

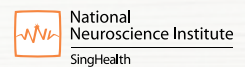
SINGAPORE HEALTH  
**INSPIRATIONAL  
PATIENT &  
CAREGIVER**  
AWARDS 2023



Organised by



### Participating Organisations



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## About the Awards

Since 2010, the annual Singapore Health Inspirational Patient & Caregiver Awards (IPCA) honour individuals for their strength, courage and resilience in the face of health challenges.

Each year, our winners continue to inspire us with their ability to overcome adversity. Their experiences provide valuable learning for the doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and other healthcare workers who care for them.

This year, we recognise 36 awardees who continue to motivate healthcare professionals to deliver better care, and inspire many others with their zest for life.

### **Partner-in-Care Award**

Patients who are engaged in their own care and actively partner the healthcare team in their journey, experience better health outcomes. To encourage patients and caregivers to take on active roles in their care, the Partner-in-Care Award honours winners from each of the Inspirational Patient and Inspirational Caregiver award categories who have demonstrated this exemplary active partnership to improve care quality and experience.



# Inspirational Patients

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# Inspirational Patients

**Partner-in-Care Award** 

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**Mdm Rohani Binte As'ad**

**Mr Tan Siak Kong**

**Mr Heng Tianfu**

**Mr Kang Yong Hui**

**Ms Deborah Tay Wyn Jie**

**Ms Ng Shilin**

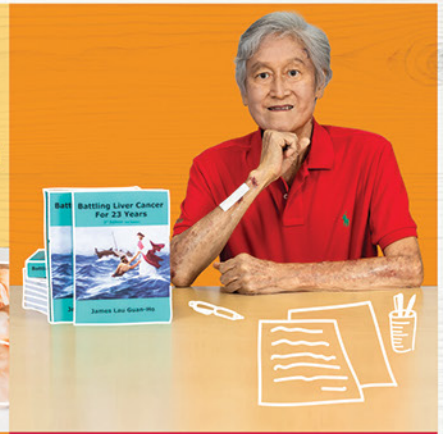
**Ms Karen Kuang**

**Mr Tan Choon Ming**

**Mdm Chua Kim Hwa**

**Mdm Wong Chee**

**Mdm Wong Yin Khay**



#InspirationalPatient&CaregiverAwards #IPCA2023

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**My biggest dreams are to see my son complete his PhD programme, and for my daughter to find a full-time job and someone whom she loves and will eventually marry. Hopefully, I will still be here to witness these moments.**



Peck Khim enjoys journaling and painting in her free time.



# Mdm Goh Peck Khim

Retiree

**I**t started with a pain on the left side of my stomach, which was diagnosed as diverticulitis, a digestive condition that affects the colon. In November 2019, I underwent a minor surgery for it. It was then that my doctor discovered that I also had stage four colon cancer.

I returned for a major cancer surgery in 2021. The surgery wound healed quickly, but the cancer was stubborn.

Next, I tried chemotherapy. The good news was that I did not experience severe side effects. The bad news was that there were no positive effects either; sadly, it was likewise for other cancer drugs I tried. My doctor had to call off my treatment and put me under palliative care.

The hardest part of my cancer journey was being told, three years ago, that I only had about five years left to live. I did not expect my life to be so short-lived. My two children still need me, especially my daughter, who has Asperger's Syndrome. She is close to me and relies on me a lot. The news of my diagnosis has been emotionally stressful for her.

Despite the devastating prognosis, I try to stay positive and not dwell on negative comments about my situation. If I let myself get upset, my health will deteriorate. I need to carry on for the sake of my children. With that mantra, I always remind myself to press on.

I still cook simple meals for my family on most days. It is good to do whatever we can while we are feeling okay. My sister tells me to rest but I think differently. I should treasure every moment and spend time going shopping with my daughter or meeting my friends!

Before falling ill, I was a freelance field interviewer conducting market research surveys. Not long after my diagnosis, COVID-19 struck, so in-person interviews stopped. I decided that it was a good time to retire. I also used to give free tuition to low-income families but had to stop as it was taking a toll on my health. I miss working but I am lucky that my church lends me financial support.

I am now part of the Restorative Hearts Ministry, led by Pastor Robin Png who is a two-time cancer survivor. I help to promote his devotional book which offers guidance and strength. Through the ministry, I formed a group with other terminal cancer patients where we pray together and uplift one another.

I am also active in the Autism Support Group, where parents motivate one another by sharing their experiences and words of encouragement, as well as resources that can help our children.

My biggest dreams are to see my son complete his PhD programme, and for my daughter to find a full-time job and someone whom she loves and will eventually marry. Hopefully, I will still be here to witness these moments.

**"Mdm Goh chooses to live life to the fullest, taking one step at a time and helping as many people as she can."**

**Kylie Yeo**

Community Coordinator  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

**Susan Low**

Senior Community Assistant  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

**Nabilah Binte Anuar**

Community Assistant  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

Partner-in-Care Award 



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**I can fight this long battle only because I have something bigger than cancer itself to live for—my family.**



*Elden loves a good basketball game with friends.*

# Mr Elden Yee Wen Chao

Software Engineer

When my oncologist, Dr Amit, broke the news to me in May 2021 that I had lung cancer, I was only in my early 30s. I was put on radiation and chemotherapy treatments, but the cancer had spread to the lining of my left lung and a few lung nodes and I was diagnosed with end-stage lung cancer.

Today, I am on targeted therapy. The oral chemotherapy medicine that I take every day gives me rashes, frequent diarrhoea and causes my toes to swell, but I am willing to endure the side effects because the treatment allows me to continue working and lead a normal life.

Cancer has changed my perspective on life. Before cancer, like many young people, I focused on climbing the corporate ladder and building a successful career. Today, my focus is to spend as much time as possible with my family. I am thankful that earlier this year, my wife and I welcomed our newest addition to the family, my daughter Estelle.

People say that I'm positive, but I see myself as a realist. I can fight this long battle only because I have something bigger than cancer itself to live for—my family.

I also started thinking about things that I always wanted to do but put off because of work, and decided that there was no better time than now to start checking off the items on my bucket list. At the top of that list was to scale Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain in Malaysia. As a child, I grew up in Sabah, near the foot of the mountain, but had never gotten around to climbing it. With Dr Amit's approval, I started training for the expedition with my wife and brother in June 2022.

We did not make it to the summit. Due to the side effects of my medication, we stopped about 30 minutes away, but I have no regrets as we had pushed ourselves to the best of our abilities, and that was good enough. We brought along a banner with the hashtag #lungcancerwillnotkeepmedown and took a group photo to mark our journey. I shared the photo on social media, where I had also been documenting my cancer journey, as I wanted to encourage other lung cancer patients, and received overwhelming response.

Inspired by my adventure, Dr Amit started a workout initiative for lung cancer patients, to spur everyone to stay healthy and reach personal 'peaks'. Together, we organise activities such as stair-climbing for patients and their families in the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) Lung Cancer Support Group. The group is part of the Lung Cancer Education and Advocacy for Patients (LEAP) initiative, which provides a platform for patients to share their stories and experiences to support fellow patients and caregivers.

I believe that every patient needs a strong support system, whether it is their family or community. No one should be alone in their journey. For this reason, I do what I can to learn and help others facing the same circumstances. I also agreed without hesitation to share my story at my company's Mental Wellness Day, as well as for the Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology (AYAO) podcast helmed by cancer survivors from the NCCS AYAO Support Group.

