

Leaving her stamp on the family business

Michelle Lim overcame her initial doubts to become a key contributor to the success of MWH Medical. BY FRANCIS KAN

A FEW years into her job at Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong, Michelle Lim got a call from her parents. The business that the couple had founded, MWH Medical, was growing quickly, and they wanted their eldest child to come back to Singapore to help run the company.

Having graduated from the London School of Economics just two years earlier, and with a promising banking career ahead of her, she was understandably reluctant to do so. In the end, however, filial piety won out over personal ambition.

"Joining the family business was not a natural choice for me. I had always wanted to work outside of the family business or start my own business," says Ms Lim, 32, who is MWH's group chief operating officer.

"I was very reluctant to give up what I had in Hong Kong and kept finding excuses to delay my return. However, in the end, I still moved back to Singapore out of a sense of obligation to my family."

She joined MWH in 2012 to provide strategic direction and leadership for the operations of the company's five medical groups: Singapore Heart, Stroke and Cancer Centre, Singapore Medical Specialists Centre, Singapore Centre for Medical Imaging, The Aesthetics Medical Clinic and Q Aesthetics Clinic.

It is a decision that has paid off handsomely for MWH. In the eight years since joining, she has been a key contributor to the company's rise to become one of Singapore's largest non-hospital integrated healthcare organisations.

MWH's revenue has grown by 50 per cent since 2012, and the number of employees have nearly doubled. The company has also been widely recognised for its performance, having been awarded the Enterprise 50 (E50) award in 2017, and sweeping six awards at last year's Global Health and Travel Awards.

As a key member of the management team, Ms Lim led the group's expansion of its signature "One Day, One Stop, One Centre" concept.

This allows patients to get lab tests, diagnostic imaging scans, and procedures done at the same location, resulting in improved patient care and quicker turnaround times.

Starting from the bottom

MWH was established in 2002 as Michael Lim Specialists Heart Centre, a clinic with a handful of staff in an 800-square-foot space. Ms Lim's father, Michael Lim, a doctor and former Member of Parliament, handled the medical aspects of the organisation, while her mother, Wendy Huang, oversaw the business operations.

Today, MWH provides a comprehensive range of healthcare services, including specialist healthcare, general medical services, day care surgery, diagnostic imaging centre and aesthetic medical services.

Ms Huang made clear to her daughter that there would be no fast-track to the corner office when she joined. "My mother has always been a business woman and she built up her business from scratch. When I joined the company, she wanted me to start from the ground level to make sure I had a thorough understanding of the different business functions."

As such, she spent her first two years at MWH rotating through the group's different departments; whether it was working at the reception counter taking appointments for



Ms Lim (above) says: "My aim is to bring the world's best doctors to our clients' doorstep, such that they can have access to medical opinions from global experts without needing to leave their home."
Ms Lim with her parents (right) at an awards ceremony.

patients, as a cashier collecting payments, or a business office executive dealing with insurance claims.

"In the beginning, I even did lunch runs for my fellow colleagues. This entire experience, while tough, was very good training for me and I had the opportunity to familiarise myself with the various aspects of the business."

"This good foundation would prove to be extremely useful in helping me manage and grow the company. Over the years, my mum has given me the opportunity to step up and play a more active role in decision making and management of the company," says Ms Lim.

Being the eldest child of a traditional family also came with higher expectations.

"My parents put a lot more focus on me, as they believe the eldest child needs to be successful in order to take care of the younger siblings and for the family as a whole to do well. Given that they have higher expectations of me, that naturally came with more pressure to do well and prove myself."

She adds: "Furthermore, because it is a family business, I feel that other

people expect me to get things right. If I do something good, it is expected of me. And if I were to make mistakes, others would be quick to judge. Hence, there is the pressure to work even harder to prove that I am where I am because of my hard work and effort and not just because it is my family business."

Working with family members can come with its own set of unique challenges. To avoid such pitfalls, Ms Lim and her parents agreed early on not to let work matters affect their relationship.

"Even if there is a difference in opinions, we will have a discussion and share our points of view. I am very appreciative of the support that my parents have given me in allowing me to implement and execute my ideas."

Transforming the healthcare experience

As advancements in medical technology allow people to live longer, Ms Lim points out that there needs to be a change in the way we think about healthcare; transitioning from traditional reactive medicine based on



symptoms, diagnosis and treatment, to a system that targets the disease before it occurs and, if necessary, treats the disease in a personalised manner.

She believes that MWH can take the lead and be at the forefront of this transformation of the healthcare experience.

"With globalisation and technology, I hope to be able to give my clients access to global top medical experts through tele-collaborations with top international medical experts."

"My aim is to bring the world's best doctors to our clients' doorstep, such that they can have access to medical

opinions from global experts without needing to leave their home."

Ms Lim cites a joint collaboration with Siemens Healthineers to set up their first Asia Reference Centre in partnership with MWH Medical as a key career achievement, as it aligns with her commitment to investing in technology and innovation.

The tie-up with Siemens enabled MWH to bring the latest diagnostic imaging equipment and software technology advances to its patients, allowing for more accurate and precise diagnosis in a faster and safer manner.

"It is important for us to continu-

ally keep abreast of the latest advances in medicine, especially in a world where technology is developing rapidly," she explains.

"Given my non-medical background, I had to make an extra effort to understand the technology available in the market by attending medical conferences and reading up on this area."

Promoting social responsibility

Ms Lim is a strong advocate for health screening and prevention, as she believes that early detection can save lives. To increase public awareness of this issue, MWH has partnered with the Orchard Road Business Association to provide complimentary health screenings as part of the Government's fight against diabetes in Singapore.

MWH is also actively involved in fundraising efforts and raising awareness for charity Stroke Support Station (S3), as part of its corporate social responsibility efforts.

Ms Lim and her team helped raise S\$1.5 million at S3's inaugural gala dinner in 2016, and another S\$2.3 million at the second gala dinner in 2018.

Having seen first-hand the devastating impact stroke has had on patients as well as their family and caregivers, this is an area that is close to her heart.

"I feel that despite the active charity scene and social support landscape in Singapore, stroke survivors are a relatively underserved group."

Building on her parents' success

As a next-generation leader, Ms Lim is committed to carrying on the legacy her parents have built.

"I feel that there are many traditional values that my parents have established within the business that I would like to retain, even as the company continues to expand."

"For example, they have always ingrained in us that we should 'Treat others how you would want to be treated'. With regards to the business, I would want to continue to put our patients' safety and comfort as our top priority in whatever we do."

"With regards to the staff, many of them have been with us since my parents started the business, and have been fundamental to the success of the company today."

"They are almost like family to me, and I would like to ensure that even as the company continues to expand and adapt, that they are well taken care of."

On a more personal note, Ms Lim believes that leading a fulfilling and meaningful life is key to happiness.

In particular, she wants to be remembered as someone who dared to dream big and think out of the box, as exemplified by her willingness to embrace new technology to keep MWH at the leading-edge of the medical field.

"As the saying goes, 'Success is not measured by what you accomplish, but by the opposition you have encountered, and the courage with which you have maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds'."

"I hope to be able to make an impact on the lives of people around me and serve as an inspiration to my fellow peers to encourage them to strive for their dreams."

Carrying on the family legacy

CHILDREN who enter their family businesses have to juggle multiple responsibilities – most notably living up to their parents' expectations, and the need to perform well as a next-generation leader.

This requires them to navigate the delicate balance of maintaining family harmony, even as they strive

to make their own contributions to the legacy their parents have built.

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