



New discoveries: 'Research is really a dynamic field. It's not static. One day, you see one thing, and the next day, you see another thing. I find that very exciting,' says Dr Latifah Saiful Yazan.

In search of a cancer cure

With the L'Oreal-Unesco For Women in Science grant, Dr Latifah Saiful Yazan was able to kick-start her anti-cancer research.

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DR Latifah Saiful Yazan was fascinated when she found out about the herb *Simpoh Air*, which is used traditionally in Sabah and Sarawak to treat many illnesses, including cancer.

"The herb is traditionally used in East Malaysia to treat many illnesses, including cancerous growths. However, there wasn't any scientific backing for that, and I didn't have the funding to do the research," recalled Dr Latifah, who lectures at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)'s Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

That was in 2006, and it so happened that was the year the L'Oreal-Unesco For Women in Science programme offering research funding was launched in Malaysia. It honours and recognises remarkable women whose scientific research contributes to changing the world: global challenges from furthering our understanding of climate change and developing new energy sources, to expanding our knowledge of the human body and preserving biodiversity.

The programme also supports women's work in science by awarding three deserving researchers a RM20,000 grant each, every year.

Dr Latifah didn't pass on the opportunity, and applied for the grant so she could embark on her research.

"I applied for the L'Oreal grant and, thankfully, I received it. It came at the right time. With the grant, we began with cell culture work and after we completed the screening, we conducted further research with funding by UPM," shared Latifah. From her research on *Simpoh Air*, Latifah's team has come up with an anti-cancer supplement.

So far, 21 outstanding women researchers in Malaysia have received the L'Oreal-Unesco For Women in Science award in the field of Life Science and Material Science, which alternates every year.

One of the L'Oreal initiative's aims is to encourage women's participation in science.

Some think that science is a field more suited for men but Latifah was quick to refute the claim and was surprised by it.

"Maybe that was the case 10 years ago but now, more than 50% of scientists in the country are women. And science is not boring," asserted Latifah. "We get to conduct research

and make discoveries, and research is dynamic. There are always changes happening."

In fact, the aspiring novelist (she confessed to having completed two books which are safely stored in her computer) believes women make better researchers because they "are more focused, hardworking and they don't get bored easily even though some of the processes are repetitive. And I find that my female students have better lab skills. They are precise and immaculate."

The mother of four sons and a daughter encourages young women to enter the science field.

"Research is really a dynamic field. It's not static. One day, you see one thing and the next day, you see another thing. I find that very exciting. I still remember how amazed I was to see the movement and growth of the cells I was screening for anti-cancer properties when I was completing my final-year project at UPM," enthused the 42-year-old researcher.

As excited as she is about science, it is her family that Dr Latifah identified as her most important priority. Recognising that has helped her balance her many roles as researcher, lecturer, wife, mother and homemaker.

"The secret is time management. You need to divide and manage your time properly. And you need to identify what's the most important thing in your life. Once you've done that, everything else will fall into place. For me, it's my family and, with God's help, I have been able to do it," said Latifah.

■ *The L'Oreal-Unesco For Women in Science Fellowship is now open to Malaysian women researchers under 35, who are PhD holders or currently pursuing research study in the field of Material Sciences. A financial assistance of RM20,000 each will be granted to three young female researchers based on their research proposals.*

Registration for applications is open until June 30. Application forms can be obtained from the Secretariat of the Malaysian National Commission for Unesco or downloaded from www.loreal.com.my.

The research proposal must be submitted with the application and be addressed to the Jury President.

For more information, contact Unesco (03-8884 6196) or L'Oreal Malaysia (03-7651 8217) or visit www.loreal.com.my.