

# Studying hard to rise above disability

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Siti Safura Jaapar may be suffering from spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) but it does not stop her from studying hard to find answers to help people with similar conditions.

The 33-year-old has just received a post-graduate diploma in bioinformatics and is now pursuing a PhD programme in Health, with a focus on bioinformatics (a combination of biology and IT).

"I enjoy studying and I want to find answers to SMA so that people with my condition could be helped," she said after the Perdana University Inaugural Convocation here yesterday.

Siti Safura, who also holds a Master's degree in phytochemistry, started her PhD in February after completing her post-graduate diploma in January.

SMA is a genetic disease affecting the part of the nervous system that controls voluntary muscle movement. It causes muscle weakness and progressive loss of movement.

Siti Safura, who is also Spinal Muscular Atrophy Malaysia protem president, was diagnosed with the condition at three and was unable to walk by the time she was 13.

For her PhD, she said she would

be conducting research on SMA to see how a certain bacteria attacks patients.

Dr Y. Kohgulakuan, 24, who graduated with a medical degree from Perdana University-Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) School of Medicine and received the Chancellor's Award, said he had always been interested in oncology and research and is pursuing a Master of Science programme in oncology at the University College London.

He will be there for a year to do research before returning to serve his term with the Health Ministry.

"People used to think that cancer is a life sentence but I'd like to be able to improve their condition by searching for answers through research," he said, adding that he hoped to return to Malaysia and be part of a university where he could pursue cancer research.

Fifty-nine graduates received Bachelor of Medicine (MB), Bachelor of Surgery (BCh) and Bachelor in Arts of Obstetrics (BAO) from the Perdana University-RCSI partnership and 21 Doctor of Medicine (graduate entry programme) from the Perdana University Graduate School of Medicine.

On the link-up between Perdana University and the American medical programme – besides having the



**Proud moment:** Siti Safura posing with father Jaapar Abdullah and mother Kalsom Abdul Wahab after the Perdana University Inaugural convocation ceremony at IOI Marriott Hotel in Putrajaya.

RCSI programme, the university's Vice-Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Syed Ahmad Hussein said this was the way to go in future.

He said the American programme, which requires one to have a Science degree before entering a four-year

Medicine course gives one a solid foundation in science while allowing a student to mature before they pursue Medicine.

The university is the only university in Malaysia that had offered an American medical programme.