

Contact

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“

Take pride in how far you've come. Have faith in how far you can go. But don't forget to enjoy the journey.”

- Michael Josephson



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About Contact

Contact is the medium for OUM graduates to stay connected to their alma mater. Published as a quarterly e-magazine, **Contact** tells the inspiring stories of those who have realised their dreams at OUM.



IN THIS ISSUE

Thanks to Covid-19, so much of what we have taken for granted about life have been completely transformed. Past outbreaks, like the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, seemed real only in documentaries and history books; many of us never imagined we would face something similar in our own lifetime.

The current situation also prevented graduates of cohort 24 from receiving their scrolls in person at a full-fledged convocation last year. While by no means a substitute for a ceremony filled with joy and splendour, in a grand hall where one could celebrate with families, peers and loved ones, this issue of *Contact* is dedicated to all graduates of cohort 24 and their outstanding achievements as OUM learners.

As such, we are delighted to share the stories of three alumni who graduated in 2020 in this e-magazine. With the pandemic still very much an ongoing battle, we also highlight some reminders about working from home and keeping ourselves informed.

All the best from us at *Contact*!

LIVE & LEARN:

LEARNING, A LIFELONG PASSION

By Izyan Diyana Merzuki (izyan_diyana@oum.edu.my)

Intellectually curious, eager for knowledge, with a clear sense of what interests him, as well as great perseverance and determination – these are the characteristics that best describe Dr Abdullah Abdul Ghani.

The 50-year-old manager working at an oil and gas conglomerate is among the learners from cohort 24 who graduated last year.

“I enrolled in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme in May 2012. It took me eight years of hard work to complete my doctorate,” Dr Abdullah says.

Decades ago, he developed an interest in management after five years of working as an engineer. He then signed up for a master’s degree in business administration and has never looked back since.

Dr Abdullah shares, “The master’s degree was not enough. My hunger for knowledge and continuous learning inspired me to pursue the doctorate programme. Even now that I have completed the DBA, I’m still learning new things because the more I learn, the more I realise how much I don’t know.”



Completing the doctorate programme was tough for him. But he took it all in his stride, in the name of knowledge.

“There were a few changes that happened over the eight years. I once requested for a deferment as I had a huge commitment at work. I focused on finishing my tasks and returned the next semester. My strong determination to succeed was what helped me overcome those difficulties and challenges.”

“ I’m still learning new things because the more I learn, the more I realise how much I don’t know.”

For this true-blue Kelantanese whose parents were farmers, seeking knowledge and education has always been a priority despite challenging circumstances.

“Other than obtaining a formal education, I also received a traditional Islamic education in the “*pondok*” where I acquired a lot of Islamic knowledge. I also obtained the “*tauliah*” or credentials from the Federal Territories Islamic Religious Department (JAWI) as well as Terengganu and Sarawak Islamic Religious authorities to give talks and share my knowledge on the religion.”

This father of seven believes in sharing in order to learn and gain more knowledge. “A few of my colleagues are still studying. So I help them out with their studies whenever I can. My previous colleague did the same for me too. We help each other because we know and understand the struggle. I’m open to sharing knowledge and experience with others anytime, anywhere and on any platform.”

Dr Abdullah’s passion in pursuing knowledge is an inspiration that serves as a great example to many learners out there.

“This latest qualification could never be achieved without the support from my wife and family. The undivided support from my supervisor helped a lot too. Sometimes, I do miss those wonderful memories. My formal learning is now complete but my informal learning will always continue,” Dr Abdullah concludes.

PERSONALITY:

PROUD TO BE A STAFF NURSE!

By Izyan Diyana Merzuki (izyan_diyana@oum.edu.my)

Michelle Chee, 31, who graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing Science (BNS) degree last year is set to make her mark as a professional nurse abroad.

With her degree, she was able to land a nursing job abroad and is currently waiting for her visa. "Nurses are needed globally and BNS qualification from OUM has opened doors for me to work in a different country where I get to learn different practices that will make me better at my job."

With nine years of experience working in the Operation Theatre (OT) at a private hospital in Ipoh, Chee gets to deepen her skills in assisting doctors in the Cardiothoracic OT unit (CaOT) who perform surgeries on heart and lung patients.



"I am fortunate to be working under the one and only cardiothoracic surgeon based in Perak. The surgeon has inspired me to do my best at work, take the initiative to learn, put my skills to practice, share my knowledge, help others, and be selfless."

According to Chee, the cardiac bypass surgery is the main surgery performed at CaOT. "My role is to assist the surgeon in harvesting veins, and in some cases arteries, as well as passing the correct instruments during surgery."