**"Elden has done a lot to inspire patients with lung cancer to exercise and take care of their nutrition, even when they were depressed and downtrodden."**

## **Dr Ang Mei-Kim**

Head and Senior Consultant  
Department of Lung, Head & Neck and  
Genitourinary Oncology  
National Cancer Centre Singapore

## **Dr Amit Jain**

Senior Consultant  
Department of Lung, Head & Neck and  
Genitourinary Oncology  
National Cancer Centre Singapore

## **Dr Gillianne Lai**

Consultant  
Department of Lung, Head & Neck and  
Genitourinary Oncology  
National Cancer Centre Singapore

## **Dr Teh Yi Lin**

Consultant  
Department of Lung, Head & Neck and  
Genitourinary Oncology  
Director  
Cancer Education & Information Services  
National Cancer Centre Singapore

## Partner-in-Care Award



**Live in the present and appreciate everything you can do now. Do not let your disabilities hinder you.**



*Nothing stops Cheryl from travelling island-wide for good food!*

# Ms Cheryl Tan Shi Ying

Customer Experience Inclusivity Officer

I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) at 24 years old. The first symptom was numbness in my right leg. Over time, I started experiencing weakness in both legs. One day as I emerged from the shower, my body could no longer hold me up and I fell to the ground.

I had difficulty accepting my condition. I was a pastry chef and loved my job. I was devastated when I could not continue pursuing my passion in baking breads due to my symptoms, as baking is a physically strenuous activity that also requires standing for hours. It took me a long while to accept that this was something I could not change.

Nonetheless, I still fought to lead a life that is similar to what I had before my diagnosis. Even though my gait was unsteady, I refused to use a walking cane because I did not want people to see my disability. Instead, I used an umbrella, and soon found out why it was unsafe. I had tripped and leaned my entire weight on the umbrella to support myself so much so that it bent out of shape, and I fell. I started to use proper walking aids after that.

After leaving the bakery, I was unemployed for two years. Nobody knew what MS was and nobody wanted to risk hiring me. Finally, a specialist eye clinic took a chance and offered me a front desk job. I worked there until my condition worsened and I was prescribed a motorised wheelchair. This workplace was not wheelchair-friendly, and it was inconvenient to move around, so I had to resign again.

Transiting to the wheelchair was challenging both physically and mentally. At first, I refused to leave the house out of fear. I worried about rolling off the pavement and bumping into someone I knew. It took me a year before I decided I could not continue avoiding reality. I forced myself to be brave because I wanted to reclaim my independence.

In 2021, I started working as a Customer Experience Inclusivity Officer with Tower Transit. Other than wayfinding and helping passengers recover lost items, I conduct public bus confidence courses to teach wheelchair users and their caregivers to commute safely and confidently, such as the importance of proper positioning in a bus to prevent injury in the event an emergency brake is applied. I also take the opportunity to share with fellow commuters in wheelchairs that if they needed help, they need not feel embarrassed to ask for it.

As one who understands the ever-changing and difficult journey of an MS patient, I joined the MS support group in the hope of reaching out to others and encouraging them to lead a normal life despite their conditions. Together, we commemorated World MS Day on 30 May 2022 by raising public awareness on MS and how we can help MS patients who need to take public transport. To my delight, my doctors joined in the event as well, and shared about MS to the crowd and media that were present.

When you first start using a wheelchair, it is common to regret the activities you did not get to do when you were able to walk on your feet. There is no point looking back at the past, or into the future with worry. Live in the present and appreciate everything you can do now. Do not let your disabilities hinder you.

There is still a journey ahead of us. MS is not the end.

**“Cheryl has demonstrated courage and resilience in her life and is determined not to let MS limit her. She is now actively contributing towards building inclusivity for persons with disabilities in our society.”**

**Dr Kevin Tan**

Senior Consultant

National Neuroscience Institute

## Partner-in-Care Award

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**If I had to describe my life, it is this: I am blessed and grateful. If God calls me back tomorrow, I will go with a willing heart because I am satisfied with my life.**



*James wrote his experience battling liver cancer into a book to help fellow patients.*

# Mr James Lau Guan Ho

(1938 - 2023)

I have battled liver cancer for the past 24 years. Since my diagnosis in 1999, I have experienced 12 recurrences of the disease. To treat the cancer, I have undergone two major liver surgeries, seven Radiofrequency Ablations—a minimally invasive technique that uses radio waves to treat tumours, 11 rounds of immunotherapy and countless other various procedures. Short of a liver transplant, you name it, I've gone through it. It has been a long uphill journey, and each time, I have outlived my doctor's prognosis.

I was born in 1938 and grew up during the Second World War. It was a difficult period for my parents, who raised 10 children in a one-room flat on my father's income as a barber. I was the third child in the family, and I remember studying in the nearby graveyard during my school years due to a lack of space at home. I eventually made it to university and graduated as a civil engineer. Perhaps it was my tough childhood that shaped my sense of fortitude in my later years.

In 2017, my doctor, Peter Mack, approached me to help start the Liver and Pancreas Patient Support Group. I saw it as an opportunity to give back to society and share my story to help others, so I jumped at the chance to do it. I have always enjoyed journaling as it helps me gather my thoughts and allows me to reflect. So the first thing I did for the support group was to put together a book that detailed my personal journey battling liver cancer. The book has been well received and my friends in the support group have enthusiastically recommended it to others.

To encourage and also learn from other patients, I attend every support group meeting, whether rain or shine, and share my diet regime on Instagram @Jameslau8888. I wanted to share my story so that other patients know they are not alone. During the pandemic, I continued to share my experiences through Zoom sessions with the support group. I am heartened that they still consider me an essential part of the group.

Despite my long battle with cancer, I count myself lucky. I am sustained by my faith and consider myself to have lived a fruitful life with a good career. I have a supportive family in my lovely wife Shirley, to whom I have been married for 57 years, as well as our three children and five grandchildren.

If I had to describe my life, it is this: I am blessed and grateful. If God calls me back tomorrow, I will go with a willing heart because I am satisfied with my life.

**"When I first met James in 2017, he struck me as a steadfast fighter who would not give up easily in the battle against his disease. I am perpetually amazed by his determination and motivation such as how he managed to reverse his Type 2 diabetes condition using just diet control. Even in his advanced cancer stage, he remains active in our support group and continues to send us positive vibes."**

**Dr Peter Mack**

Senior Consultant  
Department of Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Surgery &  
Transplant Services  
Singapore General Hospital

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**We all have a pair of hands, so it is important that we use them to do productive work and to help others. I will do my best at my job and volunteer work, and lead a fruitful life in spite of my conditions.**



*Trash to treasure! Lisa enjoys making handicrafts out of recycled materials.*



# Ms Lisa Cheah Siew Hoon

Restaurant Crew

I suffer from several medical conditions including diabetes, bipolar disorder, chronic kidney disease, hearing loss, gout, osteoarthritis and hypothyroidism. The early 2000s was probably the most difficult part of my life, when many of my medical problems began and took a toll on me.

I remember slipping into depression back then. I had taken on a supervisory role in a printing company at that time at a friend's recommendation. It was an industry that I knew nothing about, and the learning curve was so steep that my mind was in overdrive all the time, thinking about the inventory that I had to account for. I was so stressed I could hardly sleep. The pace of work was too much for me and I broke down often. It didn't help that I faced marital problems then too. Soon after, I was diagnosed with depression.

It has been a long time since my diagnosis. Today, I'm able to recognise the signs of a depressive episode. If I feel that I am not coping well, I will consult a doctor as soon as possible. I can sleep better and have better control of my condition now.

My mum, whom I used to take care of, has moved to a nursing home as her dementia deteriorated. I visit her and eat with her when I can. I also find joy in volunteering and giving back to the community, which is my way of giving back after experiencing the kindness that people showed to my mum when she was unwell. It has been four years since I started volunteering with the Red Cross Befriending Programme. I phone in to chat with seniors, find out how they're doing and encourage them. Before the pandemic, I used to visit the elderly beneficiaries at home.

Even though I have multiple medical conditions, I continue to work as I want people to know that bipolar disorder patients can hold on to a job, just like anyone else. Recently, I started a new job at a fast food restaurant which required me to take a food safety course. I was determined to succeed despite failing at my first two attempts, and on the third attempt, I passed.

People who interact with me are often surprised when they realise I have bipolar disorder, because I appear cheerful and positive. I guess this is in part due to the resilience I built since I was young; I started working at 12 years old because my mum did not allow me to study beyond Primary Six. In those days, many people favoured sons over daughters, but I do not hold any grudges towards my mum. Instead, I recognise how these life experiences have moulded me positively.

