

Working Together Towards
Better Integrated Care



*SingHealth Inspirational
Patient & Caregiver Award 2012*



Our Inspirational

Patients

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Our Inspirational

Caregivers



Foreword



The SingHealth Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Award is a dedicated platform to honor patients and caregivers who have demonstrated exemplary qualities of courage, resilience, patience, generosity of spirit, emotional and mental strength, as well as a zest for life that all of us can learn from.

Faced with healthcare challenges, their unwavering determination to overcome these hurdles with healthy and positive attitudes is indeed remarkable.

The theme for this year's event – “Working Together Towards Better Integrated Care” – raises awareness of how the best healthcare outcomes can be achieved when patients, caregivers and family members work together with healthcare professionals to facilitate their healthcare journeys.

To our patients, caregivers and families, thank you for placing your faith in us and for giving us the opportunity to provide the best possible treatment and care. Your courage gives us a renewed purpose and meaning to our work in healthcare.

We are proud to present 40 patients and caregivers with the award this year. This book, a compilation of their personal stories, is a celebration of their determination and fighting spirit. Our winners have inspired and motivated our staff to continue to deliver good care for our patients. We hope that you too, will enjoy and be inspired when you read their stories.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivy Ng', is centered within a light gray rectangular box. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Prof Ivy Ng
Group Chief Executive Officer
SingHealth



Our *Inspirational*
Patients



It all started with a sprained ankle. Ms Isabel Chua, 37, had a severe reaction to the herbal paste that she had used on her leg and suffered a septic attack. "I was shocked when huge blisters started popping up after I applied the paste on my calf and ankle," recalls Isabel, who on the second day of admission to the hospital, slipped into unconsciousness. She was warded in the Intensive Care Unit and only regained consciousness after five days.

During the subsequent two months stay in hospital, Isabel had to work hard at regaining the strength in her limbs. "Although she was weak and bedridden, Isabel still tried to do things herself and was determined to get well. She held on to her fighting spirit which was inspiring," says Ms Chong Lai Ling, Senior Nurse Manager, Department of Haematology, Singapore General Hospital (SGH).

The attack left her with a badly scarred right calf and a drop foot, a condition where the forefoot drops due to weakness, damage to the peroneal nerve or paralysis of the muscles in the front portion of the lower leg. A blocked airway due to complications from the intubation also meant that she had to be fitted with a tracheostomy.

"Initially it was quite a struggle because I had lost most of my muscle strength, so simple tasks like lifting my hand and holding up a cup was tiring. The most challenging part was when I had to live with the tracheostomy to help me breathe for a year! Having a foreign object sticking into your throat causes a lot of irritation and phlegm. I also had to learn how to clean and maintain it, and when I went back to work, I was rather self-conscious about it and it was troublesome just trying to find the right clothes to hide it."

Despite the frustration and inconvenience, Isabel was determined not to dwell on the negatives. "I tried to focus my thoughts on how to improve my lifestyle given my condition," says the optimistic young lady.

The all-important thing she learnt from this episode is that "life is fragile and unpredictable. Don't regret the past, don't worry about the future, just treasure the present and appreciate what you have."

Her family was her pillar of strength throughout this ordeal. "Never once did my parents give up on me," says Isabel who also draws motivation from reading self-help books. Thanks also to the care and support she received from the team of nurses from Ward 77 and Ms Tay Ai Choo, Senior Nurse Clinician, Nurse Clinician (Specialty Care) Services, SGH, Isabel is now on the road to recovery.

Overcoming Life's Obstacles With Optimism



*Ms Isabel Chua Seah Hong with
her father Mr Bellamy Chua &
her mother Mdm Alice Soh*



Ms Felicia Lee Lay Hoon



Whatever It Takes To Get Well

Ms Felicia Lee, 28, is one of the youngest persons to have had her entire large intestine removed at the age of 15. She was just 12 years old when she was diagnosed with Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP), a rare, inherited condition that causes polyps to develop in the large intestine. If these polyps are not treated, almost all patients with this condition will develop colorectal cancer by age 40.

Though young at the time, Felicia was undaunted by the major surgery that she was about to undergo. “What’s the alternative? Sit in one corner and wait to die? Not me,” says Felicia, “I will do whatever it takes to get well!”

Her determination and positive attitude paid off because today, Felicia is cancer-free and leads a full life. “I just need to watch my diet and be more conscious of my health,” says Felicia. “Other than that, I lead as normal a lifestyle as anyone else,” shares Felicia, who goes to the gym three times a week to stay fit and plays basketball as often as she can.

Like most people, Felicia harbours the hope of one day starting a family when she meets the love of her life. “He must, however, accept that with this inherited condition, we cannot have children of our own, and will have to adopt,” states Felicia.

“Whenever newly diagnosed patients request to speak to someone, I will call Felicia because she is always willing to either pay them a visit in the ward or speak to them over the phone,” says Ms Carol Loi, Genetic Counsellor, Department of Colorectal Surgery, Singapore General Hospital. “Felicia is one of our FAP patient support ambassadors. She is also an active volunteer in our Colorectal Cancer Support Group, and has, for the past four years, been providing support to newly diagnosed young patients as well as patients who are about to or have just undergone the removal of the large intestine. Her positive attitude and warm encouragement has boosted the patients’ morale, many of whom have expressed their appreciation for her comfort and support.”

Thirteen years ago, when he was just 37 years old, Mr Louis Ng was diagnosed with Stage 2 colorectal cancer. But instead of brooding over it or wallowing in self-pity, Louis accepted it and dealt with it. "Ok, so what are we going to do about it?" he asked his doctor after he was diagnosed. After weighing in all possible options, Louis finally decided to have his entire rectum removed and to be fitted with a colostomy bag.

Two years later, due to complications arising from a bladder operation, he had to be fitted with an ileostomy bag which means that he now has to live with two bags – one bag for his waste and the other for his urine. As depressing as it appears, Louis sees nothing but the positives in life. "Now I don't need to queue for the toilet anymore," he jokes.

A staunch Catholic, religion plays an important part in Louis' outlook on life. "God made me go through all this because he wants me to encourage and inspire people," he says. And that is exactly what he did.

An active patient support ambassador with the Colorectal Surgery Recovery (CSR) programme at Singapore General Hospital (SGH), Louis has inspired many newly diagnosed patients and their families. Through his candid sharing and encouragement, they soon realise that even with cancer, they can still lead full and active lives. Louis for one, has not had to compromise his lifestyle. "I am still as active as ever," he says.

A former Executive in the F & B logistics industry, today Louis is a part-time educator, teaching digital arts to primary school kids, including handicrafts and he couldn't be happier. "Teaching is my passion," he says, "and art is my hobby."

"Louis is a wonderful source of inspiration not only to patients and their families but also to healthcare workers like me," says Associate Professor Tang Choong Leong, Head and Senior Consultant, Department of Colorectal Surgery, SGH. "He is truly a 'victor', not a 'victim' because only optimists like Louis convert all their stumbling blocks into new opportunities," adds A/Prof Tang.

◆◆
*Bringing A Silver Lining
To Those In Need*



Mr Louis Ng Swee Kiong

Most people take simple everyday activities like sitting down and having a meal with family and friends for granted, but not Mr Su Kin Seng who has not had this pleasure. Since he was diagnosed with rectal cancer in 2005, his cancer continued to advanced progressively, especially over the last two years, despite going through treatment.

“I went through chemotherapy and radiotherapy following surgery, but the wound just refused to heal,” shares Mr Su. If anything, the wound has gotten so much bigger that even with the aid of a ‘tyre’, sitting is painful. Barely 10 minutes and Mr Su has to lie down because it gets a little too painful to bear. But with bags and tubes attached to the left, right and centre of his body – Mr Su is fitted with a stoma bag and two urine bags, one for each of his kidneys – even lying down is not much of a comfort.

A once independent man, Mr Su now needs to be assisted or risks falling and injuring himself. In the years since his diagnosis, Mr Su has lost almost a quarter of his body weight. With no exercise and a poor appetite, Mr Su lost muscle mass and is so weak that he is now confined to bed for most of the day.

Despite the efforts of the healthcare team in managing his pain and being on painkillers daily, Mr Su still lives with low level of pain. “The pain is perpetually there,” he says. “On a scale of one to 10, it is about a three or a four on most days although sometimes it surges to a five or a six and that’s when it gets quite hard to cope,” admits Mr Su.