She needs to remain alert and constantly think on her feet while in the operation theatre. "During surgery, the surgeon rarely speaks for better focus, so I need to pay attention and anticipate what is needed from me at any given time."

"Currently, I'm training a junior colleague who is assisting surgeons in cardiac bypass surgery cases. At times, I assist the anaesthetist in intubating patients prior to surgeries," she proudly shares.

Throughout the three years of her study, Chee is thankful to her lecturers, tutors, supervisor, staff and course mates for their guidance and support.

"My supervisor guided me through each and every chapter in my research project. She made me realise that research can be really fun. Thanks to her, despite the tedious process, I enjoyed every bit of it. Now, I get to share my knowledge and experiences with colleagues and friends."

At home when she is away from stitches and surgical instruments, this friendly lady loves to read and collect arts and crafts.

"I enjoy reading, especially fantasy novels, and is currently re-reading the Harry Potter series. I also have a vast collection of diamond painting portraits, do-it-yourself dollhouses and cross-stitched pieces. Indulging in these crafts is calming and relaxing to me," she adds.

WORLD VIEW:

WFH EMPLOYEES, ARE YOU OK?

By Tengku Amina Munira (tg_munira@oum.edu.my)

Loneliness. Anxiety. Stress. Depression.
Poor eating and sleeping patterns.
Sudden bursts of anger.

Is this just a generic list related to mental and emotional conditions? Well, not exactly. These are actually some of the things experienced by employees who have been working from home (WFH) since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The *World Economic Forum* (WEF) reported in a recent 28-country survey that 55% of working adults have experienced stress due to changes in work routines and organisation, 45% struggled with family pressures such as childcare, and 50% with achieving work-life balance. Productivity has also dropped for 46% of global workers: 44% complained of having to work at unconventional hours, 49%

said they felt lonely and isolated, and 46% reported they had difficulty getting work done due to inadequate home office setup or equipment.

As the pandemic rages on, other patterns are also emerging.

Women with families have found that on top of their work obligations, they must also juggle the 3 C's of cooking, cleaning and childcare, sometimes all at once. Others are



feeling burned out as they are often compelled to check their email or get 'just one last thing done' no matter the time or day.

All this has led experts, like University of Sydney's Jo-An Atkinson and WEF's Cameron Fox, to warn that Covid-19 will leave a legacy of expensive mental health problems. They have even quantified it, saying, "The projected cumulative cost of lost productivity associated with psychological distress, hospitalisations and suicide over the period 2020-2025 is estimated at USD114 billion".

So while WFH employees may be nursing their exasperations on their own, it is now clear that the mental and emotional toll of the pandemic will have severe implications beyond the individual.

But as we are all individuals, what remedial steps can we take? According to Prof Datuk Dr Tajudin Md Ninggal, Programme Director for the Master of Psychology and PhD (Arts) programmes and a licensed professional counsellor, we need to improve our mental and psychological resilience by cultivating coping skills.

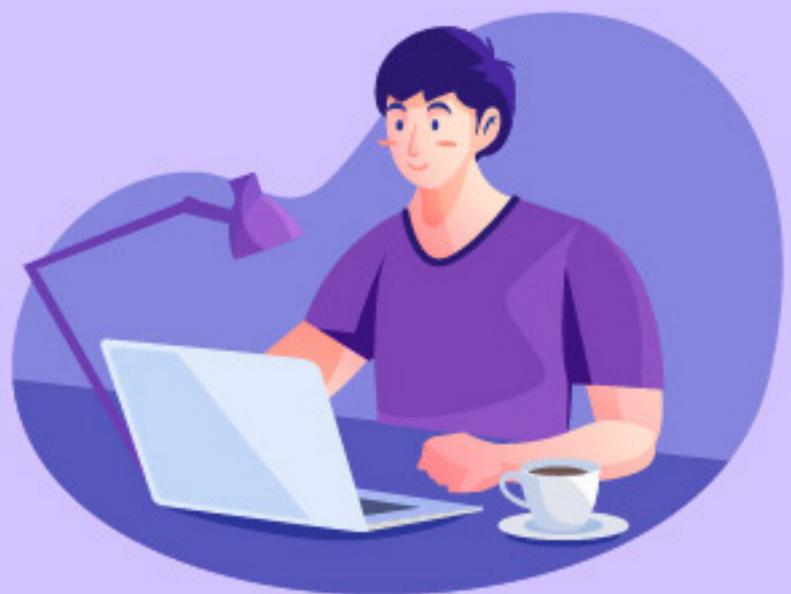
He says, "Journaling is a great tool for coping with anxiety. Meditation is another way to help regulate our emotions, reduce worrying thoughts,

and bring about a feeling of balance, calm and focus. You can also try apps that teach other anxiety relieving and relaxation techniques."