We all have a pair of hands, so it is important that we use them to do productive work and to help others. I will do my best at my job and volunteer work, and lead a fruitful life in spite of my conditions.

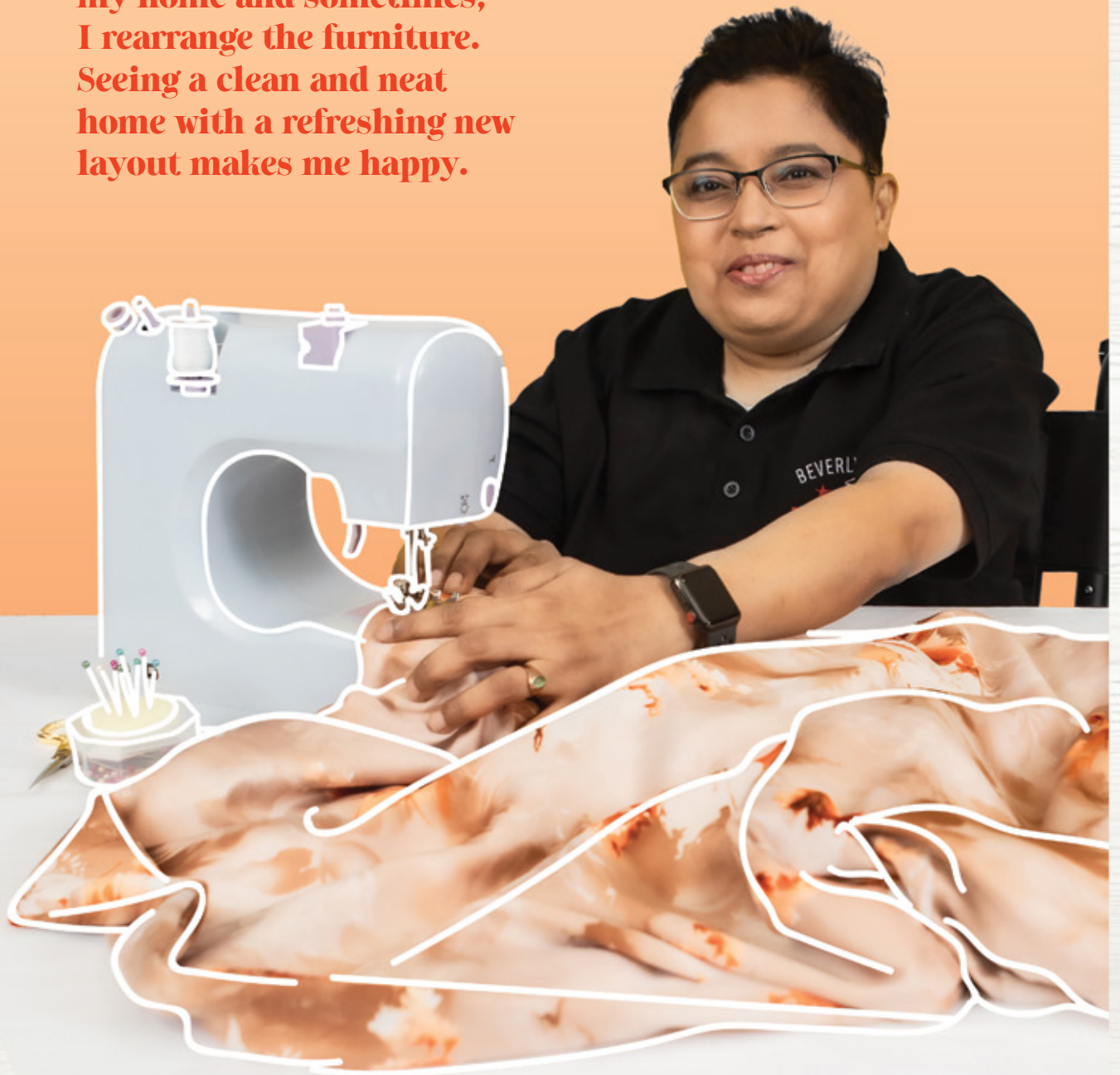
**"Lisa has encountered many obstacles in her life, but she never gives up. In fact, she chooses to treat people around her with kindness."**

**Shermin Aw Yong**  
Community Coordinator  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

**Farhanah Fawzi**  
Community Assistant  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

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**Whenever I feel low, I keep myself busy by cleaning my home and sometimes, I rearrange the furniture. Seeing a clean and neat home with a refreshing new layout makes me happy.**



*Hamidah picked up sewing through Ain Society's support group and has been loving it since.*

# Ms Hamidah Binte AB Rahaman

Home-based Baker

**M**y friend turned to me one day and asked if I had gotten shorter. As strange as her comment sounded, I realised that I was no longer taller than her. When I measured myself, my height had mysteriously decreased by 8cm. After extensive tests at the hospital, my doctor found a small, white substance in my bone. Two weeks later, it disappeared and I was discharged, bewildered but relieved to be home. This was some time back in 2014.

About a year later, I experienced a back pain that did not go away, as well as constant fatigue. That was when I decided to go for another round of tests at another hospital. I was diagnosed with stage four bone cancer. To make matters worse, I was also told that I had breast cancer and the prognosis was poor.

I was dumbfounded. When I told my three siblings, they assured me that they would be there for me throughout the treatment journey. I underwent 10 sessions of radiotherapy until I could not endure the pain anymore. After each session, I could not stomach anything, not even water. Over time, my weight dropped drastically from 67kg to 37kg. I would have given up, if not for the encouragement of my siblings, relatives and friends.

Just when I thought things were improving, my condition worsened in 2017. This time, I felt breathless and discomfort in my stomach and rushed to the hospital's emergency department. Given the severity of my condition, I was transferred to National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) and the doctor recommended chemotherapy. I was doubtful about my pain tolerance but they looked at my history of having endured many sessions of radiotherapy and told me that I could do it. I was also enrolled on a clinical trial, and fortunately, the medication worked well. I am currently in a stable condition and on supportive and palliative care to manage my symptoms.

Positive thinking has helped me through my journey. Whenever I feel low, I keep myself busy by cleaning my home and sometimes, I rearrange the furniture. Seeing a clean and neat home with a refreshing new layout makes me happy.

One of my toughest sacrifices was having to leave my job in security two years ago. I loved my job and had been in the industry for 20 years. I was reluctant to quit, but the long hours and working conditions were affecting my health. Perhaps one day when I am better, I will return.

With my newfound free time, I joined the Sinar Harapan support group at NCCS and another support group at Ain Society. I got to know many other patients and we would check on each other's treatment progress, attend sewing classes and health talks, and meet for meals and walks.

I also started a home-based baking business called Mid Munch, selling tarts and rempeyek crackers, which has been promoted by the word of mouth of satisfied customers. My customers are understanding and tell me to bake only if I am not tired. I am grateful for their patience and encouragement.

I am also thankful to God for letting me live this long. No matter how tough my illness has been, I am determined to stay strong.

**"Seeing Ms Hamidah being motivated and resilient gives me and my other patients hope. It is my privilege to journey with her and learn from her."**

**Neela D/O Natesan**

Nurse Clinician  
Division of Supportive & Palliative Care  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



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**I find strength in knowing that, even with a medical condition, I can still continue to better myself and accomplish things that I never thought I could do.**

*Rohani with her ukulele*

# Mdm Rohani Binte As'ad

Homemaker

**W**hen I found out that I had stage three colon cancer in 2014, I was no stranger to cancer and its impact. After all, my husband was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia in 2006. It was not easy being his full-time caregiver, but I guess it prepared me for my own cancer journey.

Even then, the news of my diagnosis came at a bad time. I was in my final year of studies at Singapore Polytechnic and was looking forward to completing my diploma in Business Management. I underwent surgery to remove part of my colon which was cancerous. After a period of recuperating at home, I continued to attend classes. But as the wound got infected, I was hospitalised a few times.

