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Teacher with stage 4 cancer graduates with PhD, aims to inspire his students

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SERDANG: A teacher from Beaufort, Sabah was determined to complete his Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in order to be an inspiration to his students, even after being diagnosed with stage four lymphoma.

Dr Syahrin Awang Besar (*pix*), 50, who currently teaches at SMK Beaufort in Sabah, said he almost gave up when he received the life-shattering news in January.

He said getting the diagnosis was like a death sentence that stopped him dead in his tracks -- he was then in his final year of studies in the field of Malay language.

“At that time, I had already finished my viva voce presentation and my thesis needed some correction, but when I received the news that I was confirmed as a cancer patient, everything seemed to stop and at that moment, I did not even touch my thesis at all.

“But when I thought of my students, I realised I had to be a role model to them, that whatever our situation in health or economy, education should come first,” he related to Bernama after the 46th Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Convocation (second session) here today.

Syahrin, who has taught at the Beaufort school for 28 years, reflected that some of his students had to skip school several days a week to earn extra income for their families by weaving oil palm leaves, with some even turning fishermen, while some even stopped schooling midway.

Earlier, the Raja Muda of Selangor Tengku Amir Shah Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah, who is UPM Pro-Chancellor, consented to award PhDs, masters, degrees and diplomas to 834 graduates at the convocation.

Meanwhile, private sector worker Mohd Nazim Abdul Karim, 43, said he was inspired to pursue his Master of Business Administration after his wife Masuri Mokhtar, 40, was offered the same course after successfully securing a federal study grant.

The father of four children between the ages of two and 17 said he and his wife helped each other complete academic assignments and manage the family.

“Classes start from 6 pm to 9 pm, and every time there is a class held online, my mother-in-law will take care of our youngest child,” said Nazim, who also runs a business importing coffee beans from Indonesia and Brazil.

Nazim said that even though they were in the same class, the couple still competed in a healthy way to excel as students.

Masuri, who is also an administrative and diplomatic officer at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI), said to ensure that the family was not neglected during the couple’s two-year studies, she had planned their daily activities in advance.-*Bernama*