

Profile

May Ng: a lifetime commitment to children



May Ng says that, growing up in Malaysia, she always knew what she wanted to be: “As a small child, I would say paediatrician, not doctor”. She loved looking after her younger sister and cousins. Ng has turned her affection for children into a vocation.

Initially, her parents tried to talk her out of medicine as they couldn’t afford the education she’d need. However, Ng was an exceptional student—in her own words, a “girly swot”—whose grades earned her exceptional opportunities. Thanks to scholarships for students from ASEAN member countries, Ng attended the best schools in Singapore. Then the Malaysian government awarded her a full scholarship to read medicine in Sydney, NSW, Australia. Ng was one of the first Malaysian Chinese people to win such a grant.

While training in paediatrics, Ng specialised in oncology, but she found the combination of kids and cancer too painful. “It took a toll on my mental health”, she admits. Ng switched to paediatric endocrinology so that she could care for children with diseases more chronic than acute. As she says, “You can’t cure a lot of hormone conditions, but you can help people manage them and live well.” She moved to the UK for her first job in the field and never looked back. “I really like to form relationships with children and their families, supporting them through the years.”

In academic pursuits, it could be said that Ng ran before she walked. For her PhD in child health, she led a UK-wide trial of thyroxine supplementation in extremely premature babies and studied their unique neonatal endocrinopathies. A brilliant research career lay before her, but life intervened. Her first child, Brendan, was diagnosed with non-verbal autism. Her second, Darren, was born deaf. Her third, Corinne,

was premature and spent months in hospital. Post-PhD, Ng found herself at a crossroads. She could either take a university position hours from home or work as a paediatrician at a nearby Hospital. “It was a difficult decision, but in the end family comes first”, says Ng. She chose the hospital (Southport and Ormskirk, Merseyside, UK) and developed the children’s endocrine and diabetes unit. Under her leadership, the unit has won multiple awards for health-care excellence.

Although Ng has been a full-time clinician for over a decade, she has not neglected her research interests. With honorary professorships at Edge Hill University and the University of Liverpool, she maintains her academic links. And in what Ng jokingly calls her “hobby time”, she continues to do a remarkable amount of clinical research into paediatric diabetes. She also helps shape the UK’s research agenda through her involvement in bodies like Diabetes UK, Royal College of Paediatrics and the National Institute for Health and Care Research. In her view, more medical research should focus on children; they make up 20% of the country’s population but attract only 3% of grant money.

Not content to merely cultivate her field of expertise, Ng has been busy expanding it. To act as an expert witness in court cases involving endocrinology, she obtained a Master of Laws. Following her law degree, she obtained an MBA so that she could better represent the interests of clinicians in management meetings at the hospital. Ng’s broad skill set makes her uniquely qualified for the numerous advisory and leadership roles she has taken up. For instance, she has chaired the UK Association of Children’s Diabetes Clinicians for 8 years, which seeks to improve diabetes services in multiple ways, from sharing good practice to developing national guidelines. Just as

impressive is Ng’s work for international organisations like the European Society of Paediatric Endocrinology and the International Society of Pediatric & Adolescent Diabetes where she has led several international initiatives such as a freely accessible global e-learning of paediatric endocrinology and diabetes.. She is particularly passionate about her voluntary role as chief medical advisor for Action4Diabetes, which provides vital aid—such as free insulin and blood glucose tests—to disadvantaged young people in southeast Asia. “It’s a fantastic charity”, says Ng. “If it stopped suddenly tomorrow, many children would die.”

The UK has its own disadvantaged youth, something Ng is keenly aware of. In 2019, she spoke to parliament about the barriers preventing young people in deprived areas from gaining access to diabetes technology. Ng called for an end to this postcode lottery in health care. She is currently leading a nation-wide study of the problem.

For her services to people with diabetes, Ng received an Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2022. But that’s only half the story. Her services to people with autism and disabilities were also recognised. Ever since the birth of her son, Brendan, she has been doing all she can for the National Autistic Society as a paediatrician, advocate, educator, and fundraiser.

As if Ng didn’t have enough hats to wear, she is also an accomplished author, with three books to her name, one about autism, another about hormones, and a third about type 1 diabetes—all of them written to help families deal with the medical challenges they face. When asked how she manages to do so much, Ng laughs. “I really don’t know. But I am very organised, and if I have a single moment free, I’ll do something with it.”

Carl Power



For Action4Diabetes see
<https://action4diabetes.org/>