Unfortunately, I had to defer a term of study to undergo chemotherapy and months later, I did my colonoscopy. Still, I was happy that I managed to score a distinction for one of my modules despite all the challenges.

Along my patient journey, I joined the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) Recital of Joy ukulele music group, now known as NCCS Heartstrings. It was one of the best things that happened for me. I learnt to play the ukulele, which is therapeutic and relieves my stress. I especially love the performing opportunities that come with it.

I've had the chance to write three original songs and even perform one on stage. My songs speak of my health journey and provide a glimpse into the life of a cancer patient.

Besides music, I also discovered art as a means of self-expression for my recovery. It was such an honour when one of my paintings was sold for charity at an exhibition visited by President Halimah Yacob! It was my way of giving back to the community and I found it extremely meaningful.

As I look back on my journey, I am grateful for the good that has come out of it. I find strength in knowing that even with a medical condition, I can still continue to better myself and accomplish things that I never thought I could do.

Last year, I graduated from the Singapore University of Social Sciences with a Bachelor of Science in Business. It was really tough juggling my studies and the effects of chemotherapy, which were multi-fold even long after my cancer was beaten. I made it through the hurdles by being active in class, clarifying with my lecturers whenever I had questions and studying extremely hard.

I am very thankful to be a cancer survivor. While I mourn the loss of some of my fellow cancer patients whom I had grown close to, I hope I can make a difference in the lives of others who are in the same shoes, through music and art.

**"The cancer experience has given Rohani a new sense of purpose to live life to the fullest, give with all her heart and share her talents to bring joy to those facing challenging times."**

**Flora Yong Poh Yin**

Assistant Director  
Care Planning & Transformation  
National Cancer Centre Singapore

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**For the longest time, I used to wonder, 'Why me?' When I reached my 30s, it dawned on me that I was selfish to ask that question, because it implied that I wished for someone else to suffer in my place.**



*Siak Kong perks up his mornings with coffee in his favourite mug.*

# Mr Tan Siak Kong

Retiree

I have been suffering from medical problems for most of my life. It started at 15 with lymphoedema. It is a condition where my lymph vessels are unable to drain lymphatic fluids normally. With prolonged standing, my right leg and groin area would swell badly and ooze fluids. Needless to say, it is terribly uncomfortable and embarrassing.

I am unable to play sports and am forced to spend a lot of time lying down, waiting for the oozing to stop and the swelling to subside. There is no medication for it so I have learnt to manage it better over time.

I was often hospitalised and remember missing almost one entire year of studies when I was in Secondary Four and was only discharged one month prior to my 'O' Levels. Despite this, and to my delight, I did well in my 'O' Level examinations and enrolled in a polytechnic. I am proud of having done relatively well in school despite being unwell. After working for a number of years, I went on to further my studies and pursued a Master of Business Administration.

For the longest time, I used to wonder, "Why me?" When I reached my 30s, it dawned on me that I was selfish to ask that question, because it implied that I wished for someone else to suffer in my place.

My outlook in life changed after this. I was determined to be positive and to improve my life, no matter how sick I was. My wife and I adopted two children. However, unlike most other fathers, there are activities which I'm unable to engage in with my children, such as camping or simply running around with them. I am unable to even teach them how to cycle because of my condition.

Nonetheless, I wanted to provide for my family and worked hard to excel at my job. I started as a technician in 1976 and worked my way up the ranks, to head the company. At the time of retirement, I was managing about 300 staff.

In 2016, I was diagnosed with kidney cancer. Two weeks after my cancer diagnosis, doctors discovered a gastrointestinal stromal tumour in my stomach that was about 5 centimetres in diameter. The tumours in my kidney and stomach were removed in one surgery and thankfully, I didn't require any chemotherapy or radiation treatment thereafter.

Last year, I had another health scare. Doctors discovered a pre-cancerous tumour in my colon, which has since been removed. In the same year, I suffered a slipped disc and there are still days when the pain is unbearable. In addition, I developed ulcers on my palate because I bite my tongue and gums unknowingly when I sleep. I am receiving treatment at the National Dental Centre Singapore for this.

Despite all these problems, I choose to remain positive. Ensuring that my family is provided for no matter what happens to me, is my top priority.

**"Mr Tan has shown immense strength and courage despite his many health conditions and challenges. His resilience is an inspiration to us all."**

**Dr Elyssa Yap Xiang Ying**

Registrar

Department of Restorative Dentistry - Endodontics Unit  
National Dental Centre Singapore

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**My wish is to visit South Korea and England, get married to Jean and have children of our own. She is my soulmate who understands my every need. We love each other and she means the world to me.**

GOAL!



*An avid football supporter, Tianfu enjoys watching his favourite team, Chelsea.*



# Mr Heng Tianfu

Former Auxiliary Police Officer

I was an auxiliary police officer for about nine years, taking charge of security for commercial airlines. I used to lead an active lifestyle. When I was not at work, I would meet up with friends for outdoor activities such as soccer, every two months.

When I started dating my girlfriend, Jean, we often went café-hopping to feast on pastries and explored new restaurants together. We also enjoyed shopping, going to the movies, and playing mini golf and Go Kart.

By January 2022, we had dated for three months and started discussing about applying for a flat. We couldn't wait to spend our lives together.

We had not expected that four months later, our lives would change so drastically. It started one evening when I felt breathless while preparing dinner and was rushed to the hospital. What followed in the next few days was a whirlwind that I have little recollection of due to the severity of my condition.

Later, I found out from Jean, my family and the medical team that I had a tear in my aorta (the main artery in the body). I had what was known as Type A aortic dissection; this dangerous condition can affect how blood is delivered throughout my body. Doctors repaired my aorta and warned my family there was a high chance I would suffer a stroke or loss of my left leg, where I experienced numbness due to blood clots caused by poor circulation.

True enough, I suffered a massive stroke after the operation. By then, I had undergone surgeries to resolve the blood clots and a fasciotomy to relieve swelling and pressure in my lower left leg. In addition, I struggled to breathe on my own, even with a breathing tube, and needed a tracheostomy.

Sometime in end July, I experienced repeated episodes of fever caused by an infection of the opening on my left leg, which was made earlier to treat the blood clot. To stop the infection from spreading, my family and the doctors agreed that an above-knee amputation was necessary to save my life. I was drifting in and out of consciousness at that point so when I came to after the surgery, I was devastated at the sight of the space where my leg used to be.

My life had changed in a flash. I was struggling emotionally, physically and financially. As I had held a job before I was ill, I did not qualify for subsidies on essentials like assistive technology devices and rehabilitation equipment.

I am thankful that I can lean on Jean and my family for support. Jean became my main caregiver and moved in with me after my discharge. I can feed myself, but I depend on her and my mum for basic activities of daily living. I feel bad that Jean has to take care of me while juggling her full-time job.

I am determined to become more independent. I want to get stronger, to sit up for a longer time and to walk. I would love to travel again. My wish is to visit South Korea and England, get married to Jean and have children of our own. She is my soulmate who understands my every need. We love each other and she means the world to me.

**"After the successful removal of the tracheostomy tube, Tianfu has become highly motivated. Despite going through so much, he continues to press on with determination."**

**Stella Kwek**

Senior Staff Nurse

National Heart Centre Singapore

*Mr Heng's partner, Ms Jean Sam, is a winner of the Singapore Health Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Awards 2023 – Caregiver Category. Her story is on page 59.*



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**There are still days when I feel sad because I see little improvement in my condition despite my hard work. During those times, I remind myself to never give up and always try my best.**

*Yong Hui was first trained in French cuisine when he started cooking in his teens.*

# Mr Kang Yong Hui

Former Chef

**I**n the evening of 10 June 2020, I was out on my bicycle, with plans to cycle from Punggol to Changi; but at Loyang, I suddenly blacked out.

When I regained consciousness apparently a few minutes later, I was lying motionless on the ground, with a passerby looking down worriedly at me. An ambulance took me to Changi General Hospital, but it was not until later that I realised how serious my condition was.

