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10 enrolled nurses win accolades for their dedication at annual awards

The top three recipients of the Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award for Enrolled Nurses are (from left) Ms Ow Yong Lai Chan from the Institute of Mental Health (second prize), Ms Fatimah Taha Suhaimi of Changi General Hospital (first prize) and Ms Yew Xueling from Sengkang General Hospital (third prize). All three are principal enrolled nurses. PHOTO: SINGAPORE NURSES ASSOCIATION

Shabana Begum

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In 2002, Ms Fatimah Taha Suhaimi, then an enrolled nurse, cared for a 21-year-old patient who suffered from trauma after a traffic accident.

After the patient was discharged, Ms Fatimah stayed in touch with her and advised her over the phone when she complained of giddiness at home.

It was for such instances of meticulous care that the 52-year-old, now a principal enrolled nurse at Changi General Hospital, received first prize at the Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award for Enrolled Nurses yesterday.

The late Mr Tan Chin Tuan was one of Singapore's pioneer bankers and chairman of OCBC Bank from 1966 to 1983.

The annual award is the highest accolade for enrolled nurses in Singapore. Enrolled nurses - usually the first point of contact for patients - have to complete a two-year nursing course, while registered nurses have to complete a diploma or degree in nursing.

Almost every year since 2006, the nursing award is given to 10 enrolled nurses across public and private institutions, with the top three winners usually being principal enrolled nurses.

Ms Fatimah received $3,500, a specially minted gold medallion and a trophy. The second and third prize winners received $3,000 and $2,500 respectively, along with medallions. The remaining seven winners received $800. The cash prizes will go towards the nurses' professional development.

"I feel very grateful and honoured to receive this award. It is good that enrolled nurses are encouraged to go for further studies," said Ms Fatimah, a single mother.

Senior Minister of State for Health Koh Poh Koon, who delivered a pre-recorded message to the awardees, said: "I am heartened by the dedication and professionalism of our nurses in overcoming challenges to continue to provide quality, safe and patient-centric clinical care to all patients."

Mr Sebastian Tan, director of the D. S. Lee Foundation which founded the award, said the honour is for enrolled nurses "who have very often not been publicly recognised for their contributions to the healthcare sector".

Principal enrolled nurses are also tasked to train and guide new enrolled nurses and nursing students. Ms Fatimah said many of the young enrolled nurses see her as a mother figure.

Another principal enrolled nurse who is often called "mum" is Ms Ow Yong Lai Chan from the Institute of Mental Health. But it is her younger patients who address her affectionately that way.

The second-prize recipient helps patients undergo vocational training and rehabilitation to return to the community and find employment. The 58-year-old said being the patients' biggest fan and always offering a listening ear are key to her patients' recovery.

Third-prize winner Yew Xueling, 38, from Sengkang General Hospital, said she intends to use the cash to embark on more part-time courses in areas such as counselling skills and dementia care.