

OPTIMISM TO CHANGE THE WORLD

If there is one thing that defines Dr. Lin Zhaoru, it is her optimism.

The biologist who used to work on viruses, now works on understanding cancer, in particular the role of the tumour suppressor p53 gene. "I am generally optimistic. I believe every bit of knowledge contributes to society, even if it is just one more known fact about a subject. That fact may make a crucial difference in the future," she shares. "If any of the knowledge I have uncovered contributes towards cancer therapy, that would really be rewarding."

Reading is one of her greatest passions, and that has fuelled her curiosity since she was young. Discovering how scientific and medical innovations helped improve everyday

life led her to an important decision – that she wanted to do the same for her career. Today, her work at p53Lab enables her to pursue her vision.

Her quest to contribute to the world's body of knowledge and help humankind, coupled with her natural optimism, explains her steadfast attitude towards scientific work. "Challenges are aplenty at the laboratory. Experiments don't always work the way one envisions. Being a scientist equips one with the fortitude to look at failures positively, to see what lessons one can learn and apply them to improve the next attempt," Zhaoru explains.

She adds, "Sometimes an unexpected answer can lead to a new area of research and a new discovery. When a problem arises, I take a step back, and focus on something else temporarily before returning to it. This helps me to consider the problem more fully, more clearly and in a calmer state of mind."



"I always try to maintain a positive outlook as being negative rarely solves problems."

Dr. Lin Zhaoru
Research Fellow, p53 Laboratory



SPURRING GROWTH IN BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE

Zhaoru's work is not just about making scientific breakthroughs. As a scientist who wants to help bring about change in society, she takes on a business role at A*STAR as well.

Drawing up project plans and building collaborations between p53Lab and the biomedical industry, sharing her expertise with industry experts and mentoring young interns and graduate students, Zhaoru is keen to contribute to the ecosystem of biomedical sciences as well.

"I believe that we are only at the beginning of Singapore's journey in science and technology, especially in the biomedical sciences," she opines. "Long-term, continued government backing will be crucial to its success as this industry requires a long incubation period. More talent is required to flow out from academic institutes to the industry."

Not one to stay within her comfort zone, Zhaoru acts on opportunities to catalyse the biomedical field when she sees them. In 2013, Zhaoru, together with another fellow A*STAR scholar, kick-started a biotechnology society. Now known as Biotech Connection Singapore, the society was started to link academia with the industry.

Free events such as debates and panel discussions were organised to foster conversations between the two communities. When Zhaoru and her colleague handed the society over to the second generation of leaders last year, the subscription list numbered at 700 members, with 30% of them from the industry.

"We were really excited about establishing the society as we could see that there was not a lot of mixing between

academics and industry players," she recalls. "We believe that fostering a sense of community in the Biotech ecosystem, engaging everyone and raising thought-provoking questions can help the sector grow. That we are able to achieve such growth and a good mix of membership is really gratifying."

UPBEAT ABOUT THE FUTURE

At the laboratory, it is easy to be infected with Zhaoru's enthusiasm and energy. Asked to describe herself, she says, "I would like to think of myself as a straightforward person and a team player. While I enjoy working alone, I also enjoy working in teams where everyone is aligned towards a common goal. I really value my personal relationships and will always try to help someone who has a problem, whether at work or at home."

Enjoying her leisure time is as important to Zhaoru as her work. She takes pleasure in dancing, playing and listening to music and reading. A former Dancesport competitor, she now dedicates her leisure time mostly to her family. "We have a young daughter who is one year old, and she keeps us gainfully 'employed' as parents!" laughs Zhaoru.

The young parent is upbeat about her future with A*STAR and the opportunities she has through her work. She reflects, "The opportunity to work as an academic has helped me to develop my research skills and allowed me to contribute to Singapore's research base. On a personal front, A*STAR has also allowed me to work out what really interests me in terms of a scientific career. The flexibility within A*STAR is now allowing me to be seconded to a biomedical start-up here. Hopefully, I will be able to apply my research skills to develop products that will benefit Singapore, both financially and health-wise!"