Though his future seems bleak – there is very little else that can be done medically – Mr Su remains positive. Giving up is not on the cards for this retired real estate agent who insists, “I’m never going to give up. If I do, I will die.”

“It is this optimism that inspires us nurses to always look on the bright side and never let any negative encounters bring us down,” says Ms Peggy Cheng Lay See, Nurse Clinician II, Ward 48B, Medical Oncology, Singapore General Hospital.

After years of fighting, Mr Su finally succumbed to his illness. He passed away on 1 February 2012.



There’s Just No Giving Up



(Late) Mr Su Kin Seng



Mr Tung Shee Kee

The Warmth Of Friendship Goes A Long Way

“The moment they hear the ‘C’ word, they feel like their life is over. But cancer is not a death sentence,” insists 57-year-old Mr Tung Shee Kee, who was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2007 and is now on maintenance chemotherapy to control the disease.

“Of course I was quite upset when I was first diagnosed,” he says. “But with some adjustments to my lifestyle, I realised I can still lead a full life,” says Mr Tung. “You need to keep a healthy diet – eat less meat, more fish and vegetables – you need to exercise, maintain personal hygiene and when you’ve just undergone chemo, wear a mask and avoid going out because that is when you are most prone to infection,” he advises.

During the course of treatment, Mr Tung has made many friends. “There were 16 of us in our batch,” shares Mr Tung, “some suffering from leukemia, some from multi myeloma, etc. Unfortunately, out of the 16 patients that I’ve befriended, only three are left,” says Mr Tung. “It’s not easy to befriend another sick person because there is always this fear of losing them,” admits Ms Chong Lai Ling, Senior Nurse Manager, Ward 72, Department of Haematology, Singapore General Hospital, “but Mr Tung continues to offer his friendship. He is so warm and sincere. He even bought milk supplements for one of the more needy patients!” exclaims Ms Chong. “The family members of some of the deceased patients still keep in touch with me; they encourage and give me moral support,” shares Mr Tung, “and that helps me battle the disease.”

Much of his willpower to live, he says, comes from his family especially his wife and the supportive doctors and nurses. “My wife really takes good care of me,” he confesses. “Even though she works full-time, she always comes home to cook for me,” he adds, affectionately caressing his wife’s hand.

She discovered a lump in her breast while performing a routine self-examination in August 2008. Hoping that it would be benign, Ms Kelly Ang, 48, was nonetheless prepared for the bad news. Unfortunately, her fears came true – she was diagnosed with Stage 1 breast cancer.

“When I was told I had cancer, I didn’t panic,” says Ms Ang. “I think I was quite cool,” she laughs. “But I was a little nervous when I went through the bone, heart and liver scans, because I was fearful that the cancer might have spread,” recalls the bubbly Ms Ang. “So the two weeks of waiting for the scan results was just agonising!” she exclaims.

The doctor gave her the choice of either a lumpectomy or a mastectomy. The former is a breast-conserving procedure which is followed by radiation therapy while the latter is a total removal of the breast. Ms Ang chose the latter as mastectomy may lower the chances of a recurrence.

In 2009 when the KK Alpine Blossoms Breast Cancer Support Group was formed, Ms Ang was quick to volunteer. “Ms Ang takes a great deal of time to better the lives of other breast cancer patients,” says Ms Teresa Ng, Senior Nurse Clinician, KK Breast Department, KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital. “By sharing her experience, she gives survivors hope that they too can make it through just as she did.”

“Joining a support group gives you the moral support that you need when you are at your most vulnerable. It also helps you to realise how lucky you are because there may be others who are worse off than you,” adds Ms Ang who tries to see the lighter side of things. “Ms Ang is a survivor whose optimism in life is most admirable. She has been most supportive of all the events and activities that we organised,” adds Ms Ng. “She has definitely motivated me with her extraordinarily positive attitude and her active participation in our events has spurred me to introduce new activities for the support group.” Ms Ang strongly believes that life does not end just because you’ve got cancer. “It’s your life. You’ve got to take charge of it,” she advises.



Ms Kelly Ang Yin Ping

◆◆
It's Your Life, Take Charge Of It

She Actively Supports Learning



Mdm Goh Bee Khim

While going through an ultrasound procedure, the last thing Mdm Goh Bee Khim, 47, expected was the pain she felt midway through the procedure. Though it would have been easy to put the blame on the staff for her distress, Mdm Goh couldn't be more understanding of the situation.

"I guess the radiographer was rather nervous because she was new on the job," explains Mdm Goh. "Nobody wants to make mistakes. When they do, we should give them a chance. Everybody needs to learn from their mistakes," says Mdm Goh. Mdm Goh gave the radiographer another chance to rescan her even though she was still in pain.

Apparently giving people the benefit of the doubt and the opportunity to learn from their mistakes or even if they have no prior experience is in Mdm Goh's nature. "Once when I needed a key to be duplicated, the shop assistant refused to do it simply because she had no experience in doing so. I managed to persuade her to try and assured her that I would still pay for the key even if the duplication failed," relates Mdm Goh.

With this earnest desire to want to help people learn, it is no wonder Mdm Goh earns the respect of those around her. "Mdm Goh is very patient and understanding," says Ms Eliza Anagao Morada, Radiographer, Department of Diagnostic & Interventional Imaging, KK Women's and Children's Hospital. "Her cooperation and willingness to give trainees the chance to learn is a great boost to their morale and learning experience," adds Ms Morada.



Ms Dora Goh Siok Kian

A Nurse And Proud Of It

She had everything going for her. She was young, she was beautiful, she was a flight attendant with an international airline and had just gotten married. So when Ms Dora Goh was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1996 and was told that she might have to remove her entire womb, her world collapsed!

Though she had to remove only one ovary eventually, there were the side effects from chemotherapy to deal with. "I had very bad side effects," says Ms Goh. "I spent almost six months in hospital. Fortunately, I have a very supportive family," says Ms Goh appreciatively.

Those months in hospital were most trying. Not only did she have to endure weekly urine tests, blood tests, etc., she was also losing her hair. But "thanks to Sister Chew and the other nurses, I felt less fearful," says Ms Goh who later joined the hospital's Women's Cancer Support Group and actively shared her experience with the other patients. "Ms Goh brings hope to the cancer patients and is a tremendous source of inspiration to them, especially since she managed to conceive after completing her chemotherapy despite having just one ovary," says Ms Chew Sen Mei, Nurse Clinician, Ward 43, KK Women's and Children's Hospital. Ms Goh's daughter Aideen is now 14 years old.

The immense and wonderful support from the nurses, coupled with her personal fulfillment from counseling others inspired Ms Goh to pursue a career in nursing. Today this former flight attendant is a Certified Nurse and she is doing what she loves best. "The opportunity to be a nurse was presented to me and I took it up," explains Ms Goh. "Now I am a nurse, proud to be one and always will be," she declares.

Being a former patient, she feels she is better able to relate to patients because she understands what they are going through. "She is always smiling and no matter how busy she is, she still makes time to talk to the patients," observes Ms Chew.

At 34, Ms Yvonne Tan was in the prime of her life. She was progressing well in her career and enjoying an active lifestyle. However, a major epileptic fit that struck one fateful day in 2007 led to a drastic twist of fate. Yvonne was diagnosed with advanced stage brain cancer and in July 2010 when the cancer relapsed, she was told she had a year-and-a-half to live.

“After my first diagnosis, I realized that everything I had put into my life meant nothing and I started to look at what really mattered to me. I wondered how far I could go on. While I had complete trust in the doctors and nurses, I realised there was only so much they could do. That’s when I decided to submit myself to God,” says Yvonne.

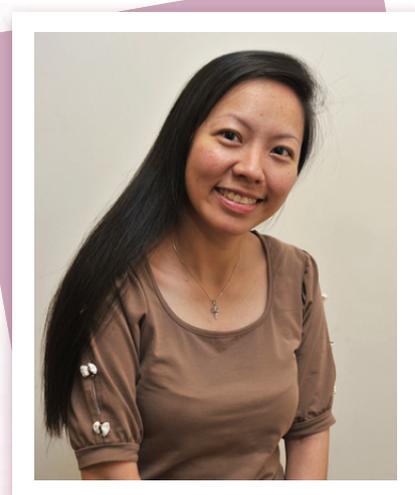
Through her faith and the love and support of her spiritual family at Bethany Independent Presbyterian Church, Yvonne eventually accepted her condition and found peace with it. “I’ve had a glimpse of eternal life and it’s joyous and beautiful,” says Yvonne, who is no longer afraid or uncertain about her future. Instead of counting down the days, she decided to make each day count.

