

SINGAPORE HEALTH  
**INSPIRATIONAL  
PATIENT &  
CAREGIVER**  
AWARDS 2016

SINGAPORE HEALTH INSPIRATIONAL PATIENT & CAREGIVER AWARDS 2016



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## ABOUT THE AWARD

The Singapore Health Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Awards is an annual award which honours individuals for their strength, courage and resilience in the face of healthcare challenges. In its seventh year, the winners continue to inspire us with their ability to overcome adversity and provide valuable learning for the doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and other healthcare workers who care for them.

We are also pleased to introduce a new category to honour outstanding patient support groups who have provided invaluable support to our patients and caregivers.

This year, we recognise 45 winners who have motivated healthcare professionals to deliver better care to their patients and inspired many with their zest for life.

# INSPIRATIONAL PATIENTS

*MR WANG GEOK SOON*

*MR JAVIER TAN*

*MR MOHAMMED AAKIF BIN MOHMAD ASIF*

*MR MOHAMED IMANUDDIN BIN MOHAMED SALLEH*

*MDM LAM AH CHOO*

*MS ZULFA BINTI ANAS*

*MR MICHAEL WONG*

*MR QUEK SER HWEE*

*MR JOSEPH CHAN*

*MR KOH SENG CHYE*

*MS KWAN YULING*

*MR LIM SIAK TENG*

*MR ABDUL MAJID BIN ABDUL SALAM*

*MDM CHEW ENG HUAY*

*MR AHMAD HISHAM BIN ABDUL RAHIM*

*MS CHONG HUI MIN*

*MR GOH WEIMING*

*MS HENG PEI YAN*

*MDM LOH BEE KIM*

*MR TEO KEE HUAT*

*MR THOMAS LEE*

*MS PATRICIA POO*

*MR CHIA SOON KENG*

# BRAVERY IN THE FACE OF PAIN

MR WANG GEOK SOON  
(1955 - 2015)

My older brother Geok Soon was the sixth of 11 children. He had fierce-looking features and a ruddy face, so we nicknamed him 'jit pun' ('Japanese kid' in Hokkien). He did odd jobs and travelled a lot, only contacting me when he struck the lottery or was in dire financial straits.

Our mother lived with him because he was the only unmarried sibling, and after she died 10 years ago, we hardly met, except on our parents' death anniversaries or Qing Ming Festival.

In June 2015, he called me out of the blue, saying he was in a lot of pain and had been admitted to hospital. We learned he had final-stage liver cancer.

I visited him regularly and it was ironic that it was only at the last stage of his life that I started learning so many things about him that I never knew. Like how cheerful, likable, and responsible he really was, and how he had been holding down a job for the past seven years as a technician.

His illness forced him to leave his job, but not before he personally handed over his work tools and trained the other staff to use them. You should have seen his colleagues come up to shake his hand and wish him well. He looked his chirpy self and told them he was off to stay in a nice hotel, when it was actually the hospice that he was going to be admitted to...

At the hospice, he briefed me very methodically on what to do with his assets, and which friends he wanted to call to say his goodbyes. He also sought solace in religion and became a Buddhist.

He was positive in spirit all the way: In his final hours, he even asked me how soon he had to wait for the end to come. When I said it was just a matter of time, he smiled and said, 'swee!' (or 'wonderful' in Hokkien). He passed away in September 2015, at peace and happy.

From him, I learned how one can be brave in the face of pain and death. When I stayed up all night at his wake, I felt so tired, but what is that compared to what he went through? ●

*As told by Mr Wang Giok Hup,  
younger brother of the late  
Mr Wang Geok Soon.*

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*Mr Wang was an outstanding example of a courageous man facing up to his illness by planning and fulfilling his bucket list.*

**Sandy Koh**  
Medical Social Worker,  
Medical Social Services  
Bright Vision Hospital

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# I WANT TO BE A SCIENTIST

MR JAVIER TAN, 8 // STUDENT

My name is Javier Tan Jia Ye and I am eight years old. I have a very rare genetic disease called Fanconi anaemia, which is an inherited blood disorder that leads to bone marrow failure. My doctor told me that only four other people in Singapore have this disease. I was diagnosed when I was three years old.

I had to go for two haemotopoetic stem cell transplants in 2014. My first transplant was not successful as the cells did not engraft. I then had to undergo another transplant immediately after the first. My skin is now very dark and dry because of Graft versus host disease (GvHD). It is itchy but my mum always tells me not to scratch.

I was terrified of the pain. Sometimes the pain can be so bad that it is like 100 points or even up to infinity on the pain scale! Once I had a bladder infection and the pain was so unbearable. I was screaming my head off. I was like a noise machine! Another time, I had a bone infection in my leg, and had to go for 12 operations within the span of one month. When the pain is too much, I try to keep my mind on something else and not think of it. I play with my Nanoblocks or favourite superhero figurines instead.

I also befriended other young patients. I was staying in the isolation room for three months when a boy my age got admitted next door. He was sad about being in the hospital and I tried to cheer him up by giving him a

pirate ship and also made him a card. We would Skype with each other and exchange notes. I would tell him to just do stuff that he likes to keep busy. Every day is a better day.

My daddy gave me his stem cells. When he was in hospital, I wrote in my journal to wish him well. My wish was for my daddy to not suffer or be in pain. I was also wishing for my stem cells to wake up so that I could go home soon.

The nurses are my favourite as they always cheer me up with encouraging words and notes. One nurse gave me a Nanoblock kit and I also used to have drawing competitions with them. I made flowers, cards and little gifts for the nurses and doctors. I also liked to entertain the doctors with my dances.

After six months in the hospital, I was finally able to go home. I was so happy to be reunited with my family, especially my younger brother whom I missed a lot! I was also thrilled to finally be able to eat home-cooked food like macaroni soup with alphabet pasta.

When I grow up, I want to be a scientist as I want my inventions to help other people. I will be going back to school this year and I look forward to being with my friends again. ●

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*At the young age of eight, Javier is one of the few patients who do not struggle or bargain during painful procedures. He Skyped and wrote letters to other patients undergoing similar procedures to encourage them and told them that there is no need to cry. When he was finally discharged, he made thank-you cards for the nurses and doctors filled with origami flowers.*

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**Yvonne Lim**  
Senior Staff Nurse, Ward 76  
KK Women's and  
Children's Hospital

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# THE LITTLE WARRIOR

MR MOHAMMED AAKIF  
BIN MOHMAD ASIF, 7 // STUDENT

Babaa ('father' in Hindi) said I went for an operation at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) three days after I was born. I had a problem with my tummy (malrotation of the gut) and my vomit was green in colour, so I had to stay in the hospital for one month before I could go home to meet my brother and sister.

When I was four years old, my tummy problem happened again. It was so painful and I could not go to the toilet! So I had another operation.

After that, I was fine. I went to nursery class and last year, I even went on a holiday with my family. We went to Pune in India because my aunty was getting married there and it was really fun!

But when we came back, my tummy hurt again. I could not go to the toilet and had to go for a third operation. This time, my kidneys were affected and I had to go for dialysis. I could only pass motion through the use of a colostomy bag.

I was admitted to the intensive care unit at KKH for three months in July 2015. It was a worrying period for my parents. I was scared but my parents were there with me every day so that helped a lot.

Besides the endless jabs, one of the hardest things about staying in hospital is having to keep to a restricted diet.

The nurses explained why I cannot have some things: I cannot drink too much because my tummy will swell, and I can eat only vanilla ice cream because the chocolate flavour is bad for my kidneys.

It was really difficult because I really like ice cream, roti prata, and chicken rice! But I know not eating these foods will help me get better so I try not to complain; I play with my toys and stickers and that makes me happy. Babaa says I am a good boy for being so obedient.

I am so glad that I am out of hospital now. I was supposed to go to primary school this year but I cannot just yet. Sometimes I wonder why other children are well and I am not, but my parents tell me not to be sad and to pray to God for a full recovery. For now, I am just glad to be back home to play with my siblings and finally be able to eat chocolate ice cream! ●

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*At the tender age of six, Aakif has gone through several painful medical procedures and operations but he continues to fight with a positive spirit. He is a little superhero who has fought against all odds. To me, he is an exemplary patient whose will to live shines through and inspires all who have had the privilege to know him.*

**Majella Irudayam**  
Principal Medical Social Worker,  
Medical Social Work Department  
KK Women's and  
Children's Hospital

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*Aakif with his parents —  
Mr Mohamad Asif and Mdm Safina Bi*

# BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE

*MR MOHAMED IMANUDDIN BIN MOHAMED SALLEH, 25 // STUDENT*

As a child, I just wanted to be normal. I used to be embarrassed, resentful and angry with myself for being “weak” as I would get frequent bruises and injuries that took a long time to heal. My mother had to carry me to school when I couldn’t walk. There were occasions when my teacher also had to carry me up the stairs in school. That was how bad my condition was then.

I was often in and out of hospital for injuries such as elbow dislocation. I felt that I was a burden on my family with my frequent need for medical attention. I felt depressed.

Finally finding out at 12 years of age that I have a rare form of severe haemophilia made me realise that I was not weak or careless — I had a bleeding disorder. It is a condition I am born with, not something I should blame myself for.

Severe haemophilia is a chronic bleeding disorder due to a lack of a clotting factor protein that helps with blood clotting. Any injuries I sustain can result in prolonged bleeding, or I can have spontaneous bleeding in my joints due to prolonged sitting. I then need to intravenously infuse factor concentrates to help stop the bleeding.

I have learnt to accept my condition. I remind myself that other people have worse problems. I keep myself

busy with my studies and friends. I try to stay positive and channel my energy into things I enjoy, such as photography and anime drawing. I have close friends whom I can share my feelings with. My best friend, Nur Hidayah, understands without my saying much when I am in pain and need to slow down.

My family supports me in their own quiet ways. I try to take on part-time work so that I do not put further financial strain on my parents who have been doing their best for me.

With self-infusion and a bit of care, I can live life normally. I hope to one day work overseas and see the world! ●

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*Din has been managing his severe haemophilia by learning to do self-infusion of factor concentrates to minimise the risk of prolonged bleeding. He is eager to share his experience with other young patients and their families. This makes a big difference to help them come to terms with their condition.*

**Lim Chiew Ying**  
Nurse Clinician,  
Haematology Oncology Service  
KK Women’s and  
Children’s Hospital

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# AN INDOMITABLE SPIRIT

*MDM LAM AH CHOO  
(1947 - 2016)*

When I was first diagnosed with rectosigmoid cancer in 2013, I was very sad and dismayed by the severity of my condition. But I had to accept it and move on. I could not indulge in self-pity as I did not want my family to feel sad and burdened by my illness.

My only son died in a car accident when he was 26 years old and his baby boy was only 10 months old. I took over the care of Joseph, my grandson. My three daughters have their own families to look after so the only person I worry about is Joseph, although he is now 25 years old.

I like to cook and used to prepare dinner for my family every day. It takes quite a bit of effort to cook for a family of 15 with different dietary needs, but it was something I enjoyed doing. I only stopped cooking when I had respiratory problems in November 2015 and had to be hospitalised. Cooking is the way I show my love and care but I could no longer go to the market, do the chopping or cooking.

On the days when I feel better, I try to sew. I used to run a clothing business with my husband so I still take an interest in sewing, or altering clothes for family and friends.

When I meet other cancer patients at the hospital, I try to chat, comfort and encourage them. I advise them

about diet and possible side effects that they might experience. I talk to medical students if they need to interview patients. I just try to help if I can, for as long as I can.

I have been prepared for the worst since my diagnosis. I accept that I cannot be cured since I have gone through surgery and chemotherapy and was told nothing more can be done. I have made what arrangements I can for my family. I even joke with my daughters that they should have learnt to cook their favourite dishes from me earlier, and not wait until now when I am dying!

I'm not afraid of dying but I can't bear to part with my family. I will fight on with all my strength. Every day that I am alive is a good day. ●

*Afternote: Although Mdm Lam passed away on 19 February 2016, her indomitable spirit remains an inspiration to all of us.*

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*Diagnosed with rectosigmoid cancer since 2013, Mdm Lam battled the disease with resilience and a positive attitude. Her fighting spirit and sense of humour was an inspiration to all of us.*

**Looi Woan Tyng**

Senior Staff Nurse,  
Nurse Clinician Services  
National Cancer Centre  
Singapore

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# THE FAITHFUL FIGHTER

*MS ZULFA BINTI ANAS, 46 //  
SENIOR ENROLLED NURSE*

As an oncology nurse who cares for cancer patients, I did not expect to one day find myself on the other end of the stethoscope. In 2006 at the age of 37, I was diagnosed with stage 3 Langerhans Cell Histiocytosis (LCH), a rare form of bone cancer.

As a nurse, I thought I was well prepared to battle the illness, especially since I have seen so many cancer patients through the course of my work. But I was as scared as any other patient. Although I knew that I would lose my hair, I did not know that it would be so severe. When my hair came off in clumps in the shower, I cried. I felt hopeless.

My lowest point was when I came down with an infection during chemotherapy. I was hospitalised and could not breathe well as I also had pneumonia. I knew that I needed to fight, but I felt so weak that I wanted to give up. Everyone in my family started crying. My eldest son was then only six years old and my younger boy was three.

Through her tears, my mom reminded me that I was and still am a fighter; that I do not give up easily and that she needed me to fight to see my sons grow up. It hit me hard when my eldest son asked me: "Mom, when are you coming home?" That was when I told myself: "I have to fight this".

Today, my experience helps me to motivate other patients. It really

helps them to see someone who has survived cancer look and feel well, so I share as much as I can, especially with those who are newly diagnosed. In 2013, I joined the Pink Spartans, a dragon boat team of cancer survivors and supporters who had helped me get back on my feet. I am also actively involved in cancer awareness and fund raising events for cancer research. I hope more people will be aware of cancer and that there will be a cure someday.

My view is that you never know how strong you are — until being strong is the only choice you have. Feed your faith and your fear will starve to death. Cancer changed my whole perspective on life. I now try to spend as much time as possible with my loved ones, especially my children. To fellow cancer patients, don't give up easily because there is always hope. Nothing is impossible. ●

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*As an oncology nurse and a cancer survivor, Zulfa fully understands how our patients feel in their battle with cancer. She has never failed to encourage patients who come under her care. She believes that the best way to succeed is always to try one more time.*

**Tan Tiew Yah**  
Assistant Nurse Clinician  
Specialist Oncology Clinic D  
National Cancer Centre  
Singapore

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*Ms Zulfa with her son,  
Muhammad Amin*

# LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE OF IT

MR MICHAEL WONG, 50

I used to take my good health for granted. Smoking and drinking were two habits I indulged in and never gave a thought about. I picked up smoking when I was 15 and smoked an average of 25 sticks a day for 30 years. I don't drink alcohol as much but I could never resist Coca-Cola. After all, that had been my staple drink since I was six years old. I drank it every day.

A couple of years ago, it dawned on me that I should watch my health, with age catching up. I started to cut back on Coca-Cola but I guess it was too late.

I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy in April 2015 and had a cardiac resynchronization therapy device (CRTD) implanted in June. Even after my implantation, I was hit with several cardiac shocks and complications, and had to be admitted to the Intensive Care Unit.

