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Contact

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DID YOU KNOW?

Non-recyclable plastic is often burnt, releasing toxic gases into the atmosphere; or it ends up in landfills, contaminating soil and water sources.



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A**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

Did you know the average Malaysian uses almost 17kg of plastic packaging every year? For consumers in Europe and North America, this figure is reportedly at least five times as much. The prevalence of plastic use, combined with poor waste management practices, has led to one of the worst environmental crises of our time. This is one of the focal points of the tenth issue of **Contact**.

Surrounding this topic are three alumni who share their personal stories of triumphs and tribulations, both while studying and also after they have graduated. Lastly, we highlight five basic but important tips on the consumption of dietary supplements.

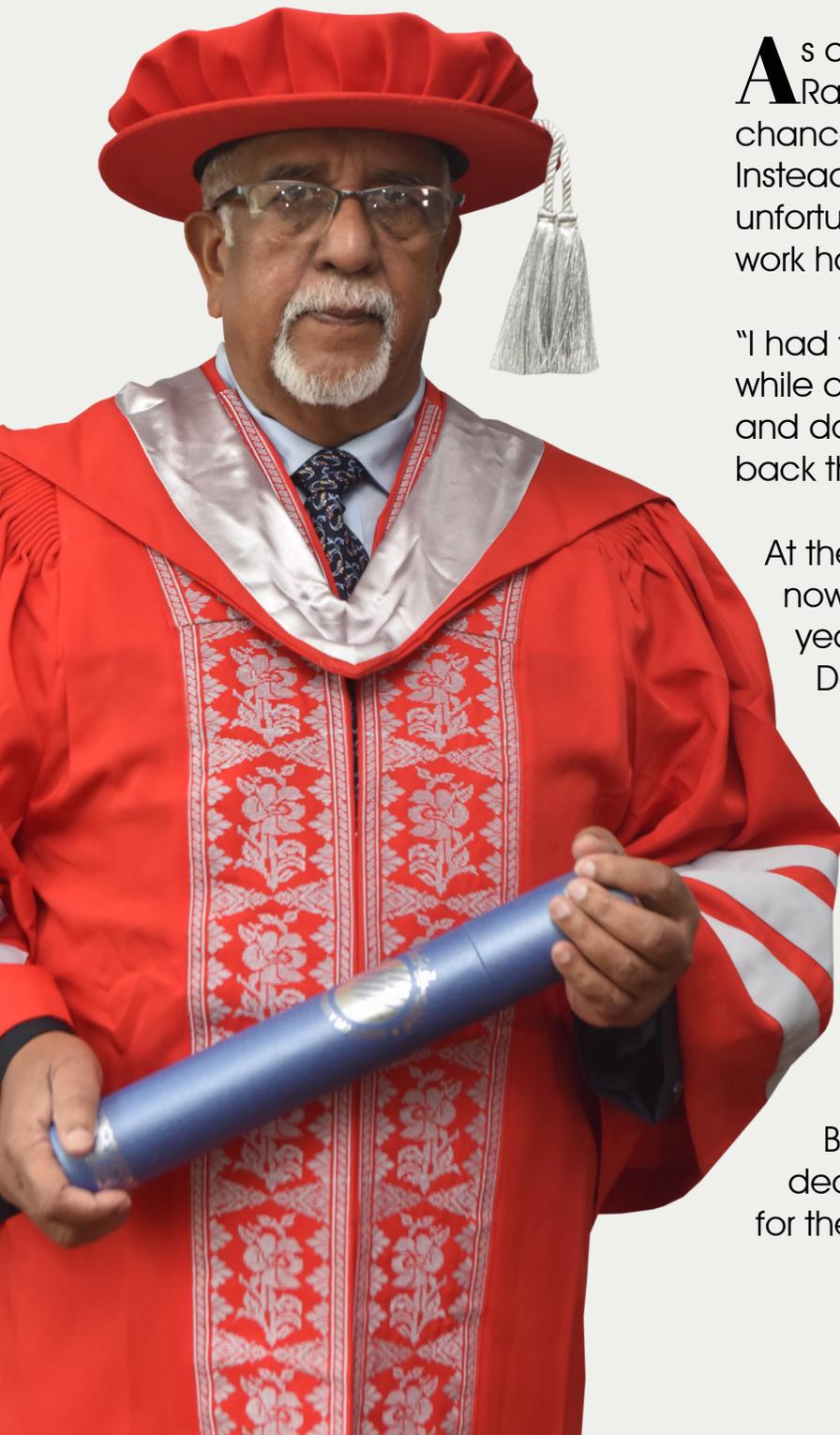
We wish all our readers safety and health.