Following the motto of her church – ‘God touches life and people care for people’, Yvonne tries to continually enrich her life by reaching out to those in need. “I find it meaningful and a privilege to be able to reach out to people and care for them,” says Yvonne.

“Yvonne is always willing to share her experience, faith and optimism with patients who have similar conditions,” says Dr Tham Chee Kian, Consultant, Department of Medical Oncology, National Cancer Centre Singapore. “Her optimism is much needed and is an inspiration to patients whose outlook is often grim. On her own initiative, she has even made visits to these patients’ homes to provide encouragement and support,” he adds.

Yvonne also draws inspiration from reading biographies of real life survivors from all walks of life – and she sees God’s work in each of them. “Having brain cancer made me re-think what life is all about and the things that truly matter in life. It made me think about my spiritual family, God and what God’s done for me and I realised that I am so blessed and found a new sense of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ,” she says.

Making Each Day Of Her Life Count



Ms Yvonne Tan Li May

He showed no sign of health problems but one fateful day in 2009, Mr Rahman Bin Abdullah, 42, blacked out and collapsed. A heart attack had struck.

When he woke up, Mr Rahman found himself attached to a Biventricular Assist Device (BiVAD) machine, a machine to help his heart function. For the next seven-and-a-half months, he had to stay in the hospital attached to the BiVAD, which is about the size of a suitcase. There was too much hassle lugging the BiVAD around, so he was confined to the room for most of those months.

With limited mobility, Mr Rahman had to find ways to entertain himself during that time. "The hospital became his home," says Ms Zubaidah Hassan, Senior Staff Nurse, Ward 56, National Heart Centre Singapore. He did everything he could to keep his sanity, "he even learned how to adjust the machine on his own," she adds.

Now that he's got a new heart following a heart transplant in October 2009, Mr Rahman has quit smoking completely, complied very well with his treatment and tried his best to stay happy. He's even changed his lifestyle. Where he used to eat only meat and no vegetables, he now eats a more balanced diet; and where he used to be a smoker, Mr Rahman is a Health Ambassador and has even appeared on national TV in the Ministry of Health's anti-smoking campaign. "Having the right frame of mind is very important," shares Mr Rahman.

"What inspires me most about Mr Rahman is his cheerfulness and positive attitude," says SSN Zubaidah. "I hope to project that same kind of spirit when I'm with my patients," she adds.

A Health Ambassador Who Inspires



Mr Rahman Bin Abdullah



Mr Senthil Nathan

Almost Perfect

At 35, he had everything going for him – a new wife and a baby waiting for him in India as well as a new job here in Singapore. But just when he thought he had everything going well for him, Mr Senthil Nathan was struck by a viral infection that left his heart functioning at a mere 10 per cent capacity. That was in 2005.

“It started with coughing, breathlessness, sweating and the feeling of bloatedness that lasted about three to four months,” says Senthil. An ultrasound revealed that he had an enlarged heart and was suffering from a dilated cardiomyopathy.

After he was fitted with an Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD) – a device that “shocks” the heart when it slows down – Senthil returned home to India to recuperate. Six months later, he returned to Singapore for work and was ever more determined to regain his health.

He lived with the ICD for about three years before it was replaced with the Cardiac Resynchronization Therapy Defibrillator (CRT-D). When that failed to work well after about a year and a half, Senthil underwent another surgery, this time to implant the Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD).

“Senthil understands his condition,” says Ms Lim Shufen, Senior Staff Nurse (Clinical) of Ward 56 at the National Heart Centre Singapore. “The three or four times that he was warded, he handled his LVAD so well and with such confidence that he did not need any help from the staff,” says SSN Lim. “He is very knowledgeable because he takes the effort to read up about his condition.”

Fortunately, in January last year, he had a successful heart transplant and is now close to functioning normally. Reflecting on the long road to recovery, Senthil said, “I may not be able to carry and play with my daughter like most fathers can but I am happy and grateful to have a new lease of life.”

“His confidence and willingness to accept and appreciate the gift he has received and to live on happily and healthily is such a motivation to me,” says a very inspired SSN Lim.

Bringing Cheers And Hope To Those In Need

Only recently Ms Gracie Lim, 69, learned that she had been living with three aneurysms in her brain, an abnormal widening of a portion of a blood vessel which can burst and cause dangerous bleeding or even death. Although she has undergone surgery, she is still being monitored closely for one remaining unruptured aneurysm. Having an aneurysm in the brain is like living with a ticking time-bomb where at any time, anything can trigger it.

“Despite her condition, Ms Lim remains very positive about her life and continues to help others in similar situations,” says Ms Lee Kah Keow, Nurse Clinician, Department of Neurosurgery, National Neuroscience Institute.

Ms Lim is part of a support group that helps patients with brain injuries as well as those newly diagnosed with aneurysms. “She’s a big help to me because when I refer a patient to her, I don’t have to worry, I know she’ll do a good job,” says NC Lee who manages a group of regular volunteers. Ms Lim visits the patients and shares her personal experiences that help to lessen their anxiety especially before undergoing surgery. “Her optimistic outlook on life clearly rubs off on patients and their next-of-kin, many of whom have expressed their appreciation to her,” shares NC Lee.

“I always encourage other patients to learn to appreciate life a little more, to try to keep healthy and not worry too much,” says Ms Lim, a happy-go-lucky person who tries to stay fit and healthy by engaging in line dancing, studying the bible and attending enrichment classes that keep her brain active.

“Ms Lim is very modest. She doesn’t realise the good she’s doing and the positive impact she has on the people she speaks to,” says NC Lee.



Ms Gracie Lim Cheng Neo

“She says she draws strength from me?” asks Ms Charmaine Tan in disbelief. “It is she who is my pillar of strength!” exclaims the 18-year-old, referring to her mother who has been instrumental in ensuring that she leads as normal a life as possible despite her disability.

Since the age of two, Charmaine has been suffering from tunnel vision, the loss of peripheral vision with retention of central vision. Today, she has only about two per cent vision capacity. “The most challenging period was when I was in kindergarten and in primary school. The kids in school used to tease me and the teachers weren’t very nice. One actually called me ‘blind girl,’” recalls Charmaine. Even then, never once did she consider giving up her studies. “My mum has embedded in me the idea that school is fun so even if the kids were mean to me, I still wanted to learn,” says Charmaine. Now that she is in Junior College, she is much happier because the teasing has stopped. “My classmates are of course much more mature,” she explains.

Charmaine’s condition was fairly stable throughout her primary school years. Unfortunately, when she was in secondary school, her kidneys started to fail. “For two weeks, I suffered intense vomiting and dizziness. It turned out I had end stage kidney failure,” explains Charmaine who started dialysis in 2008.

“It is remarkable that despite her medical condition and absence from school due to frequent hospitalisation, Charmaine is still able to excel in her studies,” says a very impressed Ms Jenny Ng Quee Lan, Senior Staff Nurse, Nursing Outpatient Department, Singapore National Eye Centre. “Out of sheer determination, she has been able to catch up with her peers and ace her examinations each time!” she exclaims. “It is this positive attitude that has enabled her to succeed and I am sure she will go far in life,” adds SN Ng.

A Strong Determination To Excel



Ms Charmaine Tan Xing En

Diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1968, Mr Ang Huat Chye knew he needed to seek help. “I realised mental illness like other ailments would not go away on its own. The earlier one seeks treatment, the better the result. I knew it would be a long road to recovery and I was prepared to work with the doctors to do whatever it takes to get well.”

Mr Ang knows that while medication helps, getting over medical conditions also requires some will power. “I must persevere to the end,” says the 56-year-old bachelor who is also plagued with severe arthritic knees and high blood pressure.

“Despite my medical condition, I am contented and I have no reason to be sad or depressed,” shares Mr Ang. “I have a home and my family takes good care of me. Family support is very important,” adds Mr Ang who has two sisters and four brothers.

With a flair for the arts, Mr Ang sees drawing and painting as a way for him to de-stress. He often presents his art pieces to the doctors and nurses who have encouraged him to stay on the road to recovery.