My first percutaneous coronary intervention failed and my heart function was deteriorating. I had no choice but to go through with Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD) implantation.

Initially after my operations, I had difficulty breathing and walking. But now that I am capable of walking on my own and managing well, I can share my experience with others. I am truly thankful to be given the opportunity to regain the quality of life I once had. Yes, though carrying

the 2-kg LVAD control unit around can be a chore, it is a matter of getting used to.

I felt quite despondent initially about my failing health but I quickly turned it around. I realised that life is what you make of it. If you are happy, time passes faster and the people around you are happier. This is why I crack jokes with the nurses and chat with people whenever I am at the hospital.

My goal is to get better so that I can one day resume my duties as the breadwinner of my family, and be there for my family. ●

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*LVAD implantation is a lifelong commitment for a patient. Mr Wong, a bachelor residing with his sister and his elderly mother, took up the role of a patient and also a caregiver for himself as he did not want to trouble anyone. Despite his condition, he remains positive and never fails to greet the nurses with a smile.*

**Chong Wei Ting**  
Senior Staff Nurse, Ward 56  
National Heart Centre Singapore

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Chong Wei Ting (Left) with Mr Michael Wong

# LIFE IS A GIFT

MR QUEK SER HWEE, 69 // RETIREE

When I was younger, I used to eat two pieces of roti prata every morning, one with egg, one without. Then I'd have Malay curry rice for lunch, and chicken rice for dinner. I drank *kopi ga dai* (coffee with milk and extra sugar) and smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. This went on for more than 20 years, with no apparent effect on my health.

Then one day, in 2008, while I was at work at the parts warehouse, I started to break out in cold sweat. My chest felt tight, and I fell back into my chair. Luckily, there was a chair behind me!

It was a heart attack, and the doctor told me I had only two years to live. Only then did I regret the way I had been living.

I was fitted with a pacemaker and I changed my diet immediately, having less fat, less salt, less meat — it wasn't difficult, because my health became very important to me.

Five years later, my heart wore out. That was when I had the Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD) implanted, to assist the function of my heart. This means I need to wear a 2.5kg battery pack with a controller on my back everywhere I go, even into the shower. I don't see it as hassle, after all it helps me to live!

My wife changes the dressing for me, at the area where the cable exits through the skin at the abdomen which connects to the LVAD. Last year, when the LVAD pocket wound got infected, I had to wear another vacuum device to drain out the

discharge. That device weighs 0.5kg, so in total, I carry 3kg around with me everywhere — that's where I get my daily exercise!

I have always been a happy-go-lucky person, and now am even more so because I was supposed to have had only two more years to live but I am still alive! I enjoy the simple things in life like playing with my three-year-old grandson, and buying my wife and my grandson's favourite dishes.

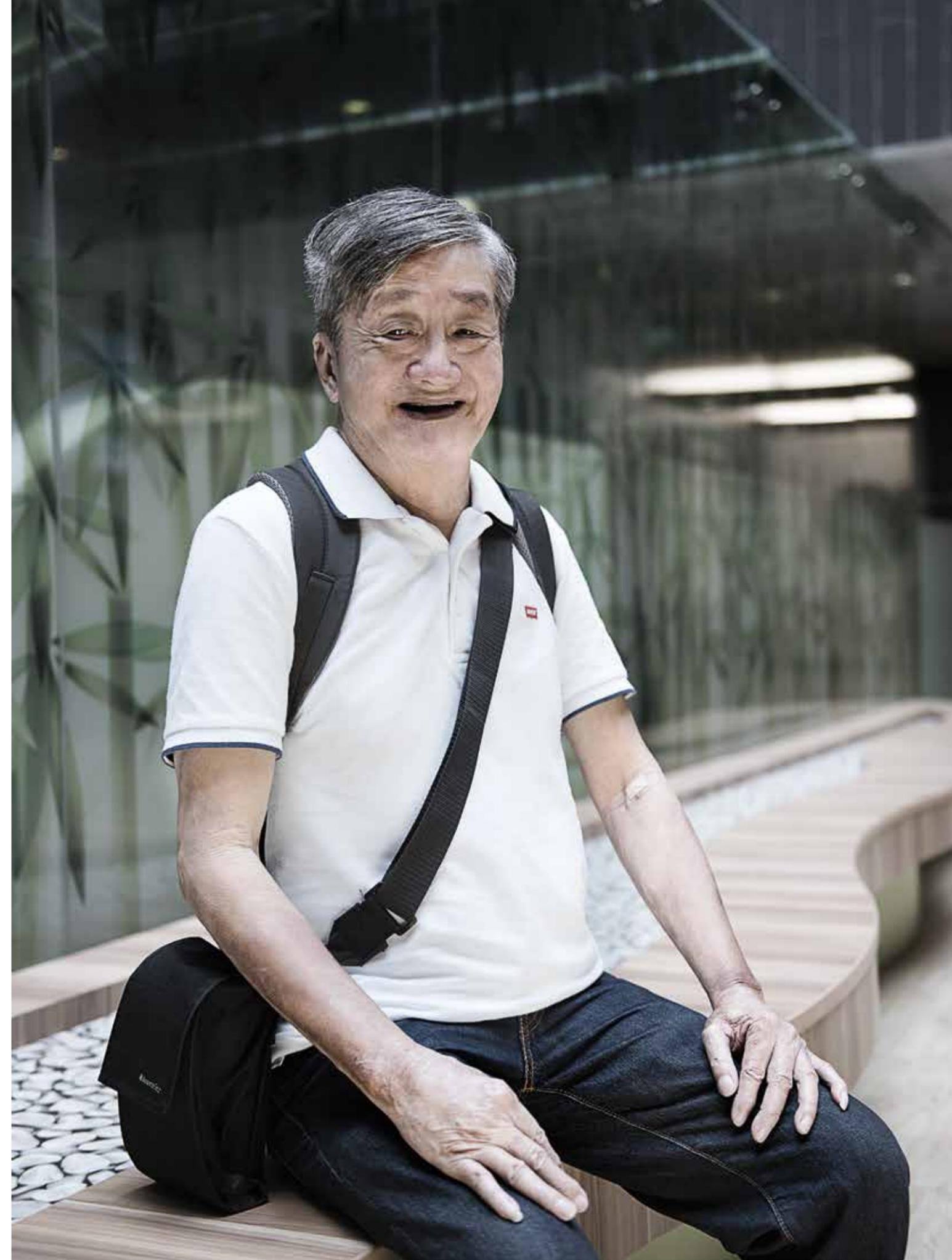
I often visit the patients at the National Heart Centre Singapore as an LVAD ambassador. When the patients see me leading such a normal life, they are not as worried about their future. ●

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*Brave, confident, and cheerful are just a few words to describe Mr Quek. Even while having to endure the pain of his LVAD infection, he never complained. His optimism and perseverance have motivated me in my work.*

**Liew Siok Moey**  
Nursing Project Coordinator,  
AIC Care Team  
National Heart Centre Singapore

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# GIVING BACK FOR AS LONG AS I CAN

MR JOSEPH CHAN, 73 // RETIREE

Without any warning, I was sent to the A&E in an ambulance by my polyclinic doctor during a routine health check. My blood count was dangerously low and I received a blood transfusion right away. I stayed for 12 days at the Singapore General Hospital and was told I had kidney failure. Due to my health condition, I was retrenched from my job as a loss prevention officer and now get by on social welfare.

It was during one of my dialysis sessions when a National Kidney Foundation (NKF) representative asked if I would like to join as a Patient Advocate. I agreed on the spot as NKF has helped me a lot, and I felt that it was my turn to give back.

I now volunteer at the various dialysis centres, entertaining patients and playing games or making crafts. I go for dialysis three times a week, and do my volunteer work on the other days, leaving Sundays to rest. I guess you can say that I am a workaholic!

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*Despite needing thrice weekly dialysis sessions himself, Joseph is still able to care for his sister and volunteer as a Patient Advocate. His selflessness and optimism have inspired and touched many.*

**Job Loei**  
Senior Manager, Patient  
Advocacy & Rehabilitation  
National Kidney Foundation

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As an Advocate Leader, I have reached out to many new patients sharing tips on eating well and preparing for dialysis. For example, you cannot drink too much water, and it is also good to do breathing exercises every morning.

I started taking care of my elder sister in 1991 when my mother passed away. She is intellectually challenged and was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011. I cook for her, ensure she takes her medication and take her for her

check-ups. It was especially tough during her chemotherapy as we had to take the bus and her legs are weak. Still we managed and I have nothing to complain about.

I have many hobbies, such as collecting stamps and coins, playing the ukulele and harmonica and cooking.

Although I am 73 years old this year, I hope that I can live for another 20 years. I love Singapore and I want to live to see the "crown jewel" at Changi and for the high speed railway to be built! There is just so much more I want to see and do, for as long as my health allows. ●



# VOLUNTEERING BRINGS MY FAMILY TOGETHER

MR KOH SENG CHYE, 53 // FOOD STALL OPERATOR

When my mother was diagnosed with kidney failure, she refused treatment. She was in her 70s, and didn't want to deplete her children's savings just to prolong her life for a few years. It was noble of her.

I was in my 30s when my kidneys failed. My daughter and son had not even started school yet; I needed to live on to provide for them. The doctor gave me four years to live, but it has been 16 years now. I am thankful for the time I have and no longer take my health for granted, or anything else for that matter.

I go to the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) thrice a week for dialysis. I spend the rest of my time running my food stall and volunteering as a Patient Advocate at the NKF.

I like to visit new patients at the dialysis centres. They have so many questions, especially financial ones. It's true that kidney failure drains your savings — I used to run six *zichar* stalls and 18 roast meat stalls. I now operate just one stall, at the NUS High School canteen, where I cook economy rice dishes with my wife's help.

Based on my own experience, I try to share with other patients what kinds of jobs and government subsidies they can apply for, or education grants they can get for their children. I'm sure their goals are like mine: to

support ourselves and our families for as long as we can.

My whole family does volunteer work, a few times a month. My kids are trained in Chinese dance, so I get them to perform at NKF events while I sing Hokkien songs. The old folks love it when there is entertainment, and my family gets to spend quality time together — this is why we enjoy volunteering! ●

*Seng Chye is a good role model to fellow patients. He takes the effort to improve his blood sugar level and no longer requires medication to control his diabetes. He is also one of the most active members of NKF's Patient Advocacy Programme. He is able to empathise with his peers and constantly seeks out patients who need his care and encouragement.*

**Pan Mei Yu**  
Clinical Nurse Manager,  
Nursing Services  
National Kidney Foundation



*From left:  
Ms Lynn Koh, Mr Koh Seng Chye,  
Mdm Toh Yok Lan, Mr Andy Koh*

# FIGHTING SPIRIT

MS KWAN YULING, 34 //  
KITCHEN ASSISTANT IN A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

I had leukaemia when I was five and was in and out of the hospital for treatment till I was 16. Lying in the hospital bed, I often wondered why I couldn't be like other kids, who could play and study.

My health condition was not the only thing that wore me down. My family broke up when my father left us when I was 12. He had taken a loan from loan sharks and took off without a word. For several months, my family was hounded by the loan sharks. My brother eventually left the family that same year and I have not seen him since.

My mother started working two jobs to support us, till she had a stroke and had to be rehabilitated for three years in a nursing home, and I had to be placed in a girls' home. I learned some English, Math, and life skills there, but never had the chance of a proper education.

When my mum and I recovered from our respective health conditions, I took on any job I could find — at fast-food restaurants, departmental stores, and supermarkets — and finally, things started looking up for us. My income was meagre but enough for us to get by.

However, in 2011, my world came crashing down again. The doctors found a tumour in my brain. At 30, I felt scared about the future for the first time. What if I didn't wake up from the surgery? Who would look after my mum?

After the surgery, I couldn't walk, talk, move, or swallow; I was tube-fed for months. However, I told myself that I had to recover. I wanted to be normal, like everyone else. So I worked hard at therapy sessions. Eventually, I could walk and talk again, just like how my mum recovered from her semi-paralysis.

Even though I have to walk with a walking stick and did not think that I could ever work again, I can now work, pay the bills, take the bus by myself to work, I'm happy.

I know that life is still filled with challenges, but I am not one to back down when the going gets tough. I was robbed recently. I know that the thief picked me because I am physically-impaired. But I'm not angry — everyone does wrong in some way, and we all deserve a second chance.

To those who are facing health challenges, I would like to encourage them not to give up. There is much more you can accomplish if you believe in yourself. ●

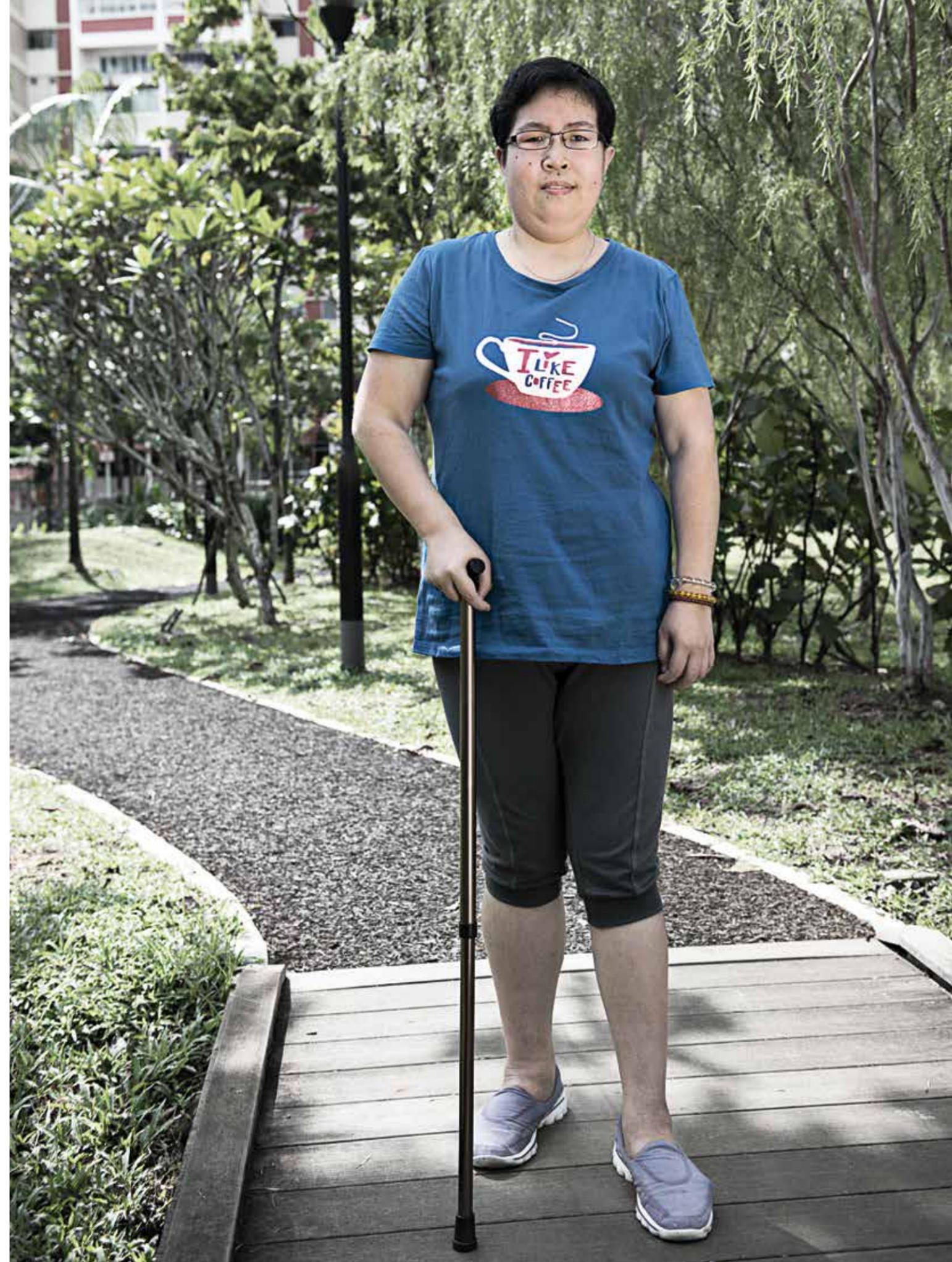
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*Yuling is a caring and sensible young woman. She is unafraid to take on any job and learn new skills, and her "never give up" attitude aided in her rehabilitation. Her fighting spirit inspires us as healthcare workers to fight on for our patients.*

**Eileen Ho**  
Senior Medical Social Worker,  
Department of Care  
& Counselling  
Tan Tock Seng Hospital

**Zhou Lifeng**  
Nurse Clinician,  
Neurosurgery Department  
National Neuroscience Institute

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# STAYING STOIC

*MR LIM SIAK TENG, 68 // RETIREE*

I was diagnosed with motor neuron disease (MND) 18 years ago, when I was 50 years old. MND is an incurable, progressive disease and I lost the function of my left arm. Within four years, I lost the function of my right arm, too.