Happy reading!

LIVE & LEARN:

A CHAMPION OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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



As a young boy, Dr Sasidharan Raman Nair was deprived of a chance at getting an education. Instead of pulling him down, this life's unfortunate event encouraged him to work hard and focus on learning.

"I had to start working when I was 15, while at the same time taking classes and doing self-study. Life was tough back then," he shares.

At the age of 65, Dr Sasidharan is now happy to embrace his golden years, having graduated from the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme in 2020.

It took him nine years to complete his study that was fraught with obstacles but he finally made it through.

"I was among the first batch of learners that registered for the programme in 2011. I had just finished the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and decided to straight away signed up for the newly introduced DBA."



He was determined to study and keep learning as a way to compensate for the things he had missed out before.

The unfortunate circumstances in his early life kept him going. He was determined to study and keep learning as a way to compensate for the things he had missed out before. And he proved it with a collection of degrees in different fields.

"I have a diploma in accounting, degree in computer science, MBA, and now DBA. I also used to work in the logistics industry, which provided me the opportunity to learn as much as I can and gather knowledge about the industry. The experience was simply great!"

This retired lecturer drew inspiration from his supervisor and other academics. "They were my role models and I always aspire to be just as encouraging and inspiring to my own students just like my mentors," says Dr Sasidharan, who still lectures part-time besides being a company consultant.

Despite the long commute between his home in Johor Bahru to the learning centre in Kuala Lumpur, he never missed a single class. He was particularly fond of the sharing sessions, which he felt was the best part of his study. "Everyone in class shared a lot of interesting knowledge and experiences, and we benefitted from each other."

"There were times when even lecturers said, "we learn from you also, and together we learn". It was a great experience," Dr Sasidharan says with a big smile.

A true champion of lifelong learning, Dr Sasidharan now channels his passion into encouraging everyone around him, especially the young generation, to pursue their studies to the highest level and to never stop learning.

"I hope to venture into business and create something beneficial for young adults that will hopefully provide them with a better future," Dr Sasidharan concludes.

PERSONALITY:

THE QUALITY MAESTRO

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

From working as a male nurse to his current position as Head of Medical Affairs and Quality at a hospital in Brunei, Azif Zahirin Md Amin's career leap is inspiring and worthy of the limelight.

The 40-year-old has been taking the lead in healthcare quality and risk management since January 2010. He shares, "Throughout my 12 years in the field, I have had the chance to work in hospitals in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, before moving to Brunei last year."

In 2018, he was selected to represent Private Healthcare Productivity Nexus (PHPN) Malaysia to visit various organisations in Japan, including the Toyota Manufacturing Company. Since then, he continues to serve the country as PHPN's industry productivity specialist and virtual advisory services advisor.



This Johorean enrolled in the Master of Quality Management (MQM) in 2016. A truly dedicated learner, Azif passed with distinction by obtaining an almost perfect CGPA of 3.94 when he graduated in 2019.

“

If people tend to avoid problems, I like to understand them and work to solve them.

“I had no solid academic background in quality and risk management when I started my career. I practised through observation, on-the-job training, and with continuous support from my mentor, Huey Dze. Plus, the MQM modules were easy to understand. It helped me to apply theoretical and practical knowledge systematically.”

As someone who holds an important leadership role at the hospital, Azif has to ensure he can consistently make the right decisions as his job is all about implementing healthcare quality and patient safety best practices, continuous quality improvement initiatives, promoting quality management system, and beyond.