Doctors told me that my spinal cord at the C3/C4 and C4/C5 areas of my neck were compressed. From there, things went downhill quickly. I had surgery on my neck. I could not move my head and neck for a long time.

I had a feeding tube inserted into my nose and I had to rely on a catheter to pass urine. My life had changed in a flash. To make things worse, I developed breathing problems shortly after my surgery and needed a tracheostomy to breathe better.

Before the accident, I used to be a chef. I started my culinary training in French cuisine at a restaurant at the age of 14, but I had learnt to cook almost anything over the years. My father was a hawker, so cooking was an easy skill for me to pick up. As I lay helplessly on the hospital bed, struggling to accept what had happened to me, I felt that I had really been dealt a crushing blow.

When I eventually moved to Ren Ci Hospital for step-down care, I had been very much beaten down by the illness and was filled with uncertainty about my future. At first, I disliked being there, which worsened my mood further. However, after I spent time observing and talking to the nurses who cared for me for a few months, I found my perspective gradually changing.

The healthcare staff truly had a heavy workload, especially during the pandemic. Things were not easy for anyone then, and needless to say, the staff bore the brunt of fighting the disease. Despite this, I realised that they never failed to give me their full support when I was not feeling well, so I decided that I wanted to help them too. I encouraged them, cheered them up with jokes and even arranged to buy them food.

When no visitors were allowed during the pandemic, I felt terribly lonely, but it was thanks to the care team that I pulled through.

Since my discharge, which was also made possible with the care team, I have adapted to living with my brother and a helper. I can feed myself and sit up for a day, compared to only three hours previously. But there are still days when I feel sad because I see little improvement in my condition despite my hard work. During those times, I remind myself to never give up and always try my best.

If I can make a wish, I would like to stand again. I would also like to open a hawker stall to sell carrot cake, just like what my Dad did for more than 40 years at Marine Terrace.

**“Mr Kang provided emotional support to the nurses when they were feeling discouraged. His positivity and enthusiasm also helped them cope with their stress during a challenging time.”**

**Sonia Oo Chieu Yin**

Medical Social Worker  
Ren Ci Hospital

**Katrina May Manansala Orcine**

Nurse Manager  
Ren Ci Hospital

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**I know how much support means to a patient and I hope to be that light for someone else.**



*Deborah finds painting therapeutic and enjoys Paint-by-Number kits.*

# Ms Deborah Tay Wyn Jie

Teacher

I started experiencing constant headaches and vomiting episodes in 2013. The general practitioner I visited found that I had elevated blood pressure and referred me to the emergency department.

I underwent several tests and did a biopsy, and doctors found that I had end-stage renal failure. This meant that my kidneys were no longer able to properly filter waste and regulate electrolytes from my blood. My diagnosis came as a huge blow, and it took some time for the news to sink in. I was only 25 years old then, and was engaged to be married. I was supposed to be happily starting a new phase of adulthood.

To cope with the treatment regime, I took a reduced workload at half-pay for six months in my teaching job. Subsequently, I decided to opt for peritoneal dialysis (PD) which helps to remove the excessive fluids in my body. PD provided more flexibility in my daily routine and lifestyle, which also meant that I could return to work in the job I love.

My fiancé Ronnie and I had to delay our wedding plans because of my illness. We took things slow, with our solemnisation taking place about six months after my diagnosis, and our wedding dinner a year later.

Together with my supportive husband, I try to live a normal life as much as I can, even though I have encountered some medical complications and infections such as pneumonia. With each episode, I

try my best to remain positive and take precautions to avoid a recurrence. I also do my best to stay active and healthy by practising yoga and taking long walks. With careful management of my health, I have taken up new hobbies, and even travelled to New Zealand and Australia.

If I had to name one good thing that came out of all this, it is having Ronnie by my side throughout this journey. Without him, I would have given up.

Through my experience, I know how much support means to a patient and I hope to be that light for someone else. Having undergone PD for years now, I wanted to share my experience to help newly diagnosed patients on their PD journey. I joined the PD Befriender Support Group to lend my support and help patients who are fearful of starting dialysis to better manage their treatment and the possible complications from renal failure.

*“Despite having to deal with a serious illness in the prime of her life, Ms Tay is helpful and approachable to other patients in the PD Befriender Support Group. Her optimism and positivity show that it is possible for them to adapt to their condition and live well.”*

**Luo Xiaohong**

Nurse Clinician  
Sengkang General Hospital

*Ms Tay's husband, Mr Ronnie Pang, is a winner of the Singapore Health Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Awards 2023 – Caregiver Category. His story is on page 67.*



**I also find joy in helping others in the same boat... Someday, I hope to teach yoga to fellow patients and encourage them to stay active and healthy.**



*Shilin enjoys yoga and practises weekly.*

# Ms Ng Shilin

Teacher

**A** routine health check-up in 2015 flagged my elevated creatinine and urea levels. Nothing overly alarming, or so I thought. After all, I was only 35 years old then and considered myself young and fit. Nonetheless, I was urged to go for further tests. One thing led to another, and tests revealed that my kidneys were failing.

Three years later, I was told that both my kidneys had deteriorated drastically – they were only functioning at 10 per cent or so. I was told to go on dialysis immediately, while waiting for a kidney transplant.

I have been on peritoneal dialysis since then. It is a nightly routine that involves me being hooked up to a machine while I sleep. It delivers the dialysis fluid through the catheter in my abdomen, to remove toxins and extra water in my body as I can no longer get rid of fluids on my own, for example, through sweating.

I am used to this routine by now and I don't let my condition get in the way of living my life. I still get to do what I love as a Physical Education teacher. I continue to exercise six times a week, have obtained a 200-hour yoga teacher certification and even managed to travel. The only thing I've had to really adjust is my diet. I have to be very cautious about my food intake, and limit the amount of water I drink.

When I broke the news of my diagnosis to my dad, he stoically assured me that everything would be alright. He went on to take charge of my meals, preparing dishes without salt for the sake of my failed kidneys.

He also told me that he would donate his kidney to me. I was aghast at the idea of receiving a kidney from my father at his age, which would surely be an ordeal for his body. Furthermore, there was always a risk of organ rejection, which would mean that his sacrifice would then be in vain. It was something I could not bear to do.

My father went for suitability tests and failed the pre-diabetes tests twice, so he was unable to donate his kidney to me. I was quite relieved about that.

Today, I'm still waiting for my turn to receive a suitable donor kidney. I am in no hurry to get a transplant. I just hope to live each day to the fullest.

I also find joy in helping others in the same boat. I've shared my experience with other renal patients, including my colleagues' relatives. It gives me fulfilment knowing that my advice helped alleviate some of the stresses they face with their diagnosis. Someday, I hope to teach yoga to fellow patients and encourage them to stay active and healthy.

**"Ms Ng has remained cheerful and positive throughout the disease progression. She's determined in living the best version of her life and not allowing herself to be defined by her illness."**

**Luo Xiaohong**

Nurse Clinician

Sengkang General Hospital



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**I am today, unbeaten by all the setbacks I have experienced in my life. I continue to live life positively and hope my story can offer motivation to people going through difficult periods.**

*Karen with one of her pet dogs, Chocolate, who keeps her going.*



# Ms Karen Kuang

Employment Officer

**I**n the short two years of 2020 and 2021, I experienced too many life-changing events. I lost my mum to heart failure, my husband—who has always been my pillar of strength and support—suffered a stroke, my dad was diagnosed with stage four nose cancer, and within two weeks of his diagnosis, I was diagnosed with stage 1B cervical cancer. Prior to that, I had experienced three miscarriages between 2016 to 2017, almost losing my life at the last miscarriage which was an ectopic pregnancy. To say that all these were a lot to handle is an understatement.

Yet here I am today, unbeaten by all the setbacks I have experienced in my life. I continue to live life positively and hope my story can offer motivation to people going through difficult periods.