Upper-body disability is not common. Those with lower-body disability can get about in wheelchairs but there are no aids for people like me, whose arms are not functional. I was unable to leave the house on my own because I could not lock the door.

Naturally, I felt depressed. After all, I enjoyed working with my hands and made a living with them — I worked as an electrician, crane operator, boat mechanic — jobs that took me to different Asian countries. Not being able to use my arms any more was devastating at first, but I have learnt to accept my condition.

Two years ago, I fell while alone at home and could not get up on my own or call for help. Since then, my family has engaged a maid to help me but I still try to be independent.

Let me tell you something funny — I was taking the bus once and a stranger held on to me for support — I had to explain that I have no use of my hands and would not be great support if the bus came to an abrupt stop!

I often tell this story to fellow patients at the MND support group at the National Neuroscience Institute. Some of them are fearful of going outdoors,

or explaining their condition to others — so I hope to encourage them with this story!

I don't think of myself as brave, just practical. I have a choice — I can choose to be gloomy about my condition or content with what I have. I prefer to be thankful and move on with life.

For new patients and their families, I would like to encourage them to take the time to get used to the condition. Talk to others, it usually helps when you share your feelings.

I know there is currently no cure for this disease but I hope that one day, a miracle will happen and a cure can be found. ●

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*Despite having Motor Neuron Disease for nearly two decades, Mr Lim remains cheerful and ever-willing to help fellow patients and caregivers. His positive attitude, tenacity and resilience have inspired many patients and health workers to always look on the bright side.*

**Associate Professor  
Umapathi N  
Thirugnanam**  
*Senior Consultant,  
Neurology (TTSH Campus)  
National Neuroscience Institute*

**Dr Kexin Ang**  
*Associate Consultant,  
Neurology (TTSH Campus)  
National Neuroscience Institute*

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# ONE STEP AT A TIME

MR ABDUL MAJID BIN ABDUL SALEM, 59 // RETIREE

I was 50 years old when I suffered from a stroke in 2008. Although I regained some of my functional status, I suffered a spine problem in 2011 and became totally bedbound after the operation. I am also diabetic and suffer from gout. My wife left me in 2011, leaving me at Ren Ci Nursing Home to care for myself.

After my stroke, I became totally paralysed on my right side and up till today, my right hand is still not fully functional. I trained myself to eat and perform tasks with my left hand although writing is still difficult. My speech was also slurred but with the help of my speech therapist I was able to talk well after one year.

I look forward to going home one day and that is what keeps me going. I tell other patients not to give up hope and be lazy. You can do it one step at a time and you can improve day by day. This was how it was for me. I would go for my physiotherapy sessions three times a week and even do exercises in bed. I would try to walk one step at a time and improve bit by bit. If I was tired I would stop, relax and try again. With the help of my therapists, I got better by the day.

Weighing a whopping 115kg, I used to need assistance from three people to transfer me on and off my wheelchair but after doing my rehabilitation exercises, I only need one person to help me. The nurses often encourage me and seeing my own improvement keeps me motivated. It is important to keep on believing and keep going with a "can do" attitude.

My sister comes to visit me and once, I was able to visit her all by myself on my motorised wheelchair. My nephews also support me, they were the ones who bought me my wheelchair as a gift. They say that I took care of them when they were young and so now it is their turn to support me.

I enjoy going out on my own and will help other residents buy lunch if I can. Some of my neighbouring patients cannot talk, so I help them if they need water or any assistance. I am an unofficial volunteer assistant at the nursing home and I enjoy it very much! ●

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*The courage, resilience and determination exhibited by Mr Majid are deeply inspiring. Being of a large frame and told that he has low potential for rehabilitation can be demoralising. However, Mr Majid's determination to be independent and enjoy his freedom to move about motivates him to continue working towards his goal.*

**Sahara Kamsani & Vivian Phua**  
Social Work Associate,  
Social Work and Counselling  
Ren Ci Hospital

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# FINDING JOY IN GIVING

*MDM CHEW ENG HUAY, 68 // RETIREE*

*Eng Huay, endearingly known as 'Ah Huay' has many qualities that inspire us — an active, cheerful and positive person who always puts others before herself. She acts as an extra pair of eyes and ears for the nurses when they are busy. She is a determined person who does not let her weakness overwhelm her; instead, she overcomes her weakness and is a blessing to others around her.*

**Chong Wai Fung**

Administrator,  
Ren Ci Nursing Home  
(Moulmein)

**June Tan**

Assistant Director, Nursing,  
Ren Ci Hospital

**Vivian Phua**

Social Work Associate,  
Social Work and  
Counselling Department  
Ren Ci Hospital

I suffered a stroke in 2000 when I was 55 years old at Ren Ci Long Term Care in Hougang and was moved to the Ren Ci Nursing Home (Moulmein) in 2008. The stroke left me with hemiplegia on the right side of my body. It limits my hand and leg movements. It makes me sad that I can't do as much as I used to do. The stroke has also affected my memory and I can't remember very much of what happened in the past.

What I do remember is helping my father sell ice kacang at his hawker stall at Havelock Road. Previously, I also worked at Lau Pa Sat selling kopi and roti. I only have one elder sister who is now a great-grandmother. She is too busy to visit me, so her children — my niece and nephew — do.

I like to stay active at the nursing home and am a resident volunteer here. It's easy to get around in my motorised wheelchair so I do what I can! Every day, I have a packed schedule: feeding other residents who need help, delivering eggs and bread to other wards, and distributing bed linen and water bottles. I also cook a big pot of red bean, green bean or barley soup, or sometimes make sandwiches and scrambled eggs for the residents. The nurses are appreciative of what I do and buy clothes or shoes for me as a form of appreciation.

Helping others makes me happy. I used to have a really bad temper and was frustrated during the initial

stages of my illness. I felt useless as I could not move my hands. But I slowly recovered and found things to do at the nursing home. I also had a friend, Ah Muay who would visit and encourage me, but she has since passed away.

Nowadays, I still try to do things by myself. I make my own bed, wash and collect my own clothes so as not to trouble the nurses. I am also working to strengthen my right hand with exercises so that I can do more for others. I cannot sit still and am delighted to be able to help people. Whatever condition I am in, I will do my best. ●



# LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST

*MR AHMAD HISHAM BIN ABDUL RAHIM, 43 //  
FREELANCE EDUCATOR & MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER*

I like the adage “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”. I get a lot of inspiration from movies and books, like Mitch Albom’s *The Five People You Meet In Heaven*. In it, the author traces the life of a maintenance man from his death back to when he was alive. I might use this back-to-front format when I write my memoirs.

Ultimately, it is my faith that gets me through life. It helps me to think positive, that whatever happens to me is a blessing in disguise, and is an opportunity to practise my faith.

As a teen, I used to play sports four or five days a week. Any chance I could get, I was jogging, or playing squash and soccer. I even considered joining the youth squash tournament after my ‘O’ levels.

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*Hisham’s journey has given me another dimension to the saying ‘nothing is impossible’. It may be slow, but it is not impossible. I believe his story of how he has overcome his years of growing disabilities would be an inspiration for many.*

**Leila Ilmami Nasron**  
Head, Department of  
Occupational Therapy  
Singapore General Hospital

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After I was struck with multiple sclerosis, I started limping; my arms got weak, I couldn’t write properly, and I didn’t finish my ‘A’ levels. Needless to say, I couldn’t do any of the sports that I used to do. Then I was hit by cervical spondylosis that caused weakness of my leg.

I am now almost completely paralysed from the neck down, and need care for my daily needs, the recurring sores, and frequent spasms, which the staff at the nursing home help me with. Though it seems almost impossible, I still dream of walking again one day.

Despite my condition, I continue to attend workshops and courses

to improve myself. After I got my degree in Business Administration through distance learning, I attended night classes for my diploma at Nanyang Polytechnic although it was quite challenging travelling to and fro. I worked at places like People’s Association, community centres, and other non-profit organisations. With my past accounting-related working experience, I implemented SOPs and ensured that the accounts were in compliance with the internal auditors specifications.

I also picked up experience in education planning, which is what led me to my passion as a freelance educator. I am now training to be a motivational speaker.

I go everywhere on my motorised wheelchair, from the nursing home to the MRT station to work, malls, eating places and back. I believe in networking, which includes making friends with people at the coffee shop, and shop vendors who help me to put on my poncho so I can still get home when it rains.

Although I can feel myself ailing with an increase in involuntary movements in my body, I don’t focus too much on that. I want to work on having a stable income, remaining independent, and living life to the fullest. Every night, I do some self-reflection on whether I made good use of my day like my parents taught me. ●



# HIGH ASPIRATIONS

*MS CHONG HUI MIN, 16 // STUDENT*

I used to be busy and active with school and friends, just enjoying life as a teenager.

When I first felt pain in my left leg, my family doctor thought it was just an inflammation. Only when the pain got so bad that it kept me up at night did the doctor order an MRI and a tumour was found. Following the diagnosis of osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer in April 2015, I have had two operations and been through six cycles of chemotherapy.

Although I suffered side effects from the many rounds of chemotherapy, it was the post-surgery recovery that I found most challenging. My first operation was in April and the second in August 2015. I was in so much pain, and felt terrified and helpless. That was the lowest point of my life.

At first, I could not deal with what I had to go through. I was so frightened by the way my life had been turned upside down. I used to break down and even fainted once after vomiting a lot due to chemotherapy.

I was brought to Changi General Hospital where I met a doctor who inspired me with his sharing. I was touched by his encouragement and realised then how important it is to have someone share their experience. Realising I, too, can make a difference, I joined a WhatsApp group chat with other young cancer patients in hospital so we can support and encourage one another.

My family and friends have been a great source of strength for me. My mother quit her job as a tour guide to look after me. My 15-year-old sister whom I am close to, has been doing her best to cheer me up. My dad cooked for me while I was in hospital. When I shaved my head in anticipation of hair loss from chemotherapy, a group of my friends shaved their heads too. I was so touched!

Despite my pain and suffering, I feel blessed to have my friends and family with me. It helps me stay strong and positive. I have since returned to school and am enjoying every minute of it. I hope to become a doctor in future to help young cancer patients. ●

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*The nurses found joy in caring for Hui Min because she was always so cheerful and positive. Every contact with her made me want to spread that joy to other patients battling cancer.*

**Karen Lim**  
Nurse Clinician, Ward 48,  
Medical Oncology  
Singapore General Hospital

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# ON THE STEADY ROAD TO RECOVERY

*MR GOH WEIMING, 30 //  
ASSISTANT OPERATIONS MANAGER*

I work as an Assistant Operations Manager and have been in this line for the last three years. On 8 November 2013 at 28 years old, I got into a serious industrial accident. It was a sudden blast caused by a chemical leak and I suffered full thickness burns on 72 per cent of my body. Because my nerves were burnt through, I could feel no pain and was conscious till I arrived at the A&E, where I finally passed out.

I stayed at the ICU for two months in a state of semi-consciousness before being transferred to a high dependency ward for three months. My family were with me every day, even sleeping outside the ward to be with me. My mum stopped working to take care of me. Because of the accident, I realised family is the most important thing to me, and our bonds are now much stronger because of what happened.

Although I had a strong will to live, I would still get frustrated about my condition and would throw tantrums, shout and cry in the initial stages of recovery. Things only took a turn for the better in October 2014 when I decided to travel, something that I have always loved to do.

I wanted to get back some form of normalcy and being able to travel again made a huge difference to my recovery. I was glad I made the trip to Perth, my first overseas trip since I was injured, with my parents and fiancée.

I have since been to Tasmania, Taiwan and even went on a cruise.

There is still a long way to go before I can return to who I was in the past. It is not so much the physical healing but the mental healing. People need to understand that I am simply not the same person as I was before. I used to do sports with people with special needs as a volunteer at the Special Olympics Singapore, but right now I can't as some of my limbs still have restricted movement.

When I was ready to share, I started to go to the hospital to share my journey with others. I can share what I've been through but ultimately it is their own journey that they are embarking on. They can choose to give up on themselves or get on the road to full recovery. I hope through my sharing I have inspired them in some way.

8 November now holds a different meaning for me as I recently proposed to my fiancée on that date in 2015 — with success! It is now a milestone as it shows how far I have come in my journey. I have resumed work at my company and look forward to greater exposure doing a job that I love. It is a dangerous line, but someone has to do it. In the years ahead, I hope to continue to help people, start my own family and pursue a life in the countryside. ●

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*Weiming demonstrated great resilience despite being hospitalised for five months in the burns ward. Knowing him and being part of his recovery journey is both a privilege and a humbling experience. His strong fighting spirit and positivity make our work meaningful.*

**Emily Tan**  
Senior Medical Social Worker  
Medical Social Services  
Singapore General Hospital

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# LIVE IN THE PRESENT

*MS HENG PEI YAN, 30 // TEACHER*

Diabetes management can be emotionally and physically exhausting, as patients have to deal with it every day in their lives.

My journey for the past 20 years has not been very smooth, especially in my teenage years. Despite all my efforts, there were times when my glucose readings just would not go down to the normal range. Having to cope with diabetes on top of my own life was like adding fuel to the fire.

During the early stages, I was in denial for a long time. I would hide my condition from my friends and sometimes even skip insulin injections at school. Things only took a turn for the better two years ago when I attended the Young Leader in Diabetes programme and saw how open people were about their condition. I began to do the same and I now have no qualms doing my injections in public.