“Even though I am no longer a male nurse, the job has inculcated passion in my current role. While I no longer provide bedside nursing care like before, I can still help patients by promoting adherence to standards of the quality management system. This is the reason why I love what I do.”

Azif is also a problem-solver, which suits his role well in the workplace. “If people tend to avoid problems, I like to understand them and work to solve them. I enjoy problem-solving activities, especially brainstorming. I also love to try out new ideas and theories, which means breaking the rules at times,” Azif shares.

Other than his love and commitment for the job, this family-oriented man truly enjoys spending time with his wife and seven children. “I rarely hang out with friends. My wife and kids are my best friends. I spend most of my time with them.”

In fact, one of the reasons he relocated to Brunei is to give his children a less hectic environment to grow up. So far, it seems he made the right decision as they have been enjoying their time there for the past eight months.

Other than taking care of his family’s well-being and creating memories with them, this young father has plans for himself too. “God-willing, I am also working on my plan to pursue a PhD.”

WORLD VIEW:

PLASTIC WASTE: WOES AND WORRIES

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

Did you know Malaysia and other developing countries have become the new dumping grounds for many of the world's biggest exporters of plastic waste?

The crisis began after China effectively banned all plastic crap shipments into the country in 2018. This factory of the world, which once accepted the bulk of the waste, declared it no longer wanted to be the "world's garbage dump" due to concerns about contamination and pollution.

Since then, Malaysia has been chosen as one of the unlucky dumping outlets, quickly becoming a top plastic importer that saw us receiving more than 900,000 tonnes of plastic crap from January to November 2018 alone.

To make this crisis even worse, Malaysia was named one of Asia's worst plastic polluters, according to a 2020 report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) that covers China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.



The WWF report estimated that the average Malaysian uses 16.78kg of plastic packaging per annum. According to Suhaila Abd Hamid, Programme Director for the Master of Occupational Safety and Health Risk Management programme, 45 sites with plastic wastes were identified by Greenpeace and Kuala Langat Environmental Protection Association.

These sites include one active burning site in Pulau Indah, and five likely illegal dumpsites in Klang, Jenjarom, and Ipoh. They contain wastes from at least 19 countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Austria, Germany, Sweden, and Ireland.

Only a small percentage of the plastic wastes has been recycled while the rest ends up in landfills and oceans. What consumers think have been recycled locally is often shipped to other parts of the world.

“Plastic unsuitable for recycling is burnt, thus releasing toxic gases into the atmosphere. This poses health and environmental risks. They also end up in landfills, potentially contaminating soil and water sources,” Suhaila explains.

She also adds that the recycling process of plastic wastes also

produces hazardous chemicals that can cause health risks to humans. This is indeed one of the major concerns in environmental health and occupational safety and health.

Malaysia has taken drastic action by shutting down 170 illegal recycling factories in a series of high-profile raids in 2019. The Government further declared that Malaysia would not become the new dumping ground for ‘western’ waste. Since then, customs officials have started refusing waste imports.

Together, we have to find a way to say “No Thanks” to all plastic waste.

“Plastic is useful in so many ways, but our own irresponsibility has created so many problems to the environment. All of it will eventually threaten the lives of all creatures on Earth,” Suhaila says.

Plastic takes hundreds of years to degrade. Needless to say, mother nature cannot do it all so we must act to reduce plastic waste, such as by reducing consumption of all types of plastics, particularly single-use plastics, and improving domestic recycling.

Reuse, recycle, but above all, reduce.

WORK & STUDY:

FAMILY MATTERS FOR SUCCESS

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



Every learner knows working and studying at the same time can be tough. For Master of Management (MM) graduate Prayashini Prabhakaran, known to her family and friends as Priya, one thing became abundantly clear while she was a learner: family matters when you're dealing with challenges.