“His resilient and positive attitude greatly inspires me,” says Dr David Ng, Deputy Director, Queenstown Polyclinic. “Despite his illness, he has never once allowed it to incapacitate him,” adds Dr Jonathan Yeo, Family Physician, Queenstown Polyclinic. “It is indeed encouraging to see how he has managed to overcome his illness and channel his focus to recover through art. He is truly an inspiration to all patients with mental illnesses.”

◆◆
Persevering To The End



Mr Ang Huat Chye



Mr Benny Lee Kim Hock

Spreading The Cheer

For the past 10 years, Mr Benny Lee, 63, who had a right chest thoracic window created for visual access to the pulmonary microvasculature has to have his wound dressings changed daily at the Bedok Polyclinic.

According to Ms Hashinah Bibi, Senior Enrolled Nurse, Bedok Polyclinic, who has known Mr Lee for the past three years, he never fusses over his appointment slots and has never complained about the long waiting time. In fact, he often takes the initiative to pacify other patients and caregivers who are agitated by the long waiting time, advising them to be more patient and understanding. On many occasions, Mr Lee even allowed other patients to be served before him.

With a cheerful disposition, Mr Lee easily strikes up conversations with just about anybody – nurses, cleaners and fellow patients. While he waits for his turn, Mr Lee is often found chatting with other patients and trying to cheer them up when they look gloomy.

Although Mr Lee has had issues with his lungs for the past 10 years, he has never let it get him down. “It started with a cough,” he says. He had tuberculosis and was later diagnosed with lung cancer. Despite his health condition, Mr Lee remains positive. “Mr Lee’s happy-go-lucky attitude has taught me to look at things in a more calm and patient manner. He has always been an inspirational patient who has shown me that nothing is impossible in the world as long as you cherish your life,” says Ms Hashinah.

A determined, self-motivated and independent man, the retired bachelor works part-time in a law firm and spends most of his free time with friends or at the library reading his favourite detective novels.

When he was found to have uncontrolled diabetes, he was put on medication and was told that he had to make some immediate and drastic lifestyle changes to manage the disease.

Mr EJ understood the implications of his condition and knew that if he was going to beat this, that he had to take control of his health and take charge of his life.

Out the door went all his previously unhealthy lifestyle; instead Mr EJ started to watch what he ate and he started exercising. Though it is tough with his heavy work schedule, Mr EJ still tries to run on the treadmill at least two to three times a week. His perseverance paid off – he has since lost weight and his BMI has also dropped.

“Although his BMI now is still considered overweight, Mr EJ has made great strides in achieving steady and progressive weight loss through his lifestyle changes,” beamed Dr Gilbert Tan, Consultant Family Physician, Geylang Polyclinic.

Mr EJ’s HbA1c test – a diabetic control indicator that measures how high the blood glucose has been on average over the last 8-12 weeks – has also dropped steadily and Mr EJ is now well on track in his efforts towards excellent diabetic control!

“Even though he still requires medication, his condition improved a great deal over the short period of just a few months simply because he was willing to make a proactive change to his lifestyle, his eating and exercise habits,” says Dr Tan.

“He is such a positive role model. I will definitely showcase his success story to my other patients with similar conditions because I believe he can really inspire them to do the same,” declares Dr Tan.



Making That Change

Mr EJ



Mr Andrew Ang Kim Ka

What Doesn't Break You, Just Makes You Stronger

He was in a coma at Changi General Hospital for two days. When he woke up, though he could speak, he was unable to move and the first thought that crossed his mind was, "Will I be able to continue to work and provide for my family?" says Mr Andrew Ang, 43, who was an on-site Service Manager in the bio-science industry before he had the stroke.

Married with a young son, Mr Ang was determined to get better. He was the sole breadwinner – his wife stopped working after they had their son – so he had to get well if he wanted to continue to provide for his family. Fearing that he might not have a job to return to if he took extended medical leave, Mr Ang gave himself just four months to recover. By the time he left the hospital two months later, he could already walk, even if he was a bit unsteady. "At home, he would continue with his daily therapy routines and this led to remarkable improvement of his condition," says Ms Charity Chu, Manager, Day Rehabilitation Centre at St Andrew's Community Hospital.

Despite the uncertainties which lay ahead, Mr Ang decided to focus on what he could do rather than dwell on what he could not. He negotiated for a change in job scope and thanks to an understanding boss, he was reassigned to an administrative role.

While he accepted the fact that life at work would be different, what he did not see coming was the change in the attitude of some of his colleagues. While some chose to keep their distance, others treated him as if he were less of a man. Although this might have been demoralising for some, it only motivated Mr Ang to improve himself even further. "I focused on doing my job to the best of my ability, accepting whatever help was offered and if there was none, I just continued to give it my all," says Mr Ang.

"Through his actions, Mr Ang has shown us all that with a positive attitude, patience, resilience and determination, one can overcome any difficulty. Even in dire circumstance, it is still possible to achieve a positive outcome," says Ms Chu.

At 88, Mr Phillips Richard Edward looks a lot younger than his age. He led a healthy life except for a bout of measles in his youth. So when he had to have part of his colon removed in 2004 because of a blockage, it was a traumatic experience for him even though the surgery went well.

His brief stint in the hospital, however, helped him to better understand the anxiety some patients face when they are at the hospital seeking treatment or awaiting test results. And that is where Mr Phillips felt he was able to help allay their fears, Mr Phillips makes a special effort to try and chat with every patient at Changi General Hospital's Geriatric Clinic where he has been a volunteer for the past six years. Blessed with the gift of languages – he is fluent in Teochew, Cantonese, Hokkien, Mandarin and even Japanese which he picked up during WWII – he feels that it is a privilege to be able to provide some support for patients.

"I love meeting patients. I get a lot of satisfaction from cheering on the patients at the Geriatric Clinic," shares the dedicated volunteer. A staunch Catholic, Mr Phillips wakes up at 4.30am for his daily morning prayers which usually takes about an hour. Mr Phillips takes it upon himself to pray for each and every patient he meets at the clinic.

"Mr Phillips is one of my best volunteers. He is very dedicated. In all the 12 years he has been with us, volunteering in different places, he has not missed a single Friday," says Ms Caroline Rajandran, Administrative Assistant, Changi General Hospital who is in charge of the hospital's volunteer programme. "Mr Phillips is an ideal role model for new volunteers. He is a great source of inspiration for them with his devotion and caring nature," she adds.

A Volunteering Spirit



Mr Phillips Richard Edward

A Painful Decision But Not A Difficult One



Ms Suzanah Shariff

In what should have been a routine breast feeding session for her child, Ms Suzanah Shariff, 46, was frustrated when the baby refused to latch on. Worried, she went for a health check mainly to find out the reason for her baby's rejection. She was shocked when tests confirmed that she had breast cancer and she had to have her entire left breast removed.

Ms Suzanah recounted that it was a painful decision when she first decided on a mastectomy, but it was not a difficult one. "I did it for my survival. My eldest child was just 13 years old at the time and my youngest, only two-and-a-half. I had to live for my family," says Ms Suzanah who has four children.

"Of course, I cried," admits Ms Suzanah. "My husband who is my strongest support said, "I'll cry with you today but tomorrow we won't cry anymore. We have faith. We will hang on to it."

Faith certainly got them through one of the toughest episodes in their lives – faith and the strong support from family and friends. The recovery period was a difficult time, but with good all-round support, firm religious faith and 'me' time, Ms Suzanah is happy today, successfully juggling her roles as wife, mother, sister, volunteer and friend.

"Not one to shun away, Ms Suzanah is ever willing to share with other patients how she coped with breast cancer and that has helped others understand the disease better and be encouraged by her positive attitude," comments Ms Sophia Chua, Nurse Clinician, Specialist Clinic J at Changi General Hospital.

"Whenever I can, I'll meet or talk with patients over the phone to help ease their anxiety," says Ms Suzanah who also volunteers at her son's school four times a week to help with the school's reading programme and after-school programme.

He moves around in a wheelchair because his left leg is double the size of his right leg due to a complication arising from a surgery he had 16 years ago when a tumour on his left hamstring was removed. "The doctors warned me of this side effect," says Mr Tan Keng Kian, 76, a resident of The Salvation Army Peacehaven Nursing Home since June 2008.