Things got even better when I switched to an insulin pump. The insulin pump runs 24 hours to deliver a constant stream of insulin. I sleep with my pump and take it everywhere I go. It has become such an integral part of my life that I started a Facebook page to document our journey together. I nicknamed my pump *Conus aspartinus* and later discovered that *Conus*, a group of predatory sea snails, known as cone snails, use insulin to disable their prey — how apt!

I am a very active person. On top of my day job as a secondary school teacher, I am an avid nature photographer and a recreational open water diver. On weekends, I volunteer as a docent at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, conduct public guided walks at Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin, and help out in marine surveys as a citizen scientist.

I was nominated to represent Singapore as a Young Leader in Diabetes in 2013 and one of my aims is to help grow an online diabetes support community for Singapore. I started a Facebook group, Singapore Diabetes Online Community (SGDoc), which currently has about 100 members.

I have recently been elected Vice President of the International Diabetes Federation Young Leaders in Diabetes program. The Young Leaders are committed to being a powerful voice for diabetes prevention, and to end discrimination worldwide.

I am currently enjoying my life and look forward to finishing my Masters in Science Communication. I am also working on getting a Grade 6 in violin. I think one way to stay positive is to simply do the things that you enjoy! ●

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*Pei Yan packs so much into her day, you would never believe that she has diabetes. Where others may choose to hide away to do their insulin injections, she decided to embrace it and become a positive patient advocate.*

**Dr Daphne Gardner**  
Consultant  
Department of Endocrinology  
Singapore General Hospital

**Dr Goh Su-Yen**  
Head and Senior Consultant  
Department of Endocrinology  
Singapore General Hospital

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# I CHOOSE TO BE HAPPY

*MDM LOH BEE KIM, 63 // RETIREE*

As a kidney patient, I thought I already had it bad. After all, going for dialysis three times a week was quite a painful and tiring affair and I had been doing it for three years. But something much worse hit me when I had to go for a coronary heart bypass graft, where a vein was removed from my left leg to be used in my heart.

Words cannot describe how bad the pain was! The giant wound on my leg just wouldn't heal, and the pain was unbearable. When the wound finally closed up, a new problem came up — I had peripheral vascular disease, a disorder in the blood vessels, which led to two of my toes being amputated — another round of pain, all in the span of a year.

After my discharge, I was very disciplined, going for my medical appointments six times a week, to change my wound dressings, or for my regular kidney dialysis.

But when I was at home, it was different. I cried all day, for a whole month, mourning for my lost toes, the pain, and how immobile I had become. I wanted very badly to get well and be my active self again — I used to play mahjong, go to karaoke, or meet up with my friends. I even used to act in drama serials and advertisements, and run a karaoke pub — but the two operations kept me away from all that.

Then one night, I was in bed, thinking about my condition. We can choose to be happy or sad. Why don't I choose to be happy? I woke up the next day with a big change of heart.

I was like that too when my husband left me. I was a young mother with three children. I cried every day, until the tears finally dried. I decided I must move on and not look back at the past. I scrambled to find work to support my children. I worked as a beautician and seamstress, and also fried *goreng pisang* for my kids to sell on the streets to help with their school fees.

My children are all grown up now and are doing well in life. They have given me 13 grandchildren. They accompany me to my medical appointments, and everyone says how lucky I am. I say it's not luck — I put in the effort and the rewards came naturally. Like how I am putting effort into my wound care now! I'm looking forward to going out and leading an active life again. ●

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*Years of toil brought Mdm Loh many health issues but she remains cheerful and even encourages fellow patients with similar wound concerns.*

**Tan Wei Xian**  
Senior Staff Nurse, Speciality Nursing (General Wound Care)  
Singapore General Hospital

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# KEEPING FIT FOR LIFE

MR TEO KEE HUAT, 72 // RETIREE

I retired ten years ago and started leading a very active life. I was playing badminton and swimming three times a week, playing basketball five times a week and jogging once a week. I was fit as a fiddle and so it came as a shock to be diagnosed with rectal cancer in 2009. After the initial shock, I was generally able to keep a coolheaded attitude, probably from years of training in a stressful HR environment.

My only dilemma was whether to opt for the Abdominal Perianal Resection surgery. I had reservations about carrying a stoma bag for the rest of my life and wasn't sure how it would affect my active lifestyle.

I saw the light when my son arranged for me to meet his friend, a GP whose father had been wearing a stoma bag for the past 15 years. When I visited his house, I immediately took notice of his oversized badminton bag and knew that we had more than one thing in common. He told me his story, about how he went trekking in New Zealand less than three months after his operation. He demonstrated how the colostomy irrigation and stoma bag worked. I felt a glimmer of hope after meeting him!

Shortly after, I went for my operation. Within three months, I was back on the badminton court. I had to abstain from cycling for a while, but all my other favourite activities such as swimming, playing basketball and

running with the Tiong Bahru Garden Joggers resumed. Truth be told, if I do not tell anyone that I am carrying a stoma bag today, no one would even notice.

Being a cancer survivor, I know how difficult the journey is and how important it is to share with other patients. That is why I began volunteering as an SGH Patient Ambassador in 2010 and am also active in the SGH Colorectal Cancer Support Group.

I enjoy volunteering and visiting patients at the hospital which I do at least three times a week. It is sometimes hectic but it keeps me from being idle! Sometimes, I even have to jog between hospitals and MRT stations to catch up on my appointments. What is most important to me is that the patients appreciate what I do and that is what keeps me going. ●

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*I was touched by Mr Teo's positive attitude towards life and his regular exercise regime that puts me to shame. Being a healthcare professional, I don't exercise as regularly to keep fit. Mr Teo gives back to society as an SGH Patient Ambassador. His sharing has inspired many patients and spurred them on in their own recovery journey.*

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**Ong Choo Eng**  
Senior Nurse Clinician,  
Speciality Care Services  
Singapore General Hospital

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# BE SOMEONE'S LIGHT

*MR THOMAS LEE, 65 // RETIREE*

As a boy, I used to help out at my father's tyre shop in Tanjong Pagar. I remember the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew ruffling my hair when he was campaigning in his ward and passed the shop. Later in life, I, too, ran a tyre business.

My father died of colon cancer, so I was very careful about getting screened every year. I ate well, worked hard, and slept well, so I was surprised when I was told I had rectal cancer. After I got home from the clinic, I went straight to my wife's dressing table where she kept photos of us. I picked out the one where I looked the best, and imagined it enlarged for my funeral photo. Then I arranged to cut an album of Chinese songs, as something to leave behind for my two children and three grandchildren. That's how down I felt initially.

After the operation, I didn't have a rectum, which meant I had to go to the toilet up to 20 times a day; once, even 50 times. I wound up my business and never left the house! This carried on for a year, and that's when I said "enough" — I shouldn't live my life like that.

So I accepted my friend's invitation to karaoke, and found out that people liked my singing! I started going for karaoke with my cousin, or to sing with live bands. I sing mainly in Mandarin or dialects — my friends laugh and ask me what kind of SJI boy am I, being so good at Chinese? Well,

that's because I grew up listening to Rediffusion, which my father used to have on all the time.

I had a relapse in 2010 and went for another operation — my abdomen now looks like the MRT network! The good thing is my body has acclimatised to my condition and my toilet frequency is down to a few times a day. But I still pass gas a lot — I really pity the people behind me on the escalator!

I am a colorectal ambassador at Singapore General Hospital, and started a regular exercise group and a Bowel Chat support group to encourage patients like myself. I also organise monthly karaoke sessions at senior daycare centres. They like my 万水千山总是情 and 夜市人生. It makes me happy seeing people around me happy. Whether it is through my singing or just being there for them, I'm glad to have brought some cheer to them. ●

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*Thomas has a bubbly personality and lights up the room. He is a good example of how having cancer is not the end to a person's life.*

**Ong Choo Eng**  
Senior Nurse Clinician,  
Speciality Care Services  
Singapore General Hospital

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# NO DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS

*MS PATRICIA POO, 27 // RECEPTIONIST*

I was born with congenital sclerocornea. My eyesight got progressively worse as I got older and I had two corneal transplantation surgeries done when I was 10 months old and four years old. Unfortunately, both failed and left me completely blind in my right eye. I have low vision and partial sight in my left eye.

I went to normal schools growing up and never felt that I was different from other classmates, just that my textbooks were in Braille and it took me longer to read the text. Right now, I am looking forward to another operation to help save my remaining vision.

The side effects from my medication include drowsiness, numbness and loss of appetite. It still hits me hard on some days but thankfully, my family, friends and colleagues from AMKFSC Community Services Limited have been very supportive. I am never without help whenever I face difficulties at work as a receptionist.

Two years ago, I joined Runninghour, a regular running club that integrates people with special needs through sport. I have taken part in more than 15 races so far, and love how I can make new friends while doing my favourite sport. I enjoy breathing in the fresh air and relaxing outdoors after a week at work. I fondly remember my very first race which was the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run in 2013. It was a 6km run which I

had trained hard for. My greatest accomplishment so far was running at the Standard Chartered Marathon in Kuala Lumpur in 2014. In that same year, I also took part in Wheels for Change, a charity cycling event with the aim of raising funds for the Singapore Disability Sports Council. As you can see, I am very much a sports lover!

It's hard to tell, but I love riding on rollercoasters and I've been on all of them at the Universal Studios Singapore! It is a great stress reliever for me, as I can simply let out my stress by screaming loudly. I was initially scared and hesitant about trying something new, but once I took the plunge, I felt a great sense of accomplishment.

I take life day by day and feel grateful and contented for what I do have. I am not sure how I keep up my cheerful attitude — I guess that's just me. I believe that no matter what, everything will be fine in the end. I am living a happy and fulfilled life and my New Year's resolution is to try bowling! ●

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*Patricia faces her struggles such as medication side effects, surgery and the possibility of total blindness with exceptional bravery and a positive outlook. It must not only take great courage but also a free-spirited love and appreciation of her other senses to make the most of her condition.*

**Dr David Goh**  
Consultant Ophthalmologist,  
Glaucoma Service  
Singapore National Eye Centre

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*Ms Patricia Poo (left)  
with Ms Chan Jan Siang*

# LEADING BY EXAMPLE

*MR CHIA SOON KENG, 70 // LANGUAGE TEACHER*

I come from a family of diabetics, so when I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes 40 years ago, it was not that shocking. Out of my family of seven, six of us have diabetes, including my parents. I attribute it to a combination of genes and generally poor health knowledge during our upbringing. Both my parents and elder brother passed on due to diabetes-related complications.

I believe diabetes can be better controlled and prevented if we keep watch of our diet and lifestyle. That is why I am passionate about sharing whatever knowledge I have about my condition and ways to manage it. I tell others that having diabetes is not the end of the world. Some 300,000 Singaporeans are diabetic and it is possible to lead a normal life. You have to remember your daily medications and keep to all your medical appointments. You also have to change your mind-set from “living to eat” to “eating to live” — it’s really not that hard.

Like others, I used to indulge in my favourite foods and would eat anything my heart desired. Now, the more I love something unhealthy, the less of it I eat. I also enjoy creative cooking and have even attended classes to learn how to cook healthy meals. Most important of all, I have learnt more about the ingredients that go into our food and how to read food labels. Some meals like bitter melon fried with egg, stir-fried Chinese broccoli and steamed fish are some of my favourite dishes.

My condition has also made me passionate about food knowledge, research and experimentation. For example, I have tried every brand of wholemeal bread and 2-in-1 instant coffee to find the ones that do not cause my glucose levels to go up. Over the years, I have also learnt how to balance my meals. I avoid buffet meals and always carry a packet of milo or canned juice and have some sweets on standby when travelling to ensure I have temporary support. To meet my exercise quota, I use the stairs instead of escalators and lifts. I also walk the distance of two to three bus stops to get to the market/shops if I am unable to go to the gym.

Today, my glucose level is fully under control. I am an active patient volunteer and happy to share my experience and management strategies with newly diagnosed diabetes patients, friends or my students. I have been a part-time English Language teacher teaching adults, local and foreigners for more than 40 years. Being an educator, it is also natural for me to be a part of diabetes education programmes at the Bukit Merah Polyclinic. I also demonstrate exercises as an instructor at the SGH Life Centre. I was also involved in the Health Promotion Board’s diabetes awareness campaign in 2011 and gave public talks to increase knowledge about self-care and diabetes. I hope that greater awareness and education will encourage other diabetes patients to manage their condition better. ●

*Mr Chia’s success in controlling his diabetes to a healthy level has inspired other patients. He has motivated other patients to follow in his footsteps, take better self-care and adopt a healthier lifestyle to prevent diabetes-related complications.*

**Cherry Tan**  
Senior Staff Nurse  
SingHealth Polyclinics —  
Bukit Merah



INSPIRATIONAL  
**CLINICAL  
TRIAL  
PATIENT  
VOLUNTEERS**

*MS LAURA RICHARDSON*

*MDM ROSNI BINTE MOHAMED YUSOF*

*MS RUTH TAN*

# RIDING HIGH

*MS LAURA RICHARDSON, 38 //  
DIRECTOR OF SPORTS DEVELOPMENT*

What was meant to be a routine check during lunch turned out to be otherwise. Being fit and healthy, getting diagnosed with a 9cm cancer tumour in my breast was a big hit. I could not get my head around it.

I underwent a double mastectomy five days later followed by six months of chemotherapy, five weeks of radiotherapy and maintenance therapy since then. My treatment in total has been ongoing for 16 months. It was tough getting used to the changes — putting on weight from the steroids, seeing clumps of hair fall out, and feeling the loss of strength. I knew I had to keep focused, with the belief that whatever phase I was going through would pass.

Before my diagnosis, I used to work 16-hour days, six days a week as Chief Riding Instructor at the Singapore Polo Club. I am naturally a very driven and energetic person. I've been riding all my life and began competing at five and progressed to become a national equestrienne for Great Britain, so being all cooped up after surgery was hard!

After my operation in September 2014, I was apprehensive about getting back on a horse, but I took my first ride on Boxing Day and was soon competing by January 2015. In April, I participated in the annual National Dressage Championships and won the FEI Small Tour. While competing, I was also coaching the Singapore SEA Games dressage team, where two

of my charges eventually won silver for team and 4<sup>th</sup> place for individual.

On hindsight, it was kind of surreal, to be riding and teaching while going through treatment. But these goals kept me going through my clinical trial sessions and I didn't miss a single one. For my last session, I had eight friends rally around me, making it the most fun anyone can possibly have during chemotherapy!

My advice to others is to keep as much of a normal routine going. People who stop work and shut down get absorbed by the illness and cannot see anything outside of it. Going on the clinical trial allowed me to keep as much normalcy in my life as possible. It gave me better treatment than what I could afford and I could keep on working while keeping my son, Rex, in school with his friends. Without the trial, I would have had to go back to the UK without a job, a home or school for Rex.

What is important to me now is being a mom and spending time with Rex. Being a mom is still the best thing you can do and having Rex is what keeps me strong and balanced. ●

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*Laura's courage to face her vulnerability and open up about her challenging journey has been inspirational. In fact, she is now flourishing as an equestrian rider and trainer, despite the long duration of treatments and visits to clinic.*

**Dr Rebecca Dent**  
Senior Consultant,  
Division of Medical Oncology  
National Cancer Centre  
Singapore

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# I WANT TO WATCH THEM GROW UP

*MDM ROSNI BINTE MOHAMED YUSOF,  
56 // LIBRARY ASSISTANT*

My sister died of breast cancer. I come from a family of eight sisters — obviously, my parents were trying very hard for a boy — so after that, all of us went for routine cancer scans and no one has had a scare besides me.

