When I first started out down the path of research, I never expected to end up in research communications. And yet, here I sit doing just that at Duke-NUS Medical School, happy as a clam. How did I get here?

Let's start at the very beginning. I hear it's a good place to start. From young, I've always had a fascination with mathematics and science, maybe it's because I'm not a linguist by any stretch of the imagination, maybe it's because I'm a true nerd. I remember reading about how cryogenically frozen frogs can be thawed back to life when I was 15 years old, and it just blew my mind. At that point, I set my sights on conducting research when I grew up. The thought of being on the cutting edge of science, and pushing the boundaries of human knowledge and experience to advance and help society excited me to no end.

Fast forward a decade and I was accepted to do my Masters in Biology at McGill University. On my first day, I stared down a dissecting microscope and fell in love with a fruit fly. Then it was the chick, the rat, and finally, the mouse, when I started a PhD in pain research a few years later. You hear people saying that research is pain, I was maybe taking it a little too literally. My project was to study the role of oestrogen in pain, specifically investigating how this female steroid regulates pain circuitry in the spinal cord. However, midway through my PhD, I realised that my love for science and research stemmed largely from putting the data together and crafting the research stories that I get to tell. To me, telling the story is as important as putting it together. It’s your opportunity to educate and inform, excite and intrigue. Although it was a difficult decision to leave my PhD, I withdrew from the programme and started my career in communications, specifically research communications. I have not looked back since.
May (second from left) with colleagues at the Duke-NUS Deans’ Pancake Breakfast in September 2016

After leaving the bench, I worked as a medical writer with pharmaceutical companies and key opinion leaders in various therapy areas to develop their medical affairs, and education strategies and initiatives. Now, I’m part of the Communications team at Duke-NUS. As a Media Specialist, I get to marry my research and science background, with my experience in education (I used to teach calculus and statistics, but that is a story for another day), to tell the research stories coming out of the School to the general public and anyone else who would care to listen. My hope is to get everyone as excited by the research being conducted on campus as I get!

About the Author

Ong Yen May is a Media Specialist with the Communications Department at Duke-NUS Medical School. She joined Duke-NUS with a Masters of Science in Biology and half a PhD in Neuroscience from McGill University, Canada. Currently, May enjoys working with researchers at Duke-NUS to tell their stories and share their findings with the general public. When she is not in the office, May can be found on the water paddling around Sentosa.

Have research stories, photos or opinions to share? Want to deconstruct science for the man on the street? Send your article to office.research@singhealth.com.sg or click here for more information.

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