My cancer journey started with a routine check-up with my gynaecologist, when I was told there was a growth in my cervix. It turned out to be cancer, but as it was only at stage 1B then, I did not need chemotherapy. The doctor gave us two options: to remove parts of my womb, which would allow me to still have children in the future but has a risk of not eliminating the cancer entirely, or to remove my entire set of reproductive organs, which meant I would never be able to have children again, but this option will provide me with a better health outcome.

It was a tough decision for me, as I knew my husband wanted kids. To him, though, the choice was easy. He told the doctor firmly and decisively, "Please save my wife first." So, I went for surgery to remove all my reproductive organs.

After the surgery, I went through 27 rounds of radiation therapy. Even though those sessions were only about 10 minutes each, the preparation was torturous. I would have to drink two litres of water before each session to bloat my stomach, so that the radiation would target the affected lymph nodes in my womb area and not extend to other parts of my stomach.

While the recovery and resulting menopause that shortly followed the removal of my organs was tough, what was harder to manage was having to stay at home for two weeks with a stoma bag, enduring the side effects of such intensive treatments, while being unable to care for my father.

Joan, my regular social worker from the Singapore Cancer Society (SCS), was a great pillar of support and motivated me to stay positive throughout my journey. She would remind me that I was not alone, and that I should love and care for myself more, in the same way that I have always taken care of my family since I was young. She also encouraged me to spend time on activities I find meaningful.

Joan's encouragement inspired me to share my story on social media. I wanted to use my experience to help people facing similar situations. Soon after, I was invited to share my story with Project Lionheart, a COVID-19 initiative that celebrated everyday heroes in Singapore.

Today, I am working with SCS to be trained as a Patient Ambassador buddy to fellow cancer patients. I am also volunteering at SCS community outreach programmes to reach out to more people.

There's a Chinese saying that after the rain comes sunshine. The future is bright and promising, and I look forward to happy days ahead.

**"Karen always exudes a quality of selflessness and independence as the main person caring for her family members since young. As a cancer survivor, she makes it a point to share her story so that her experience can benefit others. Her resilience through her journey is truly inspiring."**

**Joan Khng**  
Senior Social Worker  
Singapore Cancer Society

“ All my hardships really got me down and gave me sleepless nights. At my lowest point, I was too ashamed to face my family and friends. Luckily, my wife was always there to support me.



*Choon Ming with his late beloved dog, Ishka*

# Mr Tan Choon Ming

*Former Relief Security Officer*

I started experiencing vision problems in my left eye around mid-2015. Although I sought medical help, my eyesight got progressively worse. In 2018, I was diagnosed with cataract in my right eye and underwent an operation. I also did a laser treatment procedure called the Panretinal Photocoagulation (PRP) on my left eye hoping to improve my eyesight. However, despite medical procedures on both eyes, I never recovered my vision. I am now unable to see out of my left eye and can only see vague images out of my right.

My loss of vision has been life-changing. Falls are common for me, and I have been unable to hold down any job. When interviewers found out about my eyesight, they were unwilling to hire me. They were worried that I cannot do a good job or that I might hurt myself.

There were some who were kind enough to give me a chance, but none worked out so far. I tried dishwashing, but I was unable to wash the dishes cleanly enough. I tried working as an HDB area cleaner, but I could not pass cleanliness checks. The longest job I held was at a car wash in Jurong. Even then, I encountered many problems because of the working conditions such as dim lighting and slippery floors.

Before my vision problems started, I was running a small business. I bought second-hand goods to scrap and resell the valuable parts. But when my workers found out that I could not see, they started stealing from me. It got so bad that my once profitable business started losing money. In the end, I had to sell my flat to settle my business debts.

All my hardships really got me down and gave me sleepless nights. At my lowest point, I was too ashamed to face my family and friends. Luckily, my wife was always there to support me. She withdrew her savings and even took out a loan to help pay off my debt. Our financial situation was so bad that when my mother-in-law had a stroke, we had trouble footing her medical bills.

In the past, spending time with my beloved pet dog, Ishka, would lift my mood. My wife and I would take her out on walks and during those moments, I would forget all my troubles. Sadly, Ishka passed away a few years ago. These days, I visit the nearby Buddhist temple whenever I need to feel a sense of calm.

Because of my wife's steadfast support over the years, I tell myself not to give up. As long as I am able, I will take any job that comes my way to relieve her burden. I believe that one day, I will be able to find work that I can contribute to.

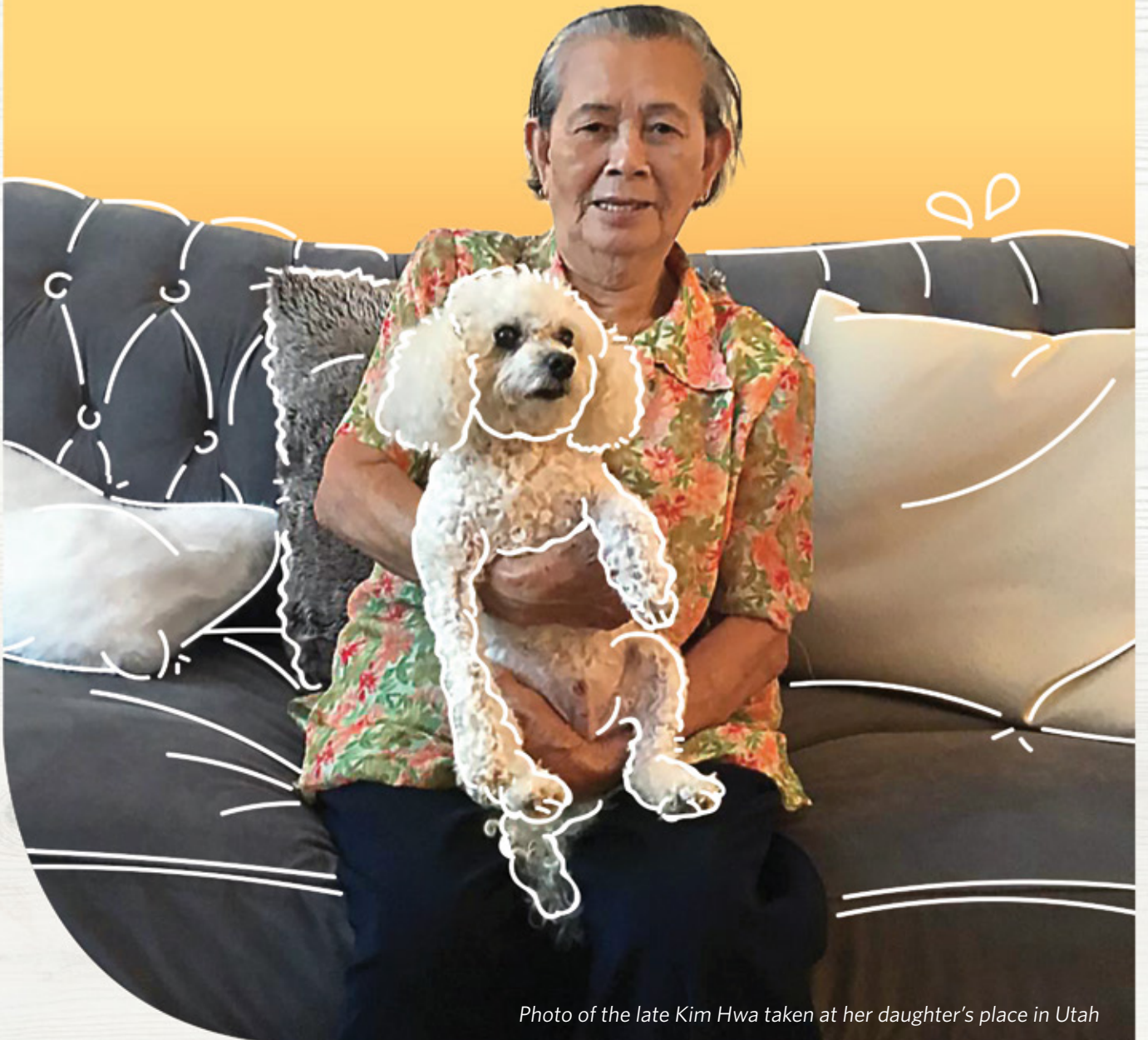
**“Despite facing repeated rejections, Mr Tan remains motivated to improve his situation by seeking out new employment opportunities to alleviate the financial stress on his wife who is the main breadwinner at home.”**

**Pang Poh Geok**

Medical Social Worker  
Medical Social Services  
Singapore National Eye Centre

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**My mum led a tough life raising the four of us with limited resources, yet she was one of the most gracious and bravest persons I knew.**



*Photo of the late Kim Hwa taken at her daughter's place in Utah*

# Mdm Chua Kim Hwa

(1927 to 2022)

**M**y mum was 94 when she was diagnosed in August 2021 with end-stage lung cancer that had spread to her brain and lymph nodes. Before that, she had been coughing for some time. It worsened to a point when she became breathless, and we had to rush her to the emergency department.