It was in 2009, while I was moving some books at work, when I felt a lump at the back of my neck. A check-up showed that I had squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck region which had spread to the lymph nodes of the neck. I underwent surgery and post-operative radiation therapy and remained well until three years later when I developed back pain. On further testing, the cancer was found to have relapsed and spread to my lymph nodes near my back bone, and to my bones. I underwent chemotherapy to control the cancer.

However, less than one year after completing chemotherapy, I suffered another relapse, and it was at this point that my doctor asked if I would consider taking part in the clinical trial of a promising drug for patients like me. At that time, two of my four children had just got married and I wanted to do everything I could to be able to see my grandchildren. So I agreed.

For the past two years, I've been taking my medication and supplements, going for chemotherapy and CT scans on a frequent basis. I also have to apply moisturizer

regularly as I get patches of dry, itchy skin. It is not a burden if you make it a habit. I am thankful that the side effects are bearable.

Today, I get to play with my two young grandchildren. I want to do my best to be able to watch them grow up!

My family, friends, and colleagues have been very supportive. My husband used to love picnics at the beach, but I can't be out in the sun for too long, so he has stopped organising such outings. If I have a chemo appointment, my children know I would be too tired to cook after that, so they buy dinner. At work, my boss moved me into a back-end position, so I don't need to do strenuous shelving work and can take leave more easily for my medical appointments.

People say I don't look like I have cancer. I believe that God tests us in one way or another, and this is my test, which I want to pass!

I have learned that my cancer is in its fourth stage when I started on the trial — I didn't want to know at first, but I later found the courage to face up to it. I remember how strong my sister was in her last days. We saw how much pain she was in, but she tried not to show it. I think she chose to hang on until her children had left for school, so they would suffer less pain when she died. I hope to be as strong as she was. ●

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*Rosni has shown great commitment to the clinical trial, never once complaining about the treatment, frequent visits, nor side effects. During Ramadan month, she adjusted her medication schedule in line with fasting to ensure she complied with the protocol set timings and restrictions. Her determination, perseverance, and stoicism are admirable.*

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**Dr Ang Mei-Kim**  
Senior Consultant,  
Division of Medical Oncology  
National Cancer Centre  
Singapore

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# A VISION TO HELP OTHERS

*MS RUTH TAN, 68 // RETIREE*

I met with a road accident when I was 12. A taxi ran into me and I hit a lamp post. The accident left me with severe maculopathy in both eyes. I was told I had low vision impairment and was sent to the School for the Blind to learn braille. I subsequently moved to Kuala Lumpur to learn how to operate a switchboard, then worked as a telephone operator in Singapore for 27 years.

Today, I support myself by distributing newspapers every morning at the Outram Park MRT Station. Once a week, I cook dishes for 'Dining in the Dark', a blind dining experience organised by the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped (SAVH). For sighted people, it is just a two-hour experience of not being able to see, but for us, it is our whole life. I find it meaningful to share various aspects of our lives with sighted people. Hopefully, it broadens their understanding of visual impairment and the challenges that we go through.

I live with my 89-year-old mother and we take care of each other. I volunteer at church by preparing the hymns in braille and also take English courses with the Singapore Work Development Agency (WDA) in the hope that I can further my volunteer work. I try to reach out to other visually impaired people as much as possible. This includes taking them out to shop for necessities. I teach them how to feel for the things that they need to buy, so that they can

do it independently and confidently. Even with low vision, as long as I can help others, I will.

Recently, I participated in a clinical trial for low vision patients at the Singapore Eye Research Institute. It gave me many tips on how to cope with challenges in daily living. I also made many friends who would call me whenever they needed someone to chat with.

Apart from volunteer work, I enjoy collecting stamps and travelling. I have been to many places like London, Paris, Israel, Beijing and Australia. These days, I am happy just making a trip to neighbouring Johor Bahru and have no problems finding my way around.

My philosophy in life is to live one day at a time. I am already 68 years old so there is not much time left! If I become totally blind one day, I will just have to adapt and move on. ●

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*Ruth is truly inspirational to me as well as my colleagues. Despite having visual impairment, she makes every effort to support and encourage the visually handicapped to lead normal lives and to bravely face each challenge that comes along.*

**Peck Chye Fong**  
Deputy Director,  
Research Clinic  
Singapore Eye  
Research Institute

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# INSPIRATIONAL CAREGIVERS

*MR GOH HWOO YAN*

*MDM SALMAH BTE ABDULLAH*

*MDM CHONG NGUK CHAI*

*MR JUSTIN CHEN*

*MDM TEOW BEE LEE*

*MR VICTOR SIM*

*MR TAN KHENG HOCK*

*MS TAN KIM HIANG*

*MS CYNTHIA LOW*

*MR NG SWEE HIN*

*MDM JULIANA ANG*

*MDM ANNIE GOH*

*MDM NEO GEOK HUWE*

*MDM JOYCE YEA*

# LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

*MR GOH HWOON YAN, 80 // RETIREE*

My wife has a terrible temper. You know how domineering she is? She won't let me eat egg yolk because of the high cholesterol, and she doesn't allow me to read the newspapers because she claims that it will ruin my eyesight. As a result, I have to sneak in a corner at home to read the newspaper.

Despite our differences, I am her husband and it is my responsibility to remain by her side. People say I fear her but it's not true — the fact is that I understand her.

She can't help herself when she's being unreasonable, but deep down, she has such a kind heart. She can't pass a beggar in the street without giving them some money. And she was a thrifty wife who managed the household finances well.

She was a heavy smoker all her life, whereas I stopped when I was young after I heard of the ill effects of smoking. She has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) now, a terminal illness.

I myself am a cancer survivor and suffer from fainting spells — that's why I walk around with an umbrella to steady myself. But I still visit my wife at the nursing home every day, because if I don't, I won't sleep well that night. I feed her and watch over her so she doesn't try to get out of her wheelchair and fall. The nurses are relieved whenever they see me

because they don't need to attend to her yelling for the rest of the day!

When she asks for her favourite pandan cake, I take a two and a half-hour round trip on the bus to a cake shop in Clementi to buy it, because theirs are nice and they wrap and seal each slice, which means the cakes stay fresh for longer. You could call it love... I feel it is my duty. If the tables were turned, I am sure she would do the same for me. ●

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*Mr Goh shows us what it means to care for one's spouse in sickness and in health, despite their differences in character.*

**Gina Tan Ju Ling**  
Senior Medical Social Worker,  
Care and Counselling  
Department  
Ang Mo Kio —  
Thye Hua Kwan Hospital

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*Mr Goh Hwoon Yan (left)  
with Mdm Chek Kwan Yoke*

# SOWING THE SEEDS OF LOVE

*MDM SALMAH BTE ABDULLAH, 50 // HOMEMAKER*

My husband, Azman and I met in our 20s when we worked in the same company. We married less than a year later, and had two children. We recently celebrated our 26<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary but it was a bittersweet occasion.

In 2012, Azman was diagnosed with a brain tumour. He had gone for two operations, but the tumour continued to grow. Just last year, the doctor delivered the devastating news that he had only one year to live. He was just 52...

Family unity is the most important thing to me. With his illness, I felt like a broken vase, but had to hide all my sadness from him. I tried to smile and act as normal as I could to encourage him.

I tried to care for him at home, but his pain got so bad that we had no choice but to admit him to hospice care. I visited every day and stayed till 9pm. It became a routine — visiting him, giving him his medication and meals, helping him with some exercise, and just keeping him company.

Sometimes I'd joke with him and say, "Can I take a day off today?" But in all honesty, I don't think I could bear leaving him alone. I believe that as his caregiver, I had to stay healthy, physically and mentally. I would try to make time for myself and the children. I'd bake muffins to de-stress when I could.

Being a frequent visitor to Bright Vision Hospital, I've made many new friends — the social workers, nurses, and therapists are all wonderful to us. In the ward, I would help the other patients in any way I could — calling the nurses for them, wiping their bed rails clean, or just chatting with them.

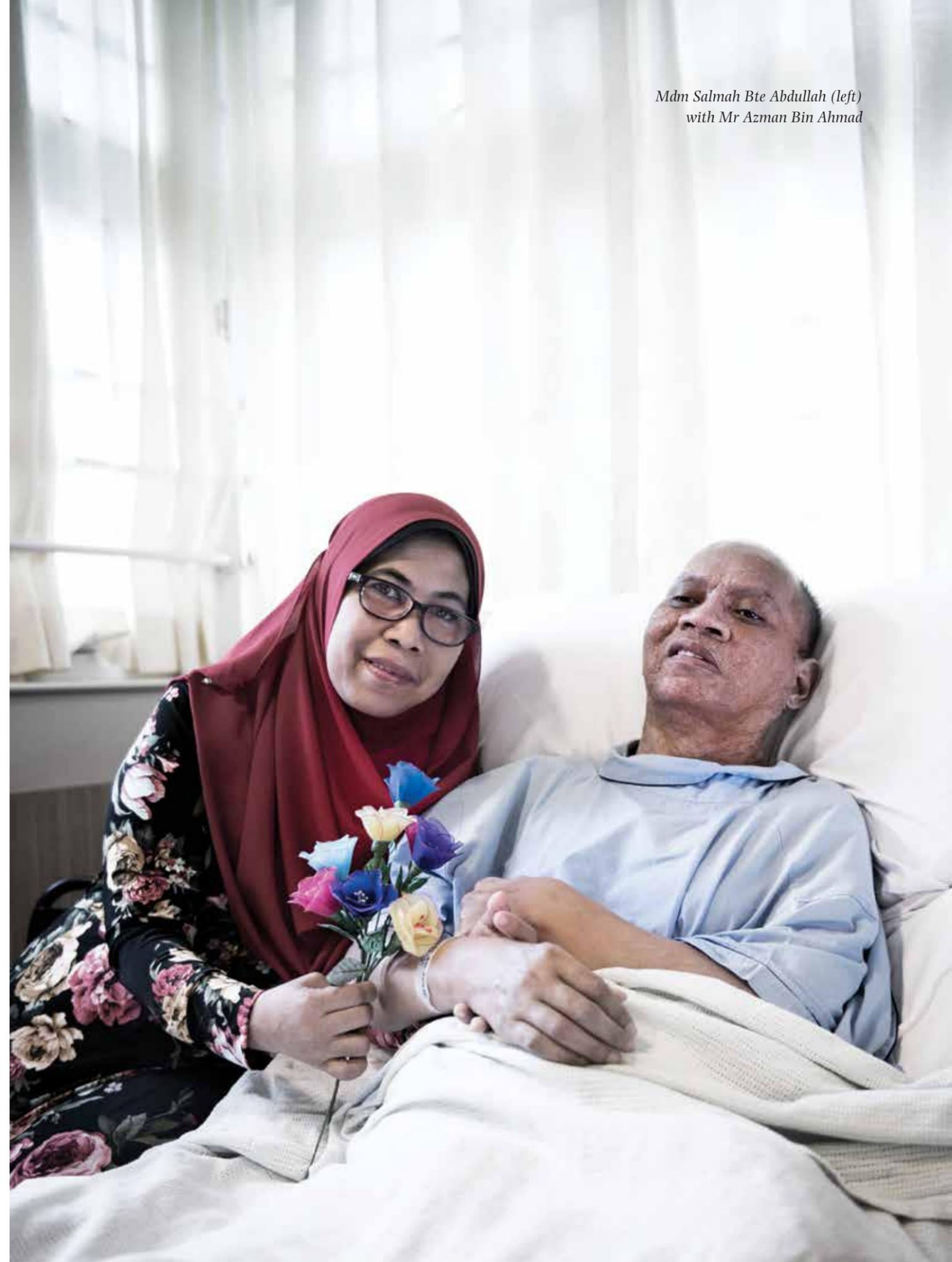
I often sat next to Azman to make my fabric flowers. I am making 100 stalks for the *bunga telur* at our son's wedding in May. It was our wish for Azman to attend the wedding. Sadly, he couldn't wait. Azman passed away on 26 December 2015. We were all brokenhearted but I know he will watch over us wherever he is. ●

*One of our male patients took one of Mdm Salmah's fabric flowers to cheer his wife, who is in a nursing home. Mdm Salmah is so caring, she literally plants seeds of love and blessings among our patients and their loved ones when she visits her husband in the ward.*

**Sandy Koh**

Medical Social Worker,  
Medical Social Service  
Bright Vision Hospital

*Mdm Salmah Bte Abdullah (left)  
with Mr Azman Bin Ahmad*



# BOUNDLESS LOVE

MDM CHONG NGUK CHAI, 55 // HOMEMAKER

Caring for my eldest son, You Liang is a lifelong commitment — a journey that can be very emotional and draining at times.

You Liang was diagnosed with neurological conditions such as microcephaly and epilepsy as a baby. He cannot speak, see, or even eat. He has to be fed milk every four hours and given medication every day, while his feeding tube has to be changed regularly at the hospital. As he is bed bound, it is not easy looking after You Liang's needs. I hardly go out except to buy food and essentials, but I do not resent it.

When I was younger, I used to get frustrated at having to care for You Liang and his brother, on top of doing household chores. Yet I could not bear the idea of having someone else look after him — I would worry if I were not with him.

You Liang is a good boy with a sweet nature. Although he can't communicate, he can sense my presence. I can understand him by reading his expressions and body language, or the sounds he makes. I know when he is in pain or uncomfortable. Sometimes he smiles at me.

Both my husband and I are in our 50s with our own health issues but we will continue to take care of You Liang for as long as we can. For now, we just take it one day at a time.

Other parents will understand our deep love for our child. To those who

are in a similar situation, I would like to say: just try your best. Find time for yourself when you can. I listen to the radio and try to sing along when I find things get too tough. When you feel you really can't cope, don't be afraid to ask for help.

We are so grateful for all the support we have received, from neighbours, friends, and hospital staff. I am thankful for each day that I have with You Liang. ●

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*Mdm Chong has been her son's main caregiver for the past 21 years. You Liang is fully dependent on her for his daily needs. Mdm Chong does not see her dedication or sacrifice as extraordinary but, to me, she is truly admirable.*

**Eleen Lim**  
Senior Medical Social Worker,  
Medical Social Work Department  
KK Women's and  
Children's Hospital

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# ANGELS IN AMANDA'S MIDST

MR JUSTIN CHEN, 48 //  
BUSINESSMAN IN THE PETROCHEMICAL & OIL SECTOR

I always get teary when I remember the early years of caring for Amanda. In addition to the realisation that our new born child had some life-long disabilities, we also had to deal with the prospect of immediate surgery which is heart-rending for any parent.

When she was born, we noticed that a part of her lower spine was not sealed properly. She was diagnosed with spina bifida and hydrocephalus.

Spina bifida is a condition where the nerves and sphincter do not communicate. As a result, Amanda requires Clean Intermittent Catheterisation (CIC) every four hours. It was a very emotional and traumatic time for our entire family, and painful for Amanda, too. We had to drain her urine with a tube every four hours.