As head of the quality assurance (QA) department at a local firm in Pasir Gudang, Johor, Priya wanted to enrol in a Master's programme to upgrade her leadership and management

skills to better perform in her job. Her journey started at the Johor Bahru Learning Centre where she discovered the flexibility of studying at OUM. She especially liked the discussion forum as it enabled the exchange of ideas among learners and tutors.

However, tragedy struck when her father was admitted into the intensive care unit while she was in the second semester. She shares, "Between meeting assignment deadlines and caring for my father, I had my own medical crisis. I was on long medical leave due to a slipped disc and could barely sit up to do any work. At the time, I was just starting my master's project. In my final semester, I was hospitalised again due to typhoid."

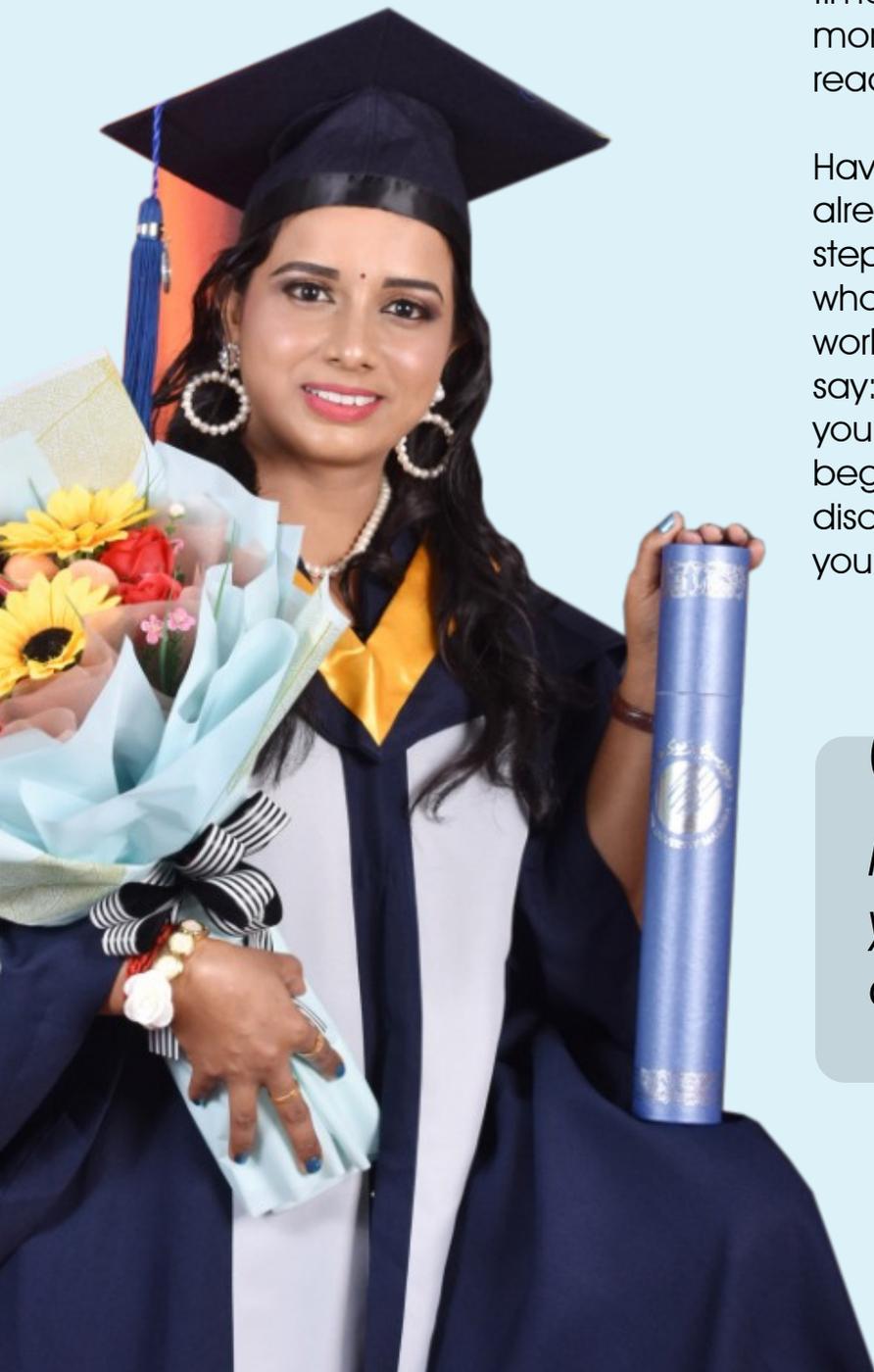
Priya believes it was unlikely that she could overcome these difficulties without the support of her family. "My husband was my pillar of strength. He completely understood the sacrifices that I had to make for me to succeed in my postgraduate study. His encouragement was a great moral booster."