However, if these don't seem to work, Prof Tajudin thinks professional support is the answer.

He advises, "Talking to a counsellor doesn't make you weak, it shows that you care about your psychological health. Keeping your problems to yourself won't help you move on, especially if you are trapped by irrational beliefs or negative thoughts. Counselling is a 'talk therapy' that can help you see these problems from different perspectives, and together, find the right solution.

"So speak to a trusted professional counsellor or physician about what you are going through. Even online counselling or therapy can help make you feel less alone and more able to deal with your issues in a productive way. We need to take charge of our emotions, rather than let our emotions take charge of us."



WORK & STUDY:

MY ROAD TO SUCCESS

By Amir Ahad Abu Kamar

What is success? For me, success is something I achieved when I completed my degree programme at OUM. The journey wasn't easy, but the challenges I faced along the way were a blessing in disguise – they helped me redefine what success means to me.

As a bank officer, I wanted to improve my knowledge in the field of banking and finance and chose OUM because of its flexible teaching and learning approach. The University turned out to be a good fit: the flexibility of myINSPIRE made studying easier and more convenient in so many ways.

At first, it was difficult to juggle work and study. I had trouble managing time, my motivation was low, but my stress levels were high. I struggled with assignments; there never seemed to be enough time for me to come up with ideas needed to produce good work.

It was a bumpy start and I knew I needed to do something about it. So I decided to face my challenges head-on. I started making action plans based on a comprehensive understanding of my goals and prioritising tasks that can contribute to my achievement. I learnt to use the SMART tool for setting goals.

I realised being a good learner doesn't just mean focusing on my study, so I made an effort to deal with stress by setting aside time for exercising and other relaxing activities. I jogged, went to the gym and swam. I picked up hobbies like landscape photography and playing guitar and ukulele. I spent time with friends and family, travelled and listened to music. These things may not seem relevant, but they helped keep my spirits up at work and study.



“

I realised being a good learner doesn't just mean focusing on my study, so I made an effort to deal with stress by setting aside time for exercising and other relaxing activities.”



Little by little, things began looking up. I finally learnt to manage my time and kept a healthy work-life balance. I had more focus and energy, felt more productive and less anxious. I also began to see positive changes in my health, mood and sleep quality. I felt that I had become better at communicating and solving problems.

I also had a chance to put my newfound skills to the test. In the compulsory course Community Service, I led a team and developed a programme for a local non-profit organisation to help the less fortunate. That course was a really memorable one for me!

And now, I have reached the finish line. There were many other challenges throughout my journey, more than what I have shared here. But I'm happy to have experienced them all and I am so proud to be an OUM alumnus.

Although there was no convocation ceremony because of the pandemic, I have received my scroll and transcript. I donned the robe and mortarboard and took photos with my loved ones. After all, this success isn't mine alone. I couldn't have done it without the support of my mother, wife, siblings, and friends.

Amir Ahad Abu Kamar, 31, graduated with a Bachelor of Banking and Finance degree in 2020. The youngest of five siblings, he works as a bank officer in Kuantan, Pahang.



POINTERS:

4 COVID-19

MYTHS DEBUNKED

By Tengku Amina Munira (tg_munira@oum.edu.my)

By the time this edition of *Contact* is published, a full year has passed since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic. While doctors and scientists continue to battle this disease, we regular folks must do our part by keeping ourselves informed.

To help get you started, here are four myths about Covid-19 and the facts behind them.

A Covid-19 infection is just like the flu, and vitamins can cure me.

It's true that Covid-19 is a respiratory disease with some symptoms in common with the flu. However, Covid-19 is more contagious and spreads more quickly, with potentially severe outcomes for high-risk persons and complex long-term effects. You should consume micronutrients like zinc and vitamins C and D to maintain a healthy immune system, but WHO cautions "there is currently no guidance on the use of supplements to treat Covid-19".

I only need to wear a facemask outdoors.

When Covid-19 first reared its ugly head, scientists believed the virus mainly spread via large respiratory droplets, such as the ones expelled when we cough. Today, we know that Covid-19 can spread in airborne particles and linger in the air for hours between people who are more than 1.8 metres apart. Air-conditioned indoor spaces with poor ventilation, like office buildings, are especially risky places where you can get infected even if you practise strict physical distancing.

If everyone gets infected, we will all become naturally immune and the pandemic will end.