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*Justin's selfless devotion and loving care for Amanda has inspired and motivated all of us. He is always willing to share his experience of caring for a child with spina bifida with other parents. He has been an encouragement and inspiration to many caregivers.*

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**Ranjit Kaur D/O JS**  
Assistant Nurse Clinician,  
Urotherapy  
KK Women's and  
Children's Hospital

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Although my wife was devastated at first, she found tremendous inner-strength and became very determined to care for Amanda. Our family played a big part too — even my dad has learned how to help Amanda with catheterisation, with my mum's assistance.

Things did get better over time. There are days when Amanda's medical care has become such a routine part of our lives that we forget she has special needs. We are heartened that Amanda has taken her condition in her stride and has learned to do her own catheterisation. She is now 10 and is very active, like other kids.

She loves ballet, swimming, piano, golf and even won an art competition. The family goes on occasional holiday trips, but we're never without our equipment and are always on the lookout for the nearest washroom.

This experience has opened our eyes to a lot of good people around us. We are thankful to have met the beautiful angels in our lives — the KKH nurses. They are passionate about their jobs, and are constantly upgrading their skills to help the patients. Nurse Ranjit for instance, attended a course at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Ohio and taught us methods to manage Amanda's daily bowel movement. We are extremely grateful to the doctors, nurses and KKH for their continual pursuit of skills and knowledge upgrading of their staff members.

Inspired by them, we try our best to offer our help to other parents, sharing as often as we can. The miracle, to us, is not that Amanda may one day be cured, but that we can wake up every day and still cope with the ever evolving challenges of her medical care. ●



From left:  
Mdm Esther Lee, Zachary Chen,  
Amanda Natalie Chen, Mr Justin Chen

# STRONGER WITH FAMILY

*MDM TEOW BEE LEE, 53 // OFFICE CLEANER*

Washina, the youngest of my eight children, was born at 26 weeks. Due to birth complications, the prognosis the doctors gave for her survival was not good. She had to stay in KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) until she was eight months old and had a shunt inserted into her brain.

Washina had another shunt replacement when she was 10 years old and underwent several operations for other medical conditions over the years. We had to brave ourselves for each of these invasive treatments but we were grateful that she responded well to them.

My husband works as a taxi driver. I chose to work from 4pm to midnight so that I can be home to care for Washina before she goes to school, and have lunch ready for her when she comes home. Washina has special dietary requirements due to her kidney problems, so I have to cook food with low salt and potassium. I try to look on the bright side and tell my family and myself that a low-sodium diet is good for all of us!

My seven older children are good kids who help me with Washina and the household chores when I am at work. My children are a joy to me. They help me stay positive and motivated. When Washina tells me "I love you, mum" and kisses me, I just feel so happy.

It has not been an easy journey for us. As a baby, Washina needed tube feeding, and an oxygen tank to help

her breathe till she was about two years old. Now when I look at her, I feel so proud that she is turning 13 this year, going to school and growing stronger.

While staff at KKH often commend me on my good work in caring for Washina, I know her progress over the years was made possible with the help of the medical staff. Since we have been going to KKH all these years, we know most of the staff at the clinics we visit and we are on friendly terms with them. They have been very helpful and encouraging.

To caregivers of loved ones with medical problems, I would like to encourage you to keep looking forward. Do not be discouraged by bad prognoses, just do your best. ●

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*Mdm Teow is a busy working mother of eight who manages to take very good care of her youngest child Washina, who has had complex medical conditions since birth. With Mdm Teow's loving care and patience, Washina has been growing well and has learnt to feed and dress herself.*

**Eleen Lim**  
Senior Medical Social Worker,  
Medical Social Work Department  
KK Women's and  
Children's Hospital

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*Mdm Teow Bee Lee  
with Washina Loh*

# UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

MR VICTOR SIM, 86 // RETIREE

I met my wife Elizabeth at a convent funfair. We got married after 5 years of courtship and have enjoyed 62 blissful years together. I am very blessed, thankful and satisfied as not many people reach our years in marriage, statistically.

Before the onset of Alzheimer's in 2000, my wife was a talented woman in her own right. She was an accounts clerk, had a flair for knitting, gardening and cooking. She also loved fishing and I often took her out to *kelongs*. We continued to take such trips until four years ago when it became too difficult.

Having such a remarkable woman as my wife, I only have good memories and have no regrets. I saw her illness as an opportunity to take care of her. It was not her fault that she had this condition, it was now my turn to give back all the love that she had showered on our children and me.

When my wife was warded in the hospital, I was there from 9am to 9pm every day to be by her side. Once, I had to be hospitalised because of an Upper Respiratory Infection. I was on the fifth floor and she was on the third. I could not bear to be apart from her even for a day and had to persuade our doctors to let me see her. Finally, they let me take a peep at her from the ward corridor as her immunity was very low at that time.

On 11 December 2015, my wife was called home to be with the Lord.

It was heart breaking. I miss her so much. I am slowly coming to terms with the sad reality that she is no longer around. It has not been easy, but I know with faith and support from my family, I will be able to cope with this loss.

To all caregivers, my advice is to be more patient with your loved ones. Learn to accept the illness and do your best. If that fails, at least be glad that you have tried your best. ●

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*Mr Sim was very meticulous in taking care of his wife. He kept detailed records of all her medications and appointments since 2006. When Mrs Sim started to lose her mobility, he faithfully continued to take her to church and out on fishing trips which was her joy. Through him, I see the power of unconditional love.*

**Karen Poon**  
Director of Mission  
Mount Alvernia Hospital

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*Mr Victor Sim (right)  
with Mdm Elizabeth Koh*

# MY TURN TO LOOK AFTER HER

*MR TAN KHENG HOCK, 73 // RETIREE*

My wife, Ying and I have been married for 45 years. I used to be the General Manager for the Manufacturing department of an electronics factory, managing close to 300 employees. Running the company back then gave me immense satisfaction. Now retired and being a full time caregiver for Ying gives me a different kind of satisfaction. It has been challenging, but it is a role I would not trade for anything else in the world.

Other than looking after her daily needs, I have taken over the duties of shopping and cooking. She used to have to coach me with step-by-step instructions to cook simple dishes, and I have now become a decent cook!

What we miss is travelling together. Thankfully, we had been to so many places before, including Europe, that we are content for now. Perhaps when Ying is better, we can travel again.

What I have learnt from looking after my wife is that caregivers need to be prepared for personal sacrifice — sometimes there is just no day or night for us. We also need to try to understand not just the physical needs of patients but their emotional needs, too. This is why I am very appreciative of healthcare workers. It must be tough looking after so many patients.

Taking care of my wife may not be easy but, to me, there is nothing more important than family. ●

Ying was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease about 20 years ago. From the initial mild hand tremors, the disease has progressed such that she now shakes a lot when walking. Sometimes, when her leg muscles stiffen up, she cannot walk properly. She has also had two falls and had to get a hip replacement.

Due to her condition, Ying has nightmares regularly that lead to uncontrolled movements such as pinching and boxing. I do not sleep well next to her but I know it is not her fault as she is actually sound asleep and unaware!

I am 73, five years older than Ying, and have my own health issues but as I am the more able one, I look after her. After all, she took good care of the family for so many years. Even after our two children came along, she managed to keep our home in tiptop condition while holding a full-time job.

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*Mdm Ng Ying suffers from Parkinson's Disease and her uncontrollable tremors make it challenging for her to keep still during dental treatment. It is hard on Mdm Ng but Mr Tan is always by her side, providing support and constantly reassuring her. Mr Tan's patience, selflessness and dedication to care for his wife, has inspired me greatly in both my professional and personal life.*

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**Dr Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz**  
Dental Officer  
National Dental Centre  
Singapore

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*Mr Tan Kheng Hock (left)  
with Mdm Ng Ying*

# A GRATEFUL HEART

*MS TAN KIM HIANG, 47 // HOUSEWIFE*

I have two children, Danny, 21 and Denise, 15. They are the light of my life and they mean the world to me.

Imagine my devastation when we found out Danny has metastatic paravertebral synovial sarcoma, a rare form of cancer. We are very grateful to the National Heart Centre Singapore's Assoc Prof Lim Chong Hee who operated on Danny. Prof Lim removed his tumour in a 10-hour procedure. It was risky but Danny's quality of life is so much better now, even though he still has to undergo chemotherapy.

The one-month period of hospitalisation was tough on Danny as he had to eat, sleep and do everything lying face-down for almost two weeks. Only after his wound and the skin flap that covered the cavity from the surgery had healed, could he sleep on his back. I cried when I saw him sleeping soundly on his back for the first time after surgery.

I learnt from the nurses how to care for Danny. I also learnt ambulatory skills to get him back on his feet. Slowly and painfully, Danny managed to regain his strength by doing the exercises that the physiotherapists taught him. Now when I see him walking and we are able to go out together as a family, I feel so thankful.

My message to other parents of sick children is "Never give up". Encourage your child to be brave enough to face the problems. As parents, we will always love and support our children but we have to fight together as a team.

I don't feel that I deserve special recognition for what I have done for Danny. I'm just doing my job as a mum. Danny has been given a chance to lead a normal life for now. We live each day with grateful hearts. My family will cherish our time together for as long as we can. ●

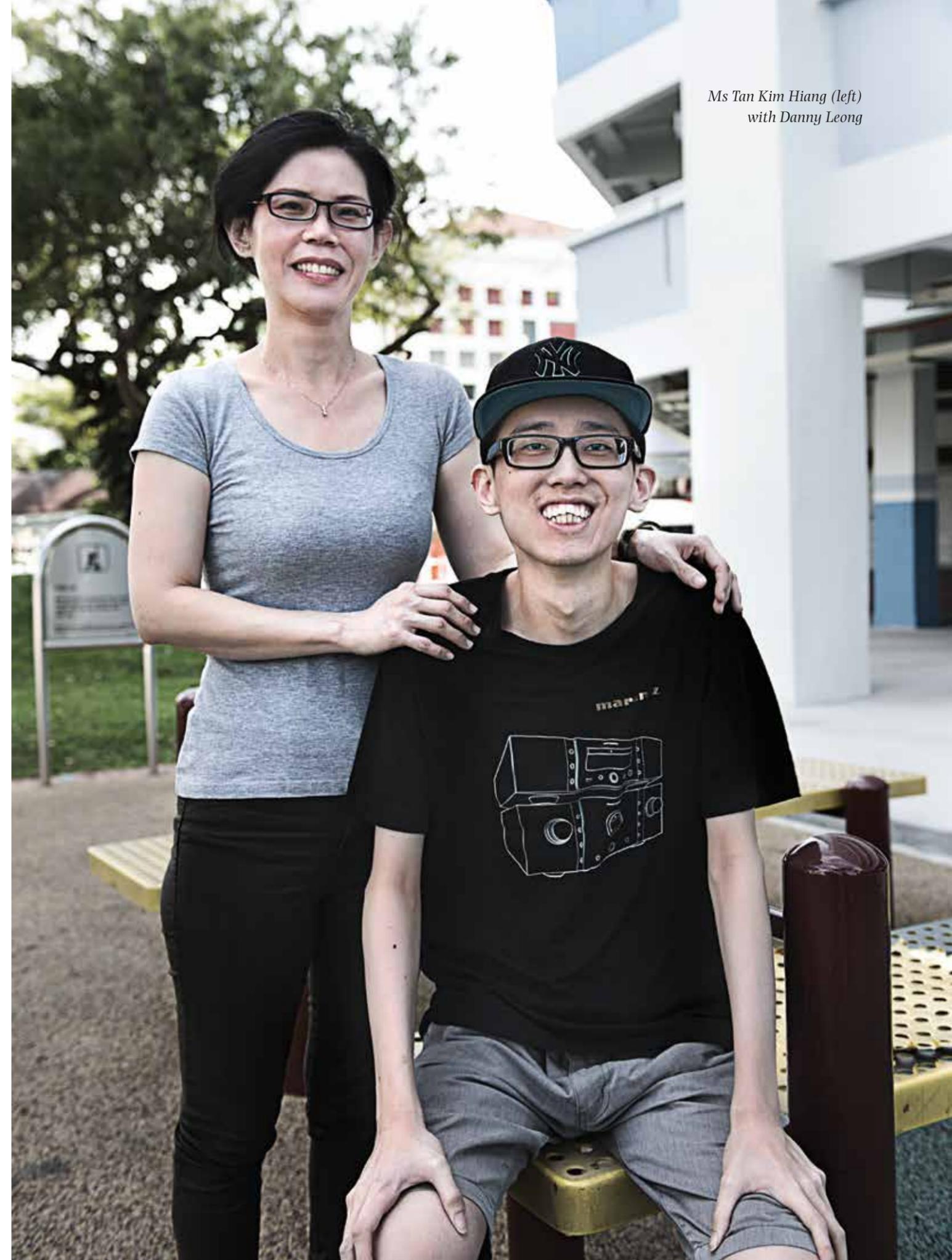
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*It was inspiring to see Ms Tan overcome anxiety and fatigue to support Danny in his recovery. Her words of encouragement to other caregivers and appreciation to staff have motivated us in our care for our patients.*

**Roshni Akhtar**  
Staff Nurse, Ward 56,  
Department of  
Cardiothoracic Surgery  
National Heart Centre  
Singapore

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*Ms Tan Kim Hiang (left)  
with Danny Leong*



# CARING WITH LOVE

*MS CYNTHIA LOW, 52 // HOMEMAKER*

I lived with my late mother-in-law, Mdm Chan Yit Wah, from the time I got married 27 years ago. She had gone through many ups and downs in her life. After her husband passed away at 36, she singlehandedly raised three children. She developed progressive weakness in her limbs in mid-2012 and when she was diagnosed with Motor Neuron Disease in July 2013, the least we could do was to be filial and take good care of her.

My role as a caregiver was definitely not easy and physical limitations were some of the difficulties I faced. Suffering from right thoracic outlet syndrome as well as carpal tunnel syndrome meant that I had to take my medication and do things slowly. Taking care of my mother-in-law besides the usual household chores was not easy.

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*Ms Cynthia always considered the needs of her late mother-in-law, Mdm Chan, way above her own. She refused to hire a helper as she believed that she was able to provide the best care possible for Mdm Chan. Her positive and caring attitude have captured the hearts of healthcare professionals.*

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**Dr Kalpana Prasad**  
Consultant, Neurology  
(TTSH Campus)  
National Neuroscience Institute

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Fortunately, I received support and guidance from various sources. This included the doctors from the National Neuroscience Institute (NNI), NNI support groups, social services, the church, courses on caregiver's training which I signed up for, as well as article clippings and the guidebook "Caregiving...the journey starts with you!" by AWWA Centre for Caregivers. My doctor was also very understanding, to let me postpone surgery for my thoracic outlet syndrome so that I could fully focus on my caregiving duties.

At times, I was unsure how to cope with her occasional tantrums and demands for attention, because she was also understandably frustrated by

her debilitating condition. Conflicts were inevitable in the process but the most important thing was finding ways to resolve them. Occasionally, she would hold and kiss my hand and thank me for taking care of her. These were touching moments, which I will always remember. It also helped me want to continue to care for her despite the many challenges. Support from my son and husband were also vital for my emotional well-being. They would help out whenever I needed time-out, allowing me to take a short walk and unwind by working on art and craft projects, which I found very therapeutic. Conflict resolution, like caregiving, can be both challenging and dynamic. You have to be resourceful and always plan and prepare for the unexpected!