Born in Muar, this mother of two also credits her daughters for her success. She says, "My girls knew that I was busy with both office work and study, so they learned to be more independent. My father was also my source of inspiration as he kept motivating me and my siblings to reach for the skies when it comes to learning."

Besides family support, the 39-year-old says that planning is also crucial. With a tight daily schedule, Priya did not leave anything to chance.

"I would ensure that my assignments and project paper writing were completed on time. My daily routine includes spending up to two hours reading literature reviews or participating in the discussion forum. On weekends, I would allocate more time for study, normally spending more than six hours on revision and reading," she explains.

Having graduated in 2020, Priya is already looking ahead and plans to step things up with a PhD. For others who may want to consider taking on work and study, this is what she has to say: "Find a university that can offer you flexibility. And importantly, always begin with the end in mind and discipline yourself so you can reach your goal."



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Family matters when you're dealing with challenges.



POINTERS:

FROM ALFALFA TO ZINC: FIVE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

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

When you step into the pharmacy, you will see rows and rows of all kinds of bottled wonders. Some claim to boost your immune system, others promise to give you clear skin, or help you shed unwanted kilos. Yes, we are talking about dietary supplements. Although about a third of the Malaysian population are said to take supplements regularly, how many of us really know about these pharmaceutical marvels?

Here are five basic but important things to consider before you pop those pills.

Do they even work?

Generally speaking, yes. Many studies have already established the benefits of dietary supplements, such as helping you get adequate essential nutrients, and better manage pain or existing medical conditions. Antioxidants like vitamin C have a protective effect against free radicals, while expectant mothers know folic acid plays an important role in the prevention of neural tube defects in unborn babies. What's important for every consumer is this – find out as much as you can (not just the potential benefits) and always make informed decisions.

Check with your doctor first.

Start by consulting a healthcare professional who knows your medical history. It's important to discuss your options thoroughly, since a supplement's safety and effectiveness often depend on your specific health condition. Here are some questions you should ask: Are there safety issues I should know? What is the proper dose? How, when, and for how long should I take it?

What's the combination?

While supplements are generally good for you, many have active ingredients that can cause unwanted consequences. Taken in combination with other medication, supplements can trigger horrible side effects or increase your risk of bleeding. If taken before surgery, they can also alter your response to anaesthesia. For example, vitamin K and ginkgo are known to affect blood clotting, while St. John's wort can reduce the effectiveness of certain antidepressants, birth control pills, and even heart medications.

It's cheaper online!

Did you find a fantastic online deal for your favourite vitamin? That's great! Just make sure you're buying from verified shops and pharmacies and only purchase products that have been approved by the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA): these carry the NPRA holographic sticker and come with a unique Malaysian registration number. Don't buy something just because it's cheap: if the product has not been approved, it may do you more harm than good.

Sounds too good to be true? It probably is.

If something claims to be a miracle cure for cancer, don't be so quick to believe. Tread with caution and a little suspicion. Even if a supplement has proven safe and effective, never replace actual medication with it, or attempt to be your own doctor. Remember – no supplement can substitute professional medical treatment.



Information sourced from:

*The Malaysian Dietary Supplement Association
Medical Journal of Malaysia
US Food and Drug Administration
The National Institutes of Health UK
Penn Medicine*

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