"But my case is actually considered quite good," he says. "I've read cases where some patients' legs are so big that they can't even sit. So I'm lucky," says Mr Tan who always chooses to see the positive side in every situation.

"Despite his condition, Mr Tan has remained positive," says Ms Trina Tan, the home's Social Worker. Not the type to dwell on the past, Mr Tan's philosophy in life is – 'Whatever has happened, happened. Don't worry about the past and don't get too upset or take it to heart because it does nothing for you.'

Always sweet and considerate, Mr Tan tries not to bother the nurses as far as possible because he understands that they are busy. "I can do most things on my own," he says proudly, "except change my bedsheets."

Mr Tan is also very caring and considerate when it comes to his fellow residents. Since not all of them can read, "he reads the newspapers and picks out news to share with the rest of the residents at the monthly Current Affairs Group sessions to keep them informed of current affairs," says Ms Tan.

With such a caring demeanor, it is no wonder that the staff at the home are inspired by his positive and cheerful attitude towards life as well as his passion to help himself and others. Mr Tan lives by an admirable motto: 'Never give up, no matter what. The only disability in life is a bad attitude.'

◆◆

The Only Disability In Life Is A Bad Attitude



Mr Tan Keng Kian



Our *Inspirational*
Caregivers



Mdm Chan Geok Lian



A Courageous Caregiver

“Never mind if you lose your temper and shout at me,” she told her son, “I understand that you are frustrated and in pain,” says 51-year-old Mdm Chan Geok Lian to her son Wei Zhong, 23, who was diagnosed with Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP), a condition in which numerous polyps form in the large intestine. While these start out benign, they can turn malignant into colon cancer if not treated.

Diagnosed at the age of four, Wei Zhong underwent surgery in 2009. Following surgery, however, he suffered immense pain and had to be admitted to the hospital frequently for the last two years. All she could do during this entire ordeal was to try and comfort him. “Throughout the two years, she was there to attend to all his needs,” says Ms Carol Loi, Genetic Counsellor, Department of Colorectal Surgery, Singapore General Hospital. “Even when her son took his frustrations out on her, she remained dedicated to him,” she adds.

Mdm Chan understands what her son is going through because she herself underwent the same surgery in 1992. Beyond the physical pain, she believes her son is also frustrated because he feels that everyone is trivializing his pain and nobody understands what he is going through.

Watching a loved one in constant agony can take its toll. To stay sane, Mdm Chan confides in her family members and seeks solace at the temple where she speaks to the monks. They seem to be able to comfort her.

“My son told me once that he wanted to die,” confesses Mdm Chan and that broke her heart because she feels responsible for his condition – FAP is a hereditary disease. “The pain was so unbearable that my son actually lost his will to live,” says Mdm Chan. “Thankfully, we were introduced to the SGH Pain Management Team and that gave us hope as Wei Zhong’s condition gradually improved,” says Mdm Chan who is very thankful.

“No words can describe my admiration for Mdm Chan who is an unwavering and courageous caregiver,” says Ms Loi. “Her selfless and unconditional love for her son has inspired me.”

Ms Chan Soh Chin, 64, is truly daddy's girl. When her 95-year-old father was diagnosed with Stage 3 colon cancer eight years ago, she quit her job to take care of him. The surgery was successful but her father was left having to wear a stoma bag for the rest of his life.

Fearing that her father might fall into depression, she encouraged him to join the support groups at the Singapore General Hospital and the Singapore Cancer Society. Meeting and getting to know other patients with the same condition gave him the reassurance that he was not alone in his battle with the disease.

"Initially it was quite difficult," admits Ms Chan. "I had to maintain the stoma bag and I didn't know how to. I know sometimes he feels sad and bad that I have to do it all. He sometimes feels he's a 'burden' to me and I told him never to think about it that way!"

She may have had to give up her job and sacrifice her time, but she wouldn't have it any other way. "He's my father. It's my duty."

Her father's condition improved gradually and three years ago, she returned to full-time employment with her father's encouragement. Knowing that her father does not like to be cooped up at home, Ms Chan often sacrifices whatever 'me' time she has by taking her father out.

"Throughout these eight years, Ms Chan has been a devoted caregiver to her father. She takes care of all his needs and brings him out whenever she can without a word of complaint," says Ms Ong Choo Eng, Senior Nurse Clinician (Specialty Care), Ward 47A, Department of Colorectal Surgery, Singapore General Hospital.

"Sometimes I bluff him and say I don't want to go out and he'll say 'ok' but then he'll ask 'So, what's the programme for today? Where shall we go?'" says Ms Chan cheekily. "When asked like that, how not to bring him out!" exclaims Ms Chan with a smile, secretly loving the bond that she shares with her dear father.


Daddy's Girl



Ms Chan Soh Chin



Putting Her Parents' Needs Before Hers



Mdm Faridah Abdul Rahman

Mdm Faridah Abdul Rahman, 51, lives three units away from her 80-year-old father and 72-year-old mother. Her father has high blood pressure while her mother, a diabetic and double amputee, suffers from renal failure and has been on dialysis treatment since 2003.

As their primary caregiver, Mdm Faridah looks into their everyday needs. The most difficult period was when both her father and mother were warded at the same time but in different hospitals – one in Changi General Hospital and the other in Singapore General Hospital – and she had to rush from one hospital to another every day after work. “It was tiring but somebody has to take care of them. However difficult it is, I must be strong for them. I pray hard to be strong and I’m so grateful that God has always given me the strength,” she says. Mdm Faridah is also thankful to have a very understanding husband and two very supportive daughters aged 22 and 17.

Mdm Faridah has indeed given her all to care for her parents. While she was prepared to do all that, Mdm Faridah was struck with a devastating blow when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. “I cried a lot as I was worried that there would be no one to take care of my parents,” says Mdm Faridah. To ensure that she could continue to care for her parents, Mdm Faridah opted for a mastectomy that may lower the chances of a recurrence.

“She does her best to take care of her parents, especially her mother. After more than 10 years of selfless caregiving, it is amazing how Mdm Faridah remains dedicated in her care for her parents despite her own condition,” says Ms Gladys Teng, Occupational Therapist, Occupational Therapy Department, Singapore General Hospital. “While patients are always at the heart of all we do, I realised it is important to look into the well-being of the caregiver too.”

For about a year Jennie, 37, suffered from mycosis fungoides, a skin condition that causes multiple skin lesions and large fungating wounds. "Her skin was constantly tearing and bleeding. She had a lot of open wounds all over her body and we had to change the wound dressings three to four times a day," explains younger sister Grace. "It was such a painful ordeal so we tried to minimise the frequency of wound dressing and the pain by applying gel and morphine to the wounds. But towards the end, even that didn't help," says a teary-eyed Grace.

As Grace and her other siblings had to work, their 66-year-old mother, Mdm Hoo Sew Lin was the primary caregiver for Jennie. "My mother tended to her every need – in hospital as well as at home." It was extremely difficult having to watch her child suffer in pain and she often wished the pain was inflicted on her instead of Jennie. Even though doctors weren't optimistic of Jennie's condition, Mdm Hoo still harboured hopes that her daughter would recover one day.

Seeing her daughter in constant pain and agony was heartbreaking but Mdm Hoo persevered. Even though she herself is a diabetic with high cholesterol, Mdm Hoo remained focused in giving the best possible care to Jennie. "Sometimes when my sister was asleep, she would watch a bit of TV to take her mind off the situation or she would take a short rest, but she didn't sleep," says Grace.

"Throughout Jennie's stay in the hospital, Mdm Hoo slept on the armchair every night so she could be with her," said Ms Manon Mani, Acting Nurse Clinician, Isolation Ward 68 at Singapore General Hospital. "Her unconditional love for her daughter truly inspired and moved us."

Sadly, Jennie succumbed to her illness in 2011 leaving behind her devoted mother and supportive family.


A Mother's Love



Mdm Hoo Sew Lin

40-year-old Ms Naw Hnin Wai Lwin may have a degree from the University of Yangon but she did not have the required experience to take care of the elderly sick. Yet, she has more than surpassed what anyone can expect of a caregiver.

Initially it was difficult to care for Mdm Nah Ah Whay, whom she affectionately calls Ah Ma as she didn't speak Ah Ma's language. "When I first came I could not communicate with Ah Ma," says Wai Lwin. "I didn't understand what she was trying to say so she often got angry with me. Then I slowly learned Hokkien and now I've no problem communicating with Ah Ma and she is clearly much happier."