The best feeling in the world is to know that your presence means something to someone. The past two years have been challenging but also very precious. I learnt so much about my mother-in-law, what she had done and more importantly, who she was as a person. Together, we built trust and appreciation for each other as we went through the different stages — from depression to acceptance. I am glad that we fulfilled her final wishes. ●



# IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

*MR NG SWEE HIN, 62 // FACILITIES ENGINEER*

I love my wife, Siew Heng very much. We met at a social gathering and married in 1993. It was a blissful 23 years and what I discovered about marriage, was that it is pointless to win an argument if it sours our relationship. So I always let her have her way.

As my wife has arthritis, I hold her arm wherever we go to steady her. But that February evening after we had just finished our social dance session, she walked ahead of me, tripped and fell badly. She had to have surgery on her skull, which led to another two operations and hospital stays.

Our lives changed significantly after that. We used to be active in *taiji* and dancing at the community centre, and travelled at least twice a year: one of our most memorable trips was the 16-day Russia/Mongolia tour we had in 2013, particularly the three-and-a-half-day ride on the Trans-Siberian Railway. I loved taking photos and videos of her against the lovely scenery.

After the fall, she didn't want to leave the house, worrying that she may not have enough strength to walk around. She just stayed home and passed time by playing games on her tablet PC. I hired a helper to watch over her, but I have to confess that my heart was not in my work.

I am constantly worried about her. But as her caregiver, I could not be impatient for her to recover. It had to be at her own pace, with some gentle

encouragement from me, because any step towards normalcy is good for her.

One day, she cut out an advertisement for the SG50 Jubilee Big Walk. I was so thrilled she showed an interest in it. I quickly signed us up. We took three hours to complete the 5-km walk — it was such a milestone in her recovery that we made it!

I am glad that she has also taken walks to the market for a meal with me, and we sometimes have coffee with our neighbours — something we used to do nearly every day. In February 2016, we made a trip back to Kluang to visit my mother and siblings. It was a meaningful Lunar New Year gathering, considering how far my wife has come. We are indeed for whatever small progress she has made. ●

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*Mr Ng tries to accompany his wife for all her appointments even after his night shift, as he feels it is his responsibility and not his helper's. He is also actively involved in the head injury support group, sharing how he struggled alone when his wife was critically ill and providing a listening ear to other caregivers.*

**Tan Bee Ling**  
Senior Staff Nurse,  
Neurosurgery  
National Neuroscience Institute

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# A DUTIFUL WIFE, A DEVOTED MOTHER

*MDM JULIANA ANG, 56 //  
CLINIC ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

My husband Weng Fook had a bad fall at work in 2002, with a ladder right beside him. Nobody knows for sure how he fell, and I think it is pointless to speculate for what's happened has happened. By the time I rushed to the hospital, he was already in a coma.

He has been comatose for the past 13 years so I have become the sole breadwinner for the family.

I feel that it is my duty as a wife to take care of my husband, whom I have been married to for 30 years. My husband was a quiet man but he took care of the family well, showing his love in his own quiet way.

I work as a clinic administrative assistant in the mornings and evenings, and visit Weng Fook, who is warded at the Ren Ci Nursing Home, in the afternoons. My two sons were at a rebellious age when the accident happened, and did not take well to the sudden absence of a father figure. I hope that one day they will come and visit Weng Fook on their own accord, after seeing how I have persisted over the years.

Although Weng Fook appears unresponsive, I know that he can hear me — he blinks his eyes when I talk to him. I think he is trying to talk to me whenever he coughs. When he struggles, I still feel his pain. I sponge him every day so that he feels more comfortable and does not

get bedsores. I also help him do his exercises, steam some pear or apple juice for his night feed and make new sets of clothes for him every year. Although the daily commute takes about an hour, I look forward to visiting him every day and I believe he feels the same. It can be tiring at times but being there for him, even for a few short hours, is the least I can do for my husband.

Luckily, I have my good friend, Alice who gives me great moral support. She is an ex-colleague and every night without fail, we meet and she keeps me company while I have my dinner at our neighbourhood coffee shop. I am grateful to her for lending a listening ear to my frustrations and worries.

My bosses have also been very understanding, whenever I need to leave work early to attend to my husband. The nurses at Ren Ci Nursing Home have also been very supportive, I would not be able to take care of him without their help.

I am not hoping my husband will wake up — unless a miracle happens. For now, I am content just being able to see him every day. The only respite I get is the annual vacation I take with my sister. That is the only time I can fully unwind and recharge, and that is enough for me. ●



*Mdm Juliana Ang  
with Mr Mong Weng Fook*

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*Mdm Ang has been visiting the nursing home every day for the past 13 years to care for her husband. I admire her perseverance as she shoulders and cares for the family by herself. To provide for her sons' education, she had to borrow money and is now working hard to pay off the debt. Despite her challenges, she has never given up or lamented that life has been difficult.*

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**Sek Ah Suan**  
Social Work Associate,  
Social Work &  
Counselling Department  
Ren Ci Hospital

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# EVERY DAY IS A BLESSING

*MDM ANNIE GOH, 52 // HOMEMAKER*

After my husband Poh Seng's cancer diagnosis, and gut surgery, he developed various complications, and was even in a coma for two weeks. He was warded at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) for a total of 360 days.

The recovery journey was a long one, and there were many unnerving moments. Looking back, I am amazed how we got through it and thankful that he is now well enough to be out of hospital.

The road ahead is still long. I am his main caregiver as my children are afraid of tending to his open bowel wound. I see to all his needs including his wound dressing, drip pump and stoma bag. I have to be very vigilant in my nursing to ensure it does not lead to any infection, as that could make him very sick.

It took me a long time to learn how to take care of my husband, particularly how to change his dressing. It was all rather challenging for me. I am very grateful to the SGH nursing team for guiding me so patiently.

Being childhood sweethearts and married for close to 30 years, I know Poh Seng very well. We had many happy times, going for karaoke together for example.

He used to have a very good temper before. Now, he has become quiet and irritable. I don't take it to heart when he shouts at me, because I know he is going through a hard

time. I try to chat with him, cheer him up and reassure him as best as I can. I think it helps that I have a natural cheery disposition!

I admit it is tiring and emotionally draining to always be on call. The only time I have to myself, is when I take a walk round the neighbourhood or run errands while my children keep an eye on their father. Even then, I do not see my caring for him as a burden. It's a choice I willingly made.

He was a loving husband and father, and took good care of the family when he could. Now it is my turn to look after him for as long as I can. I know his prognosis is not great so I see every day that he has with me as a blessing. ●



*Mdm Annie Goh (left)  
with Mr Chan Poh Seng*

*Mdm Goh took pains to learn how to provide a high level of nursing care for her husband at home, which is critical upon discharge. Her steadfast love and selfless care is admirable. It makes our work all the more meaningful, seeing how the healthcare team and caregivers can come together to provide the best care for the patient.*

**Ong Choo Eng**  
Senior Nurse Clinician,  
Speciality Nursing  
Singapore General Hospital

**Seettha Devi D/O  
Wasudevan**  
Senior Staff Nurse,  
Division of Surgical Oncology  
National Cancer Centre  
Singapore

# SELFLESS LOVE

MDM NEO GEOK HUWE, 71 // RETIREE

My husband, Saik had his first stroke in 1998, and nine more strokes after that. After the first few strokes, he could still eat and talk, though his walking was unsteady. The stroke he had in 2011 was the worst which rendered him unable to walk, talk or even eat. I was so distressed seeing my husband in such a helpless and depressed state. I wouldn't have been able to get through this dark period, if not for the support and encouragement from his doctors and nurses. I remember Dr Esmeralda Teo, the ward medical officer, who took time out to console me and show her concern. I am so touched and grateful to her.

Taking care of stroke patients like my husband is not easy, but I am content with every little blessing, such as the fact that he can still hear. I do everything for Saik, like brushing his teeth which is not easy, as he cannot open his mouth wide or may accidentally choke on water. Saik is also on peg tube feeding, I have to manage the feeding carefully so as to ensure that the tube does not get clogged.

Having been married for 40 years, we have always looked out for each other. With his current condition, I have to be even more attentive to his needs. At night, I turn him every two hours to prevent bedsores. I also monitor changes in his behavior and his bowel habits.

Though he is not mobile and it can be a challenge to take him out, I still make it a point to bring him to the

market or shopping centre every morning and to church every Sunday, something he always looks forward to. It is good for him to get some fresh air and not be cooped up at home all day. Saik also has frequent follow-up appointments at the Singapore General Hospital, National Heart Centre Singapore and National Dental Centre Singapore. The SGH Campus now feels like a second home to us!

For the past six years, I have been quite active with my volunteer work. I approach strangers at my neighborhood, shopping centres and hospital, particularly those who are disabled and elderly. I introduce and help them fill up the forms for various government aid schemes such as Interim Disability Assistance Programme for the Elderly (IDAPE), Elder Shield, Pioneer Generation Disability Assistance Scheme and Foreign Domestic Worker Grant. I don't accept anything from them for my efforts — or it wouldn't be called volunteer work!

Lately, I have cut down on these activities because I have multiple level spinal stenosis with nerve compression and have difficulty walking. I hope when I am better I can continue to do volunteer work. ●

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*Mdm Neo taught me what it means to love selflessly. She is so familiar with her husband, that she was able to pick up a subtle change in his behaviour, which she could tell was the result of another stroke. She cares for him tirelessly, always smiles and has words of comfort for the healthcare providers. Thank you for showing me what love really means.*

**Dr Esmeralda Teo**  
Registrar,  
Department of Haematology  
Singapore General Hospital

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# SMALL GESTURES MATTER

*MDM JOYCE YEA, 50 //  
SENIOR SALES EXECUTIVE*

My mother died when I was 21. To me, my mother-in-law is my mother and I treat her with the same love and respect.

Since I got married, we have lived together and I have gotten on well with her. She took good care of me after I gave birth, doing things that went beyond what mother-in-law would do. I was so touched! Now that she is unwell and has difficulty communicating, I am happy to take care of her.

My mother-in-law has many medical conditions such as glaucoma and hypertension. She has suffered two falls before and is wheelchair-bound. She was hospitalised for a month in 2013 due to a bad skin infection, so I try to take good care of her skin by massaging her with lotion and buying her organic food.

She has also been on treatment for depression for several years now. We are always mindful to avoid situations that may trigger it. When my brother-in-law passed on recently, we deliberated for a while before I finally broke the news to her, as gently as I could. I was relieved that she took the news calmly.

At home, I sort out all her medications so that when I am at work, the helper can administer them. After work, I make it a point to sit with her for a chat. I am a cheerful and chatty person, so she likes talking to me!

Many years ago, she told me she did not want to be put in a nursing home. Although we had to put her in one after she fell and needed round-the-clock care, I took her home as soon as she was better. Since then, I promised her that I would care for her at home.

I am lucky to have colleagues and understanding bosses who let me take leave to look after her. I work in the service line so I apply what I use at work, such as patience and a positive mind-set when it comes to caring for my mother-in-law. Small gestures of kindness also matter a great deal.

It is not easy caring for an elderly patient but I will not give up because she is my beloved mother-in-law. ●

*The care that Mdm Yea provides her 93-year-old mother-in-law is inspirational. Mdm Yea takes Mdm Bok Yuet Ngor to her many medical appointments at the polyclinic and hospitals. During their visits to polyclinic the close bond between Mdm Yea and Mdm Bok can be seen; from small gestures such as bringing a jacket to ensure that her mother-in-law is not cold, to ensuring that Mdm Bok has all the necessary medication and things to be well cared for at home.*

**Dr Peter Moey**  
Clinic Director,  
SingHealth Polyclinics-Pasir Ris

*Mdm Joyce Yea (right)  
with Mdm Bok Yuet Ngor*



# INSPIRATIONAL PATIENT SUPPORT GROUPS

*KK ALPINE BLOSSOMS BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP,  
KK WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL*

*NASOPHARYNGEAL CANCER SUPPORT GROUP,  
NATIONAL CANCER CENTRE SINGAPORE*

*MOTOR NEURON DISEASE SUPPORT GROUP,  
NATIONAL NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTE*

*BURNS SUPPORT GROUP,  
SINGAPORE GENERAL HOSPITAL*

*ADAPT LAH! SUPPORT GROUP,  
SINGAPORE NATIONAL EYE CENTRE*

# BOSOM BUDDIES FOR LIFE

*KK ALPINE BLOSSOMS BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP //  
KK WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL*

Launched in October 2008, the KK Alpine Blossoms Breast Cancer Support Group (KK ABSG) is Singapore's first support group led by healthcare professionals, comprising breast surgeons and breast care nurses, with supporting teams of psychiatrists, physiotherapists and dietitians.

The name 'Alpine Blossoms' was inspired by alpine flowers which thrive in harsh, wintry climatic conditions. Similarly, the support group advocates that breast cancer patients can prevail throughout their cancer journey in the face of adversity.

Over the years, the support group has blossomed into an active group. It continues to engage its volunteers and members through programmes such as therapeutic arts, music therapy, educational workshops, regular group and one-on-one support sessions, as well as fun and interactive activities such as cooking and line dancing. Caregivers and family members are also encouraged to get involved to ensure care continuity and support at home.

To facilitate sharing between volunteers, members, and newly-diagnosed patients, the "Blossoms Buddy Training" workshop was initiated in 2010. It was designed to enable effective one-to-one sharing of the treatment journey between buddies and newly-diagnosed patients.

Besides focusing on holistic care and support, KK ABSG also encourages

its members to help raise awareness through public education and fundraising events. In October 2011, the group formed Singapore's largest pink ribbon logo from 3,038 cupcakes — a local record breaking feat. The cupcakes were baked, packed and then sold by the support group, raising a total of \$14,421 for the KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) Health Endowment Fund.

KK ABSG's representative, Ms Teresa Ng, who is also Specialty Care Nurse (Breast Care) and Assistant Director of Nursing, KKH, says, "I have learnt a lot by being involved in the planning and implementation of activities for the support group. Professionally, I am more confident in handling difficult issues related to patient care. With continued support from the core committee, I am further motivated to bring the group to greater heights, and to live up to the name of KK ABSG as being a truly "Inspirational Patient Support Group". ●

*For more information on KK ABSG, please call Tel: 63948074 / 8075 / 5815*



*Throughout my four-year cancer journey, I have made many new friends — nurses, medical staff, and other patients through the KK Alpine Blossoms. I soon discovered that I was not alone in my fear. The support group became the place where I could share my grief to halve my sorrow, and share my happiness to have it doubled.*

**KA**  
Breast cancer survivor

# GIVING HOPE

## NASOPHARYNGEAL CANCER SUPPORT GROUP // NATIONAL CANCER CENTRE SINGAPORE

Among the patient support groups in Singapore, one has stood out and garnered a reputation for being the most active in Nasopharyngeal Cancer (NPC) support. The National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) NPC Support Group has seen membership grow from 20 in 2005 to some 450 members today, including some from Malaysia, Indonesia, Amsterdam, Canada and Pakistan. Survivors in the group actively provide support and share experiences with new patients, helping them through their treatment journey and post recovery care.