She underwent lung surgery, where a tube was inserted through her throat to support her lungs and help her breathe better. After that, she bravely underwent 16 cycles of radiation despite her advanced age. Her dream of visiting her hometown in Hainan Island, China, kept her going.

Following her discharge, my siblings and I took care of her at home. 10 months later, she fell in the bathroom and broke her left hip. Due to her age, she could not undergo surgery for the fracture. Instead, she was warded in Outram Community Hospital for rehabilitation where she actively participated in the activities organised by the therapists.

One such activity was called 'reminiscence therapy', a weekly session where patients were prompted to share what they remembered about Singapore then and now, based on a deck of photos. I heard from a medical social worker that beyond the activity, Mum was helpful in sharing her views. For example, she shared that the photos may be overly dated for the group to relate to, and suggested that the facilitators provide a few themes for the group to select from, to promote a livelier conversation. These feedback, in turn, benefitted other patients in the group. Despite being ill, she was not one to whine. Instead, she lived everyday with gusto.

My mum led a tough life raising the four of us with limited resources, yet she was one of the most gracious and bravest persons I knew. Growing up, I recall our family of six living in a cramped rental room,

with Mum taking on two to three jobs as the main breadwinner of the household. But even in adversity, she remained positive and grateful for whatever little she had.

In the hopes of providing a comfortable home for us, she singlehandedly saved enough to buy a three-room flat in 1983. But it was not always about us—Mum had a heart of gold and was generous with gifts to friends, their families and those in the community. She continued working well into her 80s because that was just how hardworking and independent she was.

We had the chance to bring my mum on overseas trips in her later years, and realised how adventurous she was. In 2016, she travelled with us all the way to Salt Lake City in Utah, USA, to visit my sister. During the trip, she gamely tried new dishes and had a great time.

We originally booked tickets to travel to Hainan in 2020, but COVID-19 struck and our plans were scuppered. While Mum didn't make it there, she was a trooper until the end when she passed away in October 2022. We know that despite her pain, she did not want us to worry. She even did her own afterlife planning in her last days.

We miss our mum terribly since her passing. She continues to live in our hearts and that of those whom she touched.

*Recounted by Ms Catherine Foo, daughter of the late Mdm Chua Kim Hwa.*

**"Despite the hardships she faced in her life, the late Mdm Chua often talked about her life with a sense of gratitude and contentment."**

**Sandy Koh**

Principal Medical Social Worker  
Medical Social Services  
Outram Community Hospital

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**I am an independent person with a positive outlook in life, and I believe in taking care of myself.**



Wong Chee with the Rummy-O board game

# Mdm Wong Chee

Retiree

I underwent a total knee replacement surgery in September 2022, at the age of 80. The cartilage in my right knee had worn out from wear and tear, so for about a year, I experienced pain in that knee which eventually affected my gait and made walking difficult.

At my doctor's recommendation, I opted for robotic surgery, which uses robotic technology to improve the accuracy and precision of the knee replacement. It costs more than conventional surgery, but it turned out to be a good decision. Not only did I recover well, the pain was gone and I was able to move freely and return to my usual activities more quickly.

After my surgery, I was warded at Outram Community Hospital for rehabilitation. During my two weeks there, I made friends with the patients in my ward and we chatted about almost everything under the sun, including my experience volunteering with my Residents' Committee.

To lift our spirits and ease our boredom, I introduced my newfound friends to Rummy-O, a Mahjong-like card game that uses mathematical skills. Everyone enjoyed it very much and it helped to break the ice. These interactions made our hospital stay much more pleasant. I even exchanged phone numbers with them so that we could stay in touch beyond our hospital stay. After my discharge, I would call to encourage them to continue with their rehabilitation exercises.

I am an independent person with a positive outlook in life, and I believe in taking care of myself. After raising my children, I went out to work in my 50s, first at a printing company and then as a cook at a childcare centre. My husband, who is 88, was diagnosed with dementia two years ago. He stays in a nursing home now and I visit him occasionally. My three children have their own families, but we stay connected.

My social life revolves around my church in Woodlands. There, I have a regular group of friends with whom I meet at least twice a week for karaoke, exercise and to cook soup for the old folks living in the area. We would also share our problems and provide emotional support to one another.

I currently live in a five-room flat and it is getting hard for me to keep up with maintaining the entire flat on my own. My plan for the future is to move into one of the newly-launched community care apartments, where I can live more comfortably in my old age.

**"Mdm Wong is an 81-year-old lady with an outgoing personality. During her stay in the hospital, she would spread positivity to the other patients in her ward. Her presence would liven up the mood and her fellow patients were always visibly happy to be around her. Her optimistic attitude is infectious and inspires patients and ward staff alike."**

**Kwan Jih Leong**

Wellbeing Coordinator

Social Prescribing, Office of Community Engagement & Education  
SingHealth Community Hospitals



Although Mum is no longer with us, she has left me with warm memories of her, her artwork and joyful holiday snapshots of us together. I am proud of Mum, and I know that all she wanted was for me to be happy.



*Photo of the late Yin Khay taken during her vacation.*



# Mdm Wong Yin Khay

(1973 to 2022)

**M**y mother experienced stomach bloating and severe constipation in late 2021. She visited the general practitioner (GP) who sent her to the emergency department for investigation. At first, they suspected kidney stones, but when the discomfort persisted, the GP suggested a further scan, which revealed a tumour. She was then diagnosed with stage four kidney cancer.

The news came as a huge shock to Mum. She had, in fact, survived breast cancer just about a year ago and underwent treatment. She went back to work after her recovery, thinking that it would be the last she would hear of cancer.

Before Mum fell ill, she lived a simple but full life. She worked as a clinic assistant and, being a hardworking and detail-oriented person, the work suited her well. Because of her friendly nature, she was well-liked by patients at the clinic.

Outside of work, Mum and I often spent time together. She was very encouraging of my interests in baking and pastry-making. Whenever I did any baking, she would help me in the kitchen. Together, we would make egg tarts, and ham and cheese buns. Another interest that Mum and I had in common was watching Korean dramas. We especially like the Running Man series. She would even follow me to fan meets to meet our favourite K-drama stars.

Mum also loved animals. We reared pets like fish, birds, tortoises and hamsters at home. There was a community cat in our neighbourhood that I was especially fond of, and Mum would go downstairs to feed it daily.

We discovered that Mum had a real talent in art after she fell ill. To take her mind off her condition, she picked up drawing on her own from watching videos and tutorials on YouTube and Facebook. One of her favourite things to draw was, of course, animals. Her artwork was so good that the staff at Outram Community Hospital (OCH) would display them on the community board.

When my mum was at OCH, I would visit her daily after work with her favourite food like tau suan. We would talk about my work and she would offer me advice and encouragement.

Although Mum is no longer with us, she has left me with warm memories of her, her artwork and joyful holiday snapshots of us together. I am proud of Mum, and I know that all she wanted was for me to be happy.