A staunch Christian, Wai Lwin prays everyday for strength so that she can take care of Ah Ma. Ah Ma is 88 years old with chronic medical issues including kidney and heart failure as well as diabetes. Since January 2011, Ah Ma's condition has improved tremendously. She does not have to be hospitalised as frequently as before and the amount of medication she takes has been reduced considerably too. Dr Colleen Thomas, Senior Consultant, Department of Internal Medicine, Singapore General Hospital attributes much of this improvement to the excellent and intelligent care provided by Wai Lwin.

"She keeps amazingly meticulous notes of the patient's blood pressure, vital signs, blood sugar levels and medication requirements," says Dr Thomas. "She also keeps a clear log of her medication, counts them and does medication reconciliation regularly so that there is no excess stock or double dosing at home," adds the doctor.

Wai Lwin knows all the medicines by name and what each is for. "I learnt a lot from the nurses," says Wai Lwin who is always positive, eager and willing to learn. She is grateful to the nurses for showing her how to check Ah Ma's sugar level, her blood pressure and how to administer insulin injections.

She not only makes sure that Ah Ma takes her medicine but also gets her daily dose of fresh air, exercise and interaction with friends. Every morning, she pushes Ah Ma in her wheelchair to do her exercise, go to the market, and socialize with friends. Every waking moment is spent with Ah Ma. Wai Lwin does more than just monitor Ah Ma's condition closely; she is Ah Ma's constant companion.

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She Is More Than Just Help



Ms Naw Hnin Wai Lwin



*Mr Kenneth Mah Yee Wah
with his wife Patricia*

Saving Chloe

When Chloe was just seven months old, she was diagnosed with Pompe disease, a rare genetic disorder which damages muscle and nerve cells due to a missing enzyme.

Since the age of nine months Chloe has been put on Enzyme Replacement Therapy as well as a slew of other therapies such as speech and language, hydrotherapy, occupational and physiotherapy. Now two years old, Chloe has made significant progress. She can sit on her own and move her limbs although her neck is still rather weak. "If there is any consolation, the disease does not affect her cognitive capability," says Mr Kenneth Mah, Chloe's father, "so she can communicate and play with the iPad like any toddler her age."

With this condition, Chloe requires lifetime treatment and her medical bill, which is about \$12,000 a month, is expected to increase as she ages. "We are not sure what the future holds but we know that no matter what it takes, we will continue to give Chloe the best possible care," says Mr Mah.

"Mr and Mrs Mah are very optimistic. They have this strong fighting spirit that stems from their love for Chloe," says Ms Olivine Tan, Staff Nurse of Ward 46, KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

What started out as a site to raise funds for Chloe's hefty medical expenses, www.savechloe.com has since developed into something even more meaningful. All donations now go to the KK Hospital Health Endowment Fund which raises funds to help needy patients. The fund also supports education, research and disease prevention programmes targeted at women's and children's health. The reason for doing so is simply because "we feel that other parents need help too," says Mr Mah. It is this strong desire to help others that has prompted the Mahs to form the – Rare Diseases Society (Singapore) which aims to raise awareness of Rare Disorders which afflict a small group in our community. Mr Mah hopes that with greater support and awareness, more will seek and receive treatment. "What Mr and Mrs Mah did is most admirable. Their selflessness and willingness to help others in need, despite their own difficult situation truly inspires me," says SN Tan.



Ms Isabella Sim May Lin

Come What May

When Jeremiah, 17, was just a toddler, he was diagnosed with Hypophosphataemic Rickets, a genetic bone condition where the body is unable to produce phosphate which is needed to absorb calcium that is essential for bone development.

For any parent, it is heartbreaking to have to witness their child's suffering. Due to his condition, Jeremiah had to go through numerous orthopaedic surgeries, two dental surgeries and two eye surgeries to correct his bilateral squint from the age of two. But the most crucial operation took place when he was nine when he had to remove a tumor near his brain stem.

"I used to wish that my son could grow up and develop physically like any normal kid," confesses Ms Isabella Sim, 51. But the agony of seeing Jeremiah going through the seven-and-a-half-hour brain surgery put everything into perspective. "I realised I could have lost Jeremiah on the operating table that day. What could be more important than his life? I just wanted him to live," she says. "That's when I adopted the 'come what may' attitude and we've been much happier ever since," says Ms Sim.

Still, being a full-time caregiver can take its toll. For Ms Sim, the six months when Jeremiah was in a wheelchair recovering from corrective surgery for both his legs were the most difficult, mainly because Jeremiah had grown and Ms Sim struggled to handle his weight. "Getting Jeremiah in and out of the wheelchair, getting him ready for school, etc. was extremely difficult because Jeremiah was already quite a big boy by then," says Ms Sim. "But when I see him smile and laugh, he takes all my worries away!"

"Despite all that she went through, Ms Sim has remained positive and happy," says Ms Janice Lim, Principal Pharmacist, Pharmacy Department, KK Women's and Children's Hospital. "All these years, she has been a very dedicated caregiver and has never allowed Jeremiah's medical condition to be a stumbling block. In fact, she makes every effort to make their lives as normal as possible by including Jeremiah in everything she does," says Ms Lim.

Miu Teng was born 2.2kg, a rather healthy weight for a newborn. However, Miu Teng's mother, Ms Yong Seek Ying, 38, noticed something amiss when Miu Teng started having difficulty drinking milk which affected her growth.

As Miu Teng was not able to get her nutrition through normal feeding, the doctors had to put her on total parenteral nutrition (TPN) – a way of supplying all the nutritional needs of the body by bypassing the digestive system and feeding nutrient solution directly into a vein. "It was painful watching them trying to do it. Her veins were so tiny they had difficulty finding the veins for the catheter and she ended up with a lot of needle marks," recalls Ms Yong. "She was only about 8 months old then."

"My first thought when I was told that Miu Teng had to be put on TPN was 'Would she have to rely on it for the rest of her life?'" says Ms Yong. Right till the age of 15 months, Miu Teng had to be hospitalised frequently. As a working mother, it was a challenging period for Ms Yong, who spent almost every night at the hospital. In addition to caring for Miu Teng, she was also mindful of not neglecting her other young child. "Spending time and having a meal together is so rare," says Ms Yong. But a turning point came when Miu Teng could eventually consume solid food. "She finally got off TPN when she was almost 14 months old," says Ms Yong with much relief.

"Despite having so much on her plate, Ms Yong is still actively involved in her daughter's treatment and well-being," says Ms Rumya Ananthan, Staff Nurse, Ward 66, KK Women's and Children's Hospital. "The way she cares for her daughter truly inspires me," she adds.


My Little Fighter



Ms Yong Seek Ying

“To be honest, I envy Ms Mah for having such a loving and caring brother,” says Ms Elace Looi, Service Quality Manager, National Cancer Centre Singapore. “He is not just a companion to her because he does more than just accompanies her for medical appointments or sits by her bedside when she is warded . When it comes to his sister’s health, he is very involved and participative,” adds Ms Looi.

When Mr Mah Wai Meng’s unmarried elder sister Poey Lin was diagnosed with uterus and ovarian cancer in 2001, he took care of her and when her disease metastasized to the liver in May 2011, he again stepped up.

“What motivates me is my sister’s determination to get well. She’s so cooperative and positive. As her family, we must give her all the support she needs,” says 57-year-old Mr Mah.

“My wife is also very supportive and chips in to help whenever she can,” shares Mr Mah who also takes care of his 83-year-old mother. Without his wife’s support, it is unlikely that he would be able to sustain such a stressful lifestyle – taking care of both his beloved sister and aged mother while working full-time in the events management industry.

“We’ve not had a holiday or a weekend to ourselves for a long time but she never complains or grumbles,” says Mr Mah of his wife of 30 years.

While Mr Mah’s wife treats his mother and sister as her own, Mr Mah does the same with his mother-in-law too. When she suffered a bout of tuberculosis and had to go to the polyclinic every morning for her medication, it was Mr Mah who took her there daily without a single word of complaint.

“We have this mutual understanding,” explains Mr Mah. “Family is family. It doesn’t matter whether it is yours or mine. They are ours.”



