelor of Medical Science because what I read in the UAC book sounded good, actually. Your first year they just try to get you a basic grounding of chemistry, biology, physics, they try to get everyone in first year, all the first year students to be kind of on a similar level.

I've had a choice of majors or specialities within my degree and I picked medical microbiology because I saw, I saw career path within - as being a hospital scientist or working in a lab kind of environment. That led me into doing a year in research. I did quite well in my third year which was a lot of medical microbiology and

immunology kind of courses. I undertook a project researching molecular biology of *Bordetella pertussis*, which is the whooping cough. At that time I was also doing volunteer work with St John's Ambulance and I really enjoyed engaging with out patients and that led me to think that nursing might be a career for me.

I love working with St John Ambulance because I get to meet many different people and there's always a different situation at every event that we do. There's a lot of training as well which is really useful to my career.

St John's Ambulance basically provides first aid to community events so it could be anything as small as a local football club playing a game or it could be as something as big as the New Year's fireworks.

Pretty much halfway through my honours or research project I already kind of knew this type of research really wasn't for me and so I was already looking for something outside that was within sort of health because I was really interested in working with patients and clients directly. When my father became unwell and I visited him quite a lot in hospital I kind of saw the work that the nurses were doing for him and that's when I really realised that nursing was probably what I was looking for. When I looked more into nursing itself I saw how broad it was, how it could encompass so many different things and you could really choose what you wanted to focus on in your life. If you wanted to focus on career then nursing had pathways for that. If you wanted to focus on your family then you could still work and mould your work around your family commitments so I thought that was quite important because my priorities may change in the future, I'm not really short so I'm looking for some sort of career that could work around the rest of my working life pretty much. So since I already completed four years at university I was looking at the quickest way I could get into a career in nursing and that's a 2-year degree.

So within the two years you go through a variety of types of nursing. So you've got your mental health, you've got your high acuity, you've got community nursing and you've got your general nursing, those are probably the main aspects.

During my second year at the nursing degree I really enjoyed working in intensive

care. So I was there for four weeks full time and that was part of the high acuity aspect of my course and I already knew at that time that that's really where I wanted to work was either in ICU or emergency department. You had two choices when you're a graduate nurse. So you can either mid year of your final year you apply to get into a new graduate program where they kind of whichever hospital you get accepted into they take you around different areas, you work in different fields for how many weeks or months and then hopefully whilst you're during this new grad year some area that you've been in will pick you up and say we'd like to offer you a position.

So I went to Goulburn, I went for a day trip and I talked to the clinical nurse educator down there. I really explained what my goals were and where I wanted to go with my interests. So I already knew I was interested in intensive care so that's where I wanted to end up. So I was very pleased when they gave out my placements I started off in rehab, then I went to operating theatres and my last one ended up in intensive care in Goulburn Base Hospital.

I've been fortunate enough to get a position at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in their 2-year intensive care program. This really aligns with my career aspirations to work as a flight nurse. I'm going to need another 10 more years experience within that field to get there but start somewhere.

In dragon boating through St John's Ambulance when I agreed for a favour to do first aid for a race. At the time I had no idea what dragon boat was. I initially thought you just put the paper boat like you make on to water. And when I arrived on the day there were just thousands of people all in their gear with their paddles and luckily I had convinced some of my friends from St John's to help me out too and we were all kind of a little bit stunned. And so the sport looked pretty cool. It was fast and furious and I was looking to join a team sport at the time. So a friend of mine knew of a group and that was Chinese Youth League and when I went to meet them they seemed friendly enough so kind of stuck around for the next two years and I'm still sticking even though I lived so far away during the last year in Goulburn.

My advice to perspective nurses is to just keep open minded. It will give you the

experience, it will give you the start and you will really understand how the medical world kind of works. I think nursing gives great opportunities to anyone that dares to enter it. Keep open minded about, yeah, what you can achieve basically because I think that nursing does offer quite a lot of opportunities.

Okay, university has been an extremely important role in my life because without it I could never have become a registered nurse and I could never have worked in the job that I've been in for the past year or so and I could never have made it to Royal Prince Alfred so yeah, without university then I wouldn't be where I am today.

So within the next five years I'd really like to continue working in intensive care units not just in NSW but around the world so I wouldn't mind going to the US or the UK and working there as well. So it's one of the great things about nursing is you can really take it overseas and, you know, you're not limited to just one area or one place really to get a job.

My name's Rita and this is my story. I grew up in Auburn in Sydney's west. I graduated from university with a Bachelors of Medical Science Honours and then a Masters of Nursing. I work as a registered nurse in an intensive care unit. I do volunteer work for St John's Ambulance. I'm part of a dragon boat team. University has given me a career in nursing and helped me achieve my dream job.

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Rita recently graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing and is putting all her experience in a major country hospital to good use in Sydney. To learn more about these inspiring stories visit our website at modelsofachievement.com.au. See you next time.

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