The support group started in 2006 after an informal social gathering where the pioneering members found that they had a common aim — to help other cancer patients. Their first public talk — attended by 30 people — dealt with managing the side effects of radiotherapy, and is a topic that continues to be shared today.

Apart from their monthly talks which now attract an average of 65 participants, the group also organises fringe activities such as karaoke sessions, healthy cooking workshops, nature walks, and an annual celebration party.

At the heart of the support group is a dedicated committee that consists of survivors with different talents.

Support group leader Teo Thiam Chye says, "The commitment and contributions from each member are key to the success of the group. Without fail, fellow survivors come

forward to support each another and reach out to new patients. No one is left to walk their cancer journey alone. There is always someone to hold their hand."

Dr Soong Yoke Lim, Senior Consultant, Division of Radiation Oncology, NCCS and medical adviser to the support group says, "Although medical professionals can help to manage the condition, we are only there for a short time. The support group volunteers are able to spend more time with patients, addressing their fears and concerns. Patients also feel that survivors understand them better, because they have travelled the journey before."

The support group celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday last year by launching a book, *The NPC Journey*. The book features personal stories from survivors and their caregivers, as well as tips to help cope with the side-effects of treatment. "We want to give hope to NPC patients by sharing our success stories," says Ms Lim Wai Cheng, a committee member and fellow survivor. ●

For more information on NCCS NPC Support Group, please visit: <http://www.healthxchange.com.sg/NPC/Pages/nose-cancer-support-group.aspx>

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*When I was diagnosed with nose cancer, I received a lot of help and support from the NPC Support Group, for which I am most grateful. Now that I have a chance, I will also share my experience and what I have done for my health with new members. This is the best way to pay it forward.*

**Lawrence Er**  
NPC Support Group member  
and NPC survivor

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# STRENGTH IN UNITY

*MOTOR NEURON DISEASE SUPPORT GROUP //  
NATIONAL NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTE*

The Motor Neuron Disease (MND) Support Group is a tightly knit community of patients, caregivers, and healthcare staff, who are united by their common goal: to show how it is possible to live with the disease.

As MND is not easily understood, and can strike in various forms and degrees of severity, patients and caregivers tend to feel lost as they try to grapple with the degenerative illness and find ways to adapt to its ever-changing demands.

The group meets every quarter to offer answers and support to patients and their caregivers, so no one feels alone in the battle.

The group's coordinator is Ms Jasmine Chan, a lawyer whose mother has MND and can communicate only through her eyes. Businessman Samuel Seong Koon, a volunteer who entertains the group with his soulful singing, says he can see the appreciation in her eyes when he sings — which is enough motivation for him to show up for every gathering with more jokes and music up his sleeve.

The group's passion to share is so strong that Ms Pauline Goh continues to contribute seven years after her husband Barry passed away from the disease. She knows firsthand what a caregiver goes through — noting how she felt so alone when her husband was first diagnosed — and doesn't want that experience to go to waste.

Today, the group is about 50-strong, and new patients find it easy to assimilate into the group. Patient

Mr Lim Siak Teng says having a larger gathering of people means more tips and contacts can be exchanged, and the mood is lighter too.

Transport to the meetings is provided or reimbursed by the group to encourage participation. The group also manages a website to facilitate communication, and buys certain medical equipment in bulk, to pass savings on to its members.

But so much more can be done if the group had more funding and volunteers, says Dr Kexin Ang, Associate Consultant, Neurology Department (TTSH Campus), National Neuroscience Institute. Since the nature of the disease is such that patients may deteriorate rapidly, many cannot wait for funds to be raised, before the equipment and care come along.

The UK organization Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) has claimed: "In our view it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society."

If their needs are provided for, the illness no longer manifests as a disability — and the group hopes to champion this mindset change in society. ●

For more information on NNI MND Support Group, please visit: <http://www.nni.com.sg/patients/pt-education-resources/patient-support/Pages/Home.aspx>

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*The group has been effective in helping patients and family members to make informed decisions on procedures and therapy, and in linking them to external agencies for services such as respite care. The warmth in the group has encouraged MND patients to come out of their shells and cope with the disease. We even have patients from other Southeast Asian countries joining in the meetings!*

**Kamilah Jabin**  
Advanced Practice Nurse,  
Neurology Department  
Tan Tock Seng Hospital

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# YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE

*BURNS SUPPORT GROUP //  
SINGAPORE GENERAL HOSPITAL*

For burn survivors, the road to recovery is longer than most. Not only is there severe pain from fire, chemical or explosive burns, patients also often face both physical and psychological scarring. Burn survivors require a great deal of determination and emotional support to endure what can typically be a two-year rehabilitation period.

The Burns Support Group (BSG) aims to provide such support to burn survivors and their caregivers. Founded by Mr Freddy Neo with the support of his employer ExxonMobil in 2003, the group has some 30 members to date. It engages survivors and the general public with "coffee talk" sessions, home visits and awareness campaigns.

Mr Neo is himself a burn survivor who was involved in an industrial accident in 2001. Realising that more support was needed for burn patients, he rallied funding and got help from his company to establish the Total Burns Care Programme at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH).

He shared, "The first thing we want victims to know is that they are not alone. The moment a patient sees a survivor and how they get on with life, they become encouraged to overcome their own challenges."

The close-knit group holds regular meet-up sessions over coffee, as an informal avenue for survivors to share their experience with new patients. A home visit team of six nurses also

visits burn patients who need help with wound management and adjusting to life after discharge from SGH.

Another burn survivor-turned-volunteer is Ms Lee Poh Ling, a window display artist who suffered burns on 31 per cent of her body due to a motorbike accident. It took her over two years to recover and today, she is paying it forward by visiting new burn victims at the SGH Burns Centre. She said, "I want to encourage them by showing them that burn victims can live a normal life."

Besides one-to-one sharing, the group conducts public awareness and outreach campaigns, such as talks on skin grafting transplants. For the last two years, the group participated in the OCBC Cycle to raise funds for the Transplant Research, Unique care and Education (TRUE) Fund.

In 2019, the group will take part in the Asia Pacific Burns Conference which will be held in Singapore for the first time. The medical conference will formally recognise the importance of caregivers in burns recovery, and BSG will be sharing their perspective. Till then, BSG hopes to formalise their training and guidelines, so that volunteers are better equipped to help patients on their road to recovery. ●

For more information on SGH BSG, please visit: <https://www.healthxchange.com.sg/aboutus/Pages/Burn-Support-Group.aspx>

*The recovery time for burn patients is very long. Some of us have to wear the pressure garment for two or three years, sometimes even longer. The support group has given me the encouragement to press on, to lead a normal life and get better.*

**Ms Lee Poh Ling**  
Burn survivor



# A VISION FOR INDEPENDENCE

*ADAPT LAH! SUPPORT GROUP //  
SINGAPORE NATIONAL EYE CENTRE*

"Give a man a fish, feed him a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime." This old adage from Lao Tzu is the operating principle for ADAPT Lah!, a support group at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) that aims to empower people with low vision, with the knowledge and skills they need to lead fulfilling lives.

ADAPT Lah! began as a research project with 80 patients engaged in four hourly sessions, that ran for four weeks. Facilitated by medical social workers, patients were encouraged to express their feelings and the difficulties faced due to low vision.

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*Addressing the psychosocial aspects of low vision is important. We are here to help patients accept their condition, and eventually be confident enough to go out on their own. We are glad to see social work being valued and recognised as an important component in a patient's total rehabilitation.*

**Priscilla Lim**

Head,  
Master Medical Social Worker,  
Medical Social Work  
Singapore National Eye Centre

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"This process is difficult for patients but it paves the way for them to accept their condition and learn new skills to cope with the loss of vision," says Priscilla Lim, Head, Master Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work, SNEC.

The programme was so well-received that it will continue to run to benefit more patients. The organisers are also now in the process of starting a similar programme targeted at caregivers of low vision patients.

ADAPT Lah! teaches patients coping skills to give them more independence in their daily activities. Patients are taught how to use assistive devices, manage their household chores, medication and money, and how to orientate themselves and move around safely outdoors.

A little shared ingenuity goes a long way for the participants. For example, they are taught to tell how full a cup is by floating a ping pong ball in it. They can also use their mobile phones to take and enlarge pictures of price tags or use simple labels to mark out expiry dates on perishable foodstuff.

Different coping strategies and creative ideas are shared among the participants, who often come away with new tips and newly formed friendships.

"In Singapore, very little is being done for people with low vision, who are still on the margins. We found that patients usually stayed at home and were reliant on their caregivers. After attending our programme, patients feel more confident to get out and about!" says Priscilla.

One such patient is 74-year-old Mr Loon Kam Poh, who has no trouble taking public transport and enjoys singing at the Residents' Committee and swimming at East Coast beach — just like any senior citizen.

"I have learnt a lot of tips from the programme that I can apply in my daily life, such as using stickers with bumps to identify buttons on the TV remote. I enjoy the sessions and I do not mind taking two buses to SNEC just for this!" says Mr Loon. ●



# PAST WINNERS

2015

## PATIENTS

### Home Nursing Foundation

Mr Seah See Seng

### KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Ms Lan Linghai  
Ms Nur Fatimah Binti Sabah  
Mr Tan Kai Ern

### National Cancer Centre Singapore

Mr Lim Khoon Huat  
Mr Ow Weng Keong  
Mr Samuel Seong Koon

### National Dental Centre Singapore

Mr Stephen Chan

### National Heart Centre Singapore

Mr Mohd Ali Bin Hashim  
The Late Mr Tan Qing Sheng Daniel

### National Neuroscience Institute

The Late Mr Edwin Lim  
Ms Teo Wei Shan

## CAREGIVERS

### Bright Vision Hospital

Mr Michael Koh

### Home Nursing Foundation

Mrs Kaliyana Sundaresan

### KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Mdm Keh Li Ching  
Mr Low Swee Chai

### National Cancer Centre Singapore

Mdm Tan Swee Eng

### Ren Ci Nursing Home

Mr Marzuki Bin Repu

### Singapore Eye Research Institute

Mr Deans Gordon Paul

### Singapore General Hospital

Mr Alex Wong  
Ms Helina Chan  
Ms Jocelyn Suarez  
Mr Lee Yong Jie  
Mr Leong Teng Chow  
Ms Melissa Lim  
Mr Mustafa Kamal Bin Abu Bakar  
Mdm Nancy Chua  
Mr Poh Khoon Yong

### National Heart Centre Singapore

Ms Choy Wenhui

### Ren Ci Hospital

Mr Woo Sen Chuan

### Singapore General Hospital

Mdm Chua Soh Chen

### Singapore National Eye Centre

Mr Benson Sim

2014

## PATIENTS

### ECON Healthcare Group

Mdm Lee Siew Yin  
Mr Lian Keng Heong

### KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Ms Zhang Pei Shan  
Mr Zul Kamuradin

### National Cancer Centre Singapore

Mdm Rosita Mary Cedillo  
Mdm Wong Poh Eng

### National Heart Centre Singapore

Ms Serene Lee Shu Lynn  
Ms Tan Swee Hiang

## CAREGIVERS

### Bright Vision Hospital

Mr Kua Sim Choon  
Mdm Mary Goh

### KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Mdm Norahan  
Ms Sharon Sia  
Mr Vincent Tang Puay Boon  
Mr Zaric Foo

### National Cancer Centre Singapore

Ms Felinn Shoo Pei Qi

### National Heart Centre Singapore

Mr William Tan Soon Huat

### National Neuroscience Institute

Mdm Foo Yip Mun  
Mdm Shannon Heo

### Singapore General Hospital

Mdm Helen Wong Siew Kheng  
Mr Loh Wan Heng  
Mr Michael Lee  
Mr Royston Hogan  
The Late Ms Tan Ai Ngin

### SingHealth Polyclinics

Mr Vincent Francis Spykerman

### National Neuroscience Institute

Mr Gan Cha  
Mdm Pauline Goh

### Singapore General Hospital

Mr Akhil Jain  
Mr Ang Kim Seng  
Mr Eddie Tan Kie Chai  
Mdm Natalia Nugroho  
Mdm Josie Liow

### Singapore National Eye Centre

Mdm Cecilia Lee  
Mdm Juliana Katherine Yip

2013

## PATIENTS

### Ang Mo Kio – Thye Hua Kwan Hospital

Mr Basheer Ahmad s/o Mohamed Jaffar  
Mr Hazlan Bin Abas  
Mdm Sara Bte Ariffin  
Ms Doreen Goh

### KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Ms Caline Chua Lee Ling  
Mr Kenrick Seah Gui Dong  
The Late Mr Mohamed Baasha  
s/o Mohamed Yasin

### National Cancer Centre Singapore

Mr Chong Ah Huat  
Ms Merle McIntyre  
Ms Jenny Teo Bee Moy

### National Heart Centre Singapore

Ms Haziqah Binte Idris

### National Neuroscience Institute

Ms Bridget Ang  
Mdm Sumathi

### Ren Ci Hospital

Mdm Wong Wai Chong

### Singapore General Hospital

Ms Cheong Lee Meng  
Mdm Leong Wah Kin  
Mr Pay Gang Yi, Wilson  
Mr Ravinder Singh  
Mr Shiv

### Singapore National Eye Centre

Ms Ong Hui Xin

### SingHealth Polyclinics

Mdm Ho Buay Geok

2012

## CAREGIVERS

### **KK Women's and Children's Hospital**

Mr Daniel & Mrs Karen Oon  
Ms Fadiana Binte Dahlan  
Ms Rae Mok Rui Wen

### **National Cancer Centre Singapore**

Mr Chong Ah Tat & Ms Chong Shun Mei  
Mr Sundarajoo Panirsilvam

### **National Heart Centre Singapore**

Mr Atago Shuto  
Mr Peter Lim

### **National Neuroscience Institute**

Ms Angelia Choo  
Mdm Mislina Kasman

### **Ren Ci Hospital**

Mdm Doris Goh Fun Cheng

### **Singapore General Hospital**

Mdm Chua Seng Lan  
Ms Hayati Suaidi  
Mrs Christine Peterson  
Mr Shao Liwei  
Mdm Tay L H

### **Singapore National Eye Centre**

Mdm Keng C L  
Mdm Toh Gea Kim

### **SingHealth Polyclinics**

Ms Christine Chew Ai Ling  
Mdm Pan Chiak Lin  
Mdm Tan Bock Hway  
Ms Rachel Wong Fui Lih

### **Tan Tock Seng Hospital**

Ms Serena Siau Kim Ooi

## PATIENTS

### **Eastern Health Alliance**

Mr Andrew Ang Kim Ka  
Mr Phillips Richard Edward  
Ms Suzanah Shariff  
Mr Tan Keng Kian

### **KK Women's and Children's Hospital**

Ms Kelly Ang Yin Ping  
Mdm Goh Bee Khim  
Ms Dora Goh Siok Kian

### **National Cancer Centre Singapore**

The Late Ms Yvonne Tan Li May

### **National Heart Centre Singapore**

Mr Rahman Bin Abdullah  
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