“Herd immunity” happens when enough members of a population develop immunity to a pathogen to prevent further outbreaks.

Thanks to new research, we now know that natural immunity to the Covid-19 virus lasts only three to nine months, and its reproductive number is between two and three. This means that in order to achieve herd immunity to Covid-19, 70% of the population would have to be infected every nine months. In other words, it’s impossible to achieve herd immunity to Covid-19 through widespread transmission.

Once I am vaccinated, I will be totally immune and no longer have to worry about Covid-19.

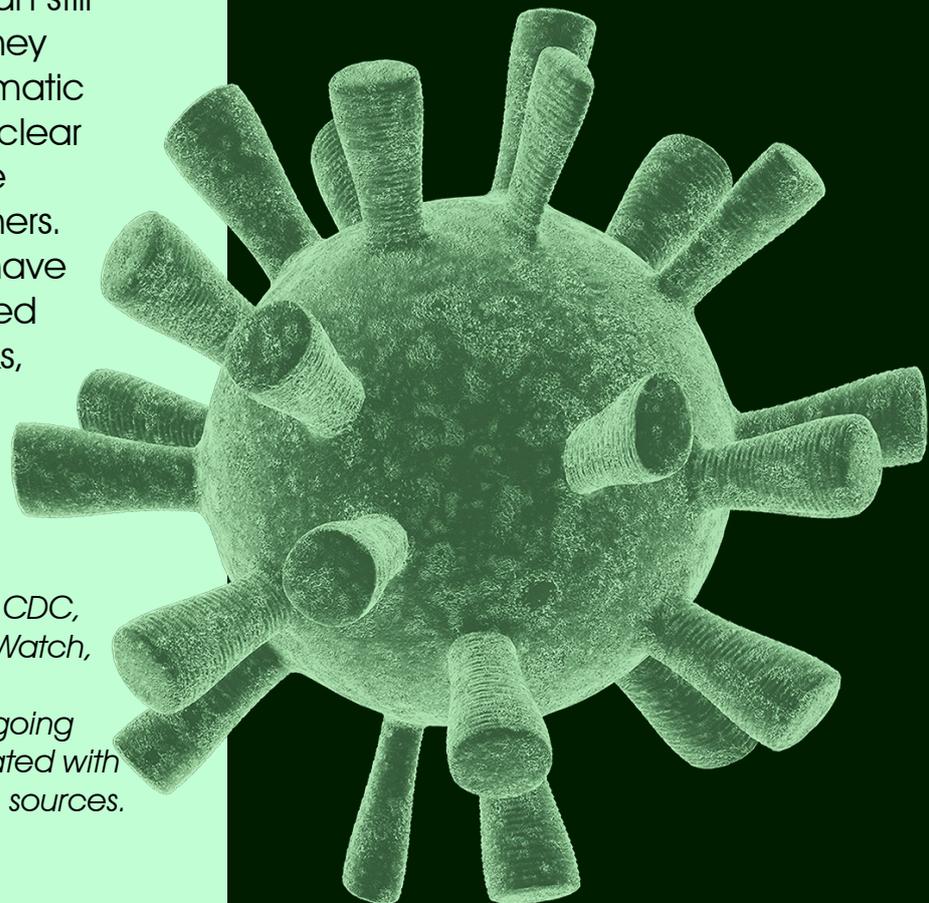
It’s still too early to tell, but preliminary data shows that people who have been vaccinated can still contract Covid-19, although they are more likely to be asymptomatic or just mildly ill. It’s also not yet clear if vaccinated individuals will be able to pass the disease to others. In conclusion, even after you have been fully vaccinated, you need to continue wearing facemasks, keeping clean and practising physical distancing.

**Sources: WHO, MOH, Mayo Clinic, CDC, Gavi: The Vaccine Alliance, MarketWatch, Intermountain Healthcare.*

**As the Covid-19 outbreak is an ongoing situation, always keep yourself updated with the latest information from credible sources.*

Think you might have Covid-19? Here’s what to look out for.

- At least two of the following symptoms: fever, chills, rigors, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue, or nasal congestion/running nose; or
- Any one of the following symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, or sudden loss of sense of smell or taste; or
- Severe respiratory illness with at least one of the following: clinical evidence of pneumonia, or acute respiratory distress symptoms.
- Also bear in mind if you have:
 - o Attended an event or been to known red zones; or
 - o Travelled to/resided in a foreign country within 14 days before the onset of illness; or
 - o Had close contact to a confirmed case within 14 days before the onset of illness.



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Take the opportunity to be featured in this e-magazine and be an inspiration to others. Write to us at alumnimag@oum.edu.my if you're interested!

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