Mr Mah Wai Meng

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Anything For The Family



Ms Vivien Tan Liyun

All On Her Young Shoulders

2010 was an extremely difficult year for Ms Vivien Tan, 27. Her grandfather was diagnosed with stomach cancer in March; her grandmother with lung cancer just two months later; her uncle with pancreatic cancer a month later and finally her father, with colon cancer, in October. With lean family support, Vivien had to take on the responsibility of caring for all four of them. A role she willingly took on as she was close to her family.

To do this, Vivien had to give up her job and much of her personal time. "It was a stressful period for me, especially the period when my grandfather, grandmother and uncle were all hospitalised at the same time," says Vivien.

A dedicated caregiver, Vivien managed everything from working out the finances to accompanying them for all their medical appointments. "Caring for one dependent can be quite stressful, imagine having to care for four at the same time. One can only imagine the fatigue that she is experiencing," says Ms Agnes Tan, Medical Social Worker, Psychosocial Oncology Department, National Cancer Centre Singapore. Despite the mental and physical stress of being a long-term caregiver, Vivien has never thought of giving up. Not even when she had to make frequent round the island trips to the hospital traveling from Woodlands, where her grandparents lives, to Ang Mo Kio where her father stays and then to Jurong, to pick up her uncle. Vivien also often creates opportunities to bring the family closer together by organising birthday parties and family gatherings.

"I would never have thought that a lady so young is able to shoulder so much responsibility. Her optimism and perseverance has deeply inspired me and motivated me in my work," says Ms Tan.

“Our aunt is a giver. She’s always been there for us and looking out for all our needs,” shares Ms Diana Seet, 53 referring to her aunt Mdm Tan Pek Neo who recently had a heart bypass.

Mdm Tan’s health took a downward turn when she was diagnosed with pneumonia in June 2011 following a bout of asthma and flu. “Her pneumonia triggered a heart attack and for the next four months, she was in and out of hospital,” recalls Diana.

The surgery went well but three days after being discharged from hospital, Mdm Tan had to be readmitted to the hospital due to an infection of the right thigh and chest. It was a critical period but thankfully, Mdm Tan pulled through.

As the main caregiver, Diana had to give up her personal time to care for her aunt, but never once did she consider giving up. Her faith in God gave her strength and kept her going. Of course, her genuine love for her aunt helped too. “We love, treasure and cherish our beloved aunt very much. We are so blessed and grateful she is well now,” says Diana.

Diana’s love and concern for her aunt certainly didn’t go unnoticed. “She was very kind and patient towards Mdm Tan. She always made sure that her aunt kept to a healthy diet to help control her blood sugar,” says Ms Tardo Gay Sindiong, Staff Nurse, Ward 56, National Heart Centre Singapore. “The care and concern she showed for her aunt not only motivated her aunt to get better, it also served as a source of encouragement to us nurses,” adds SN Tardo.

◆◆
For A Loving And Giving Aunt



Ms Diana Seet



Ms Ellen Goh Lee Peng

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*My Mission Is To Make
Him Laugh*

In 2008, her brother was involved in a serious road accident where he suffered a severe head injury that has since left him bedridden. At first the family was still very hopeful that he would make a full recovery but that hope slowly diminished when he showed no progress despite having gone through 11 operations.

To better understand her brother's condition, Ms Ellen Goh, 39, did extensive research and gathered information from books, the Internet as well as neuroscience journals. "I am deeply moved by her hard work and perseverance in trying to find out as much as she can – from disease management, to medication and alternative treatments," says Ms Phoebe Tan, Senior Staff Nurse, Neurosurgery Department, National Neuroscience Institute. "She has showed me what it means to not give up hope," she adds.

"She is now very knowledgeable in the care of patients with severe head injuries," says SSN Tan. A Financial Planning Consultant, Ellen puts that knowledge, together with her knowledge of financial matters, to good use by sharing it with other families who face similar situations.

Now that her brother's health is stable and the family has come to terms with his condition, her focus has shifted towards making him as comfortable and happy as possible. She has not only found him a suitable nursing home, she also makes it a point to visit him every day to cheer him up with jokes and You Tube videos. "I've made it my mission to make him laugh everyday," says Ms Goh.



With Love, Anything Is Possible



Mdm Pan Meng Zhu

Mdm Pan Meng Zhu, 33, and her two children were looking forward to joining her husband who was on a job posting to Taiwan for two years. However, all plans were ruined when he was involved in a road accident that left him in a coma for about five months. When he regained consciousness, he remained bedridden, unresponsive and required full-time care.

“At the beginning, I couldn’t accept it,” admits Meng Zhu. “The kids were only two years and two months old at the time. I was at a loss, but I came to terms with his condition after six months and was determined to remain by his side,” she says.

Despite her husband’s condition, Meng Zhu realised it was important to have a father figure in the family and for her husband to see their kids grow up. So she decided to care for her husband at home. It was a daunting task, juggling work while caring for her husband, but Meng Zhu was determined to keep the family going.

“With her care, Mr Lim’s condition has been stable and he has even gained some weight despite feeding difficulties,” says Ms Phoebe Tan, Senior Staff Nurse, Neurosurgery Department, National Neuroscience Institute.

A childcare teacher, Meng Zhu returns home during her lunch break to bathe her husband with the help of a domestic helper. She then rushes back to work and when her work ends at 4.30pm, she heads home again to spend more time with her husband and helps him with his daily exercises. “When the kids come home, we have dinner together, and I supervise them in their homework while attending to my husband’s needs,” says Meng Zhu. She wishes she could look after her husband full time but realises that it isn’t realistic because she has to earn a living.

Until such time when she can give up her job and focus entirely on caring for her husband, she is happy to continue to share her life with him, reading and talking to him while the kids play happily around him.

According to SSN Tan, Meng Zhu has been keeping a journal since the incident which she hopes to compile into a book one day to inspire others. “She has certainly inspired me,” declares SSN Tan. “She is one of the most courageous people I have ever met!”

Jun Jie was born with multiple eye problems. At only seven months, he had his first surgery to remove a cataract in his right eye. Now five years old, he has to wear spectacles for his short-sightedness as well as an eye patch to correct his lazy left eye.

“He is much better now but it was very difficult initially,” admits Jun Jie’s mother, 36-year-old Mrs Neo, who had to bear with Jun Jie’s cries, kicks and struggles during the countless assessments and evaluations, surgeries and follow-up visits to the eye centre. There were also many incidences of eye inflammation which required further treatment that inevitably led to greater stress. Although Jun Jie’s condition has now stabilised, his future is still fairly uncertain as he has a 50-50 chance of developing glaucoma. Ever conscious of Jun Jie’s condition, Mrs Neo keeps a close watch on his development and takes swift action when she notices anything amiss. Mrs Neo’s dedicated care has paid off as Jun Jie is now a well-adjusted kid who takes his eye condition in his stride and enjoys school life like any other kid.

“Mrs Neo is an excellent role model to other parents whose children are plagued with vision problems. It is clear that with proper treatment and dedicated care, a child who is visually impaired can regain optimal vision, just like Jun Jie whose condition has greatly improved,” says Ms Maria Goh, Optometrist, Singapore National Eye Centre.

Hard Work And Dedication



Mrs Neo (Mdm Lau Lee Ping)

Despite her daughter's visual impairment which struck at the tender age of two, Mdm Lee Siew Chow, 48, was determined to enrol her in a mainstream school. It was an uphill task to get Charmaine into a regular school but Mdm Lee was undaunted as she had absolute faith in Charmaine's learning abilities and was certain she could excel in her studies like any other kid.

Although Charmaine only has about two per cent vision capacity, her condition remained stable throughout her primary school years. However, when she was in secondary one, her kidneys started to fail. This came as a blow to the family but they soon came to terms with it and Mdm Lee continued to give Charmaine the best possible care and support. At her encouragement, Charmaine persevered in her studies and today, she is in her first year of junior college.

"Sometimes it gets very tiring because I worry," admits Mdm Lee. "I worry what will happen to Charmaine if I am gone. That is why I must teach her to be independent," says Mdm Lee, a hairstylist who works from home because "my priority is to take care of Charmaine," says Mdm Lee.

"I am impressed and encouraged by Mdm Lee's care and concern for her daughter," says Ms Linda Chan, Executive, Quality Service Department, Singapore National Eye Centre. "She is truly an exemplary mother who has remained strong for her daughter and given her the greatest support and best possible care."