*Recounted by Ms Low Hwee Ying, daughter of the late Mdm Wong Yin Khay.*

**“Mdm Wong was someone with great insight in life. Her art inspired and touched the lives of people around her in the last few months of her life. She used her own drawings to examine her own vulnerabilities and fear of dying. By openly sharing her patient journey and emotions in the face of serious illness, she helped staff understand the inner world of a terminally ill patient and taught them the power of empathy and listening.”**

**Sandy Koh**

Principal Medical Social Worker  
Medical Social Services  
Outram Community Hospital

# Inspirational Caregivers

**Partner-in-Care Award** 

**Ms Elaine Ng**

**Ms Belinda Seet and Ms Babara Seet**

**Ms Wendy Wong Woon Ee**

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**Mdm Asmah Binte Abu Bakar**

**Ms Pamela Kwek Sok Hoo**

**Ms Ruby Lye Keng Fong**

**Mdm Mabel Kerk Mei Poh**

**Mdm Salinah Binte Parsiri**

**Ms Jean Sam Si Ying**

**Ms Nur Aqilah Andrelina Binte  
Muhammad Andisufian**

**Mdm Jessie Toh**

**Mr Clayton Hosanna**

**Mr Pang Ronnie**

**Mr Michael Yeap Tong Ming**

**Mdm Wahidah Binte Omar**

**Mr Sean Chew Han Siang**

**Mdm Siti Abdillah and Mr Abdul Rahman**

**Mdm Jennie Lim Chieh Nee**

**Mr William Woo Show Kee**



#InspirationalPatient&CaregiverAwards #IPCA2023

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It is my greatest hope that the future Sophie lives in will be one that will not discriminate against her for her skin condition, and that she will have the grace to treat others with kindness even if she is faced with unkindness herself.



*Elaine and Sophie love reading together!*

# Ms Elaine Ng

Marketing Manager

**S**ophie was born premature, so we thought that her peeling, red skin at birth was not out of the ordinary. However, my intuition as a mother prompted me to take Sophie to see her paediatrician when she was six days old. We were then told to take her to KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) immediately. That was the start of my rollercoaster journey as a mother to a daughter with Netherton Syndrome (NS), a rare genetic disorder affecting the skin, hair and immune system. This condition affects only 1 in 200,000 newborns worldwide.

In Sophie's first year of life, she spent many months in KKH due to frequent sepsis and severe dehydration as she lacks a crucial skin barrier that protects her from infections and water loss. Each time we brought her to the hospital for fever, it pained us to see her undergo a whole array of tests which are part of the hospital's protocol for young babies to ensure their good health and well-being. What pained us even more were the long, frequent hospitalisations and not knowing what the doctors would say each time.

As this is a rare condition, it has been a tough and lonely journey. We had to learn how to care for Sophie by trial and error, and from overseas support groups as there was no one with the same condition here. Out of the five children diagnosed with NS in Singapore, Sophie is the only one living here; the rest live overseas.

Today, Sophie is three years old and in a more stable condition. I apply creams on her body eight times a day and give her oil baths twice a day, with her bath routines each lasting up to an hour. My husband and I wanted Sophie to live a normal life as far as possible, so we started our search for a suitable school that was inclusive and could manage her condition. She now attends mainstream preschool and absolutely loves it. I could not be prouder of my brave, kind and spunky Sophie, who has surpassed all her doctor's expectations.

We have come a long way and I am extremely thankful to my family, in-laws, friends and the multidisciplinary

healthcare team for their dedicated care and support, especially Associate Professor Mark Koh. They have been receptive and accommodating to the many things I have read up on with regard to Sophie's treatment. I know they want the best for her and we work closely together to determine how to best care for Sophie.

I am mindful of the challenges Sophie has to overcome, especially the unsolicited judgement she will have to face. I have been asked by strangers in public if I did something wrong during pregnancy, or if I had left her in the sun for too long. Most of them have no ill intention; just the lack of awareness. I hope to build up her resilience so she can manage such situations herself. Beyond that, I want to play my part in building an inclusive society for all children who are born visibly different.

For this reason, I'm passionate about raising awareness for rare skin conditions. I serve as an EXCO member to the Rare Skin Conditions Society (RSCS), where I help drive campaigns to raise awareness and funds to support patients with large medical bills. I also reach out to patients and caregivers with newly diagnosed rare skin conditions from around the world to help them ride through the initial difficulties by sharing my experience.

It is my greatest hope that the future Sophie lives in will be one that will not discriminate against her for her skin condition, and that she will have the grace to treat others with kindness even if she is faced with unkindness herself.

**"Elaine is a loving and big-hearted Mum, a consistent team player in RSCS and I believe her story will inspire many others to always find joy even in difficult situations."**

**Dr Wee Wei Yi Lynette**

Consultant  
Dermatology Department  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

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**Mum is 91 years old, and we know there will come a day when she leaves us. Till then, we want to cherish all our moments together and create memories that will stay with us for a lifetime.**



*The Seet sisters enjoy knitting in their free time.*

# Ms Belinda Seet and Ms Babara Seet

*Part-time English Tutor & Counsellor*

*Associate Mediator & Counsellor*

It was not long after our Dad passed away when Mum was diagnosed with mild stage Alzheimer's disease in 2011. She lost her way driving home from her regular volunteering stint at St. Theresa's Home for the Elderly. We wanted to rule out the possibility of a brain tumour, so we brought her to the clinic for a check-up. Now at the age of 91, after 13 years, her condition has progressed from mild to moderate stage Alzheimer's disease.

Although we have a helper to share our load, we coordinate our schedules to ensure that one of us is always with Mum. At times when both of us have to be away, either for work or to care for our aunt who also has dementia, our other siblings are happy to take over the care. We are grateful to have a supportive family where we all work together for Mum's best interests.

We learnt from our research that interaction is important to keep Mum's cognitive functions from declining, so we work on keeping her engaged through learning activities and games. As Belinda specialises in early childhood education, she found games for kids that are also helpful for people with Alzheimer's and downloaded them on the iPad for Mum to play.

Mum has become so proficient and entertained by her games that the first thing she does when she wakes up in the morning is to reach for her iPad. Besides mobile games, she plays a mean game of Chinese checkers and even beats us at it sometimes. She also plays card games like Snap and Donkey, and is great at mahjong. This is proof that we should not underestimate the memory and strategic abilities of people with Alzheimer's.

To continue stimulating her brain, we even bought Primary Two assessment books for her to work on. She also enjoys painting and colouring. Through these activities, we see her self-confidence flourish each time she achieves her goals.

Mum has always valued her independence, so she was upset when she had to stop driving because of dementia. In the early days, to appease her, we took

her for a driving test, not expecting her to pass. To our disbelief, she did pass the test and was allowed to drive, with the stipulation that one of us has to be with her at all times. This was difficult for us to arrange, and so to her frustration, she did not get to do any driving. We did, however, renew her license annually as we knew it was important to her. After eight years, she finally told us not to renew it anymore, and that was when we knew she had finally come to terms with her condition.

On the many nights when Mum experiences night terrors, she wakes up confused and terrified. Belinda sleeps with her, so she hugs and assures her that all is well before tucking her in again.

We are proud that Mum is mobile and even leads an active social life. She conducts free knitting classes for caregivers at Dementia Singapore, and on Saturdays, she participates in their Memories Café programme for sing-along sessions and meals with other dementia patients and their families.

People with Alzheimer's are often fearful because they feel as if they have lost control of their own lives and to some extent, themselves. This is why we focus on enabling and empowering her to take charge of her own activities and plans. We also encourage her to get involved in outreach programmes to help other patients with the same condition, and we also volunteer our time at Dementia Singapore to share our experience as caregivers.

Mum is 91 years old, and we know there will come a day when she leaves us. Till then, we want to cherish all our moments together and create memories that will stay with us for a lifetime.

*"Belinda and Babara are willing to play and laugh with her, and see life from her point of view as a person living with dementia."*

**Esther Vanessa Chua Ai Ling**

Nurse Clinician  
National Neuroscience Institute

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I