◆◆ *A Mother's Unconditional Love For Her Child*



*Mdm Lee Siew Chow with
her daughter Charmaine*



Ms Catherine Tan

Playing The Pivotal Role

Fifteen years ago, Ms Catherine Tan's mother suffered a mild stroke and had to undergo balloon angioplasty to widen a narrowed blood vessel. As her primary caregiver, Ms Tan, 45, looks into every aspect of her mother's health and well-being. Knowing that it was important for her mother to take ownership of her own health management, Ms Tan took the effort to brief her on how to manage her daily medication, check her blood pressure and record it for her doctor's review.

To motivate her mother to keep to the health plan, Ms Tan makes it a point to check her mother's blood pressure records and discusses it with her so that she understands how she is progressing.

"Ms Tan plays a pivotal role in supervising the medical care of her mother as well as in helping to reinforce the health messages that we are trying to convey," says Dr Tan Ngiap Chuan, Director, Pasir Ris Polyclinic. "Under her supervision, there has been significant health improvement," says Dr Tan. "Her mother managed to lose 3kg in three months, which is an amazing accomplishment," he says. "She is indeed a role model for caregivers of patients with multiple morbidities."

Since taking care of her mother, Ms Tan has less time to spend with friends. She also has to give up family time with her husband and son and misses those days when she could just go on a vacation without any worries.

"Though the initial years were tough, taking care of my mother has become a routine affair," says Ms Tan. "I am blessed with a caring mother and supportive family members – my husband, son and siblings are my pillars of support," she adds. With her dedicated care, medication and physiotherapy, her mother's health has improved and today, the healthy, active 80-year-old often joins the family for vacations and meets up with her friends regularly for dinner or karaoke.

For two and a half years, domestic helper, Ms Grace Melican Etrata, has been caring for 67-year-old Mr Johnny Goh, a diabetic who is bed-ridden and also suffers from renal failure. Although she has no prior experience in caring for the elderly sick, she took the initiative to learn how to clean and change his wound dressing as well as suction out and change the inner cannula of his tracheostomy tube.

When Mr Goh was hospitalised for six months, following the amputation of his right leg, Grace remained by his side the whole time, taking brief breaks in the mornings only when he went for his dialysis treatments. Since Mr Goh has no family here – all his three children are living abroad – Grace takes the trouble to film him when he shows improvement so that his family can see his progress.

“Seeing how she takes such great care of Mr Goh makes me want to do more,” admits Ms Marnie Tamayo Gutierrez, Senior Staff Nurse (Acting Nurse Clinician), Ward 47, Changi General Hospital, who observed that throughout Mr Goh’s stay at the hospital, Grace took care of him with such untiring passion.

Although Mr Goh was in a semi-conscious state, Grace always expressed words of encouragement because she strongly believed that he could still hear and understand her. And because he was unable to communicate, she was always alert in looking out for signs that might indicate a change in his condition.

For instance when she noticed him perspiring profusely one day, she immediately alerted the nurses. That’s when they discovered that his sugar level had suddenly dropped. “Her extraordinary attention to detail about Mr Goh’s condition is such a motivation to us nurses. It inspires us to be more alert and vigilant,” says Ag NC Marnie.



Ms Grace Melican Etrata



Passion And Grace



Mr Ismail Bin Mohamed



Handicapped But An Able Caregiver

He may be handicapped, but he is still able. “As long as I still have two strong arms, I will continue to take care of her,” asserts Mr Ismail Bin Mohd who has declined offers from his children to get a maid to help him take care of his wife who is bed-bound. Mr Ismail is himself wheelchair-bound after an accident left him paralysed from the waist down when he was just 29 years old. He is now 76 and his wife, Mdm Sohdiah, is 72.

Mdm Sohdiah has been plagued with liver and heart problems for years but her condition deteriorated in recent years, leaving her bed-bound and entirely dependent on Mr Ismail whose daily household chores include marketing, cooking and cleaning. Most of his time is spent lovingly taking care of his wife – feeding her, changing her, sponge-bathing her. Whatever little time he has left after all that, Mr Ismail spends reading the newspapers and watching TV programmes. “I actually have very little free time,” admits Mr Ismail. You may notice a tinge of tiredness in his voice but there is hardly a hint of regret. The level of care and devotion he showers on Mdm Sohdiah is simply admirable and has always been a source of inspiration to his five children, fifteen grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Despite these challenges, Mr Ismail remains optimistic and relies on his faith to keep him strong. “Even though he is wheelchair-bound, he has never let his disability affect his way of life. In fact, he once said that every challenge is a test from God and we should not only accept them but try our best to overcome them while staying positive as each test only makes us stronger,” says Ms Nasirah Mansor, Medical Social Worker, Changi General Hospital. “He has shown such great resilience and is not only an inspiration to his children but to healthcare workers like us too,” she adds.



Running A Mini Eldercare Centre



Ms Parliyah Tariyo Sasmito

Having to take care of one elderly person is tough enough. Imagine having to take care of three all at the same time, in the same house. It is like running a mini eldercare home. And that is what Ms Parliyah Tariyo Sasmito, 42, had to do when she started working for the Tehs in August 1999.

“At first they could still walk, but their health deteriorated over the years, and taking care of them has become even more challenging,” says Parliyah, referring to Mr Teh Seong Kang, whom she affectionately calls Ah Kong, and his wife’s condition. Unfortunately, Mrs Teh’s health deteriorated rapidly and she succumbed to her illness in 2002, leaving behind Ah Kong and his daughter who suffers from Alzheimer’s.

“It is very tiring taking care of them,” admits Parliyah who wakes up at 7am to go about her daily tasks of taking care of the elderly dependents and tidying the house. On most nights, she doesn’t sleep before 1am. “The only thing I keep thinking about is that I also have parents back home. The Tehs are like my family, which is why I care for them like my own family,” says Parliyah.

Mdm Poh Choo, the Tehs’ daughter passed away in 2010 and Ah Kong, who just celebrated his 100th birthday, is the only one left now. “I do everything for him,” says Parliyah who is always asking the doctor what else she can do to help improve Ah Kong’s condition. “She is so dedicated and passionate when it comes to caring for Ah Kong,” says Ms Mei Zirong, Nurse Clinician, Ward 28, Changi General Hospital who has known Parliyah for the past four years. “It is not uncommon to see the caregiver just sitting by the patient’s side and letting the nurses take care of the patient, but not Parliyah. She is very hands-on and you can really see her passion,” she adds.

Caregivers like Parliyah play a very important role in the patient’s well-being. “Parliyah is important to Ah Kong because she gives him not only the physical support but the emotional and psychological support he needs as well,” explains NC Mei.

Mdm Sabita Devi d/o Amrit Lal, 66, has been a dedicated caregiver for most of her adult life. Her 41-year-old daughter was diagnosed with cerebral palsy from a very young age and her son has been plagued with a mental condition since his early 20s. In addition to caring for her children, Mdm Sabita also takes care of her 86-year-old mother. When her husband's mobility became impaired after a stroke, she took care of him along with his two elderly brothers whom he was caring for at the time too.

Although she underwent a bypass in 2003 and suffers from high blood pressure, this retired childcare teacher's dedication to taking care of her loved ones is admirable. Never once has she faltered. Even now as she lives off her savings and whatever little bit of extra income she gets from cleaning jobs, she has never uttered a single word of complaint.

If anything, Mdm Sabita seems to laugh her way out of every situation. "Laughter makes the world go around," says the cheerful Mdm Sabita who shares this common characteristic with Mdm Gita, her younger sister. "Cheerfulness runs in the family," they chorused.

"Of course I have stress," admits Mdm Sabita, "but if it's beyond my control, what can I do?"

It is this refusal to allow herself to worry about a situation that she has no control over and her strong religious belief that has kept Mdm Sabita sane through some of the hardest times in her life. "Sometimes I think about how lonely my life is and I think of Sabita's and feel so blessed," says Mdm Gita. "Never once have I ever heard her grumble," she adds.

Mdm Namrata Sadarangani, Senior Manager, Community Therapy Services, St Andrew's Community Hospital shares Mdm Gita's admiration for Mdm Sabita. "Although it is a struggle for her, she is still able to maintain a positive outlook on life," says Mdm Namrata. "She is what we would call a pillar of inspiration. She is such a source of encouragement to all of us," she adds.

A Wonder Woman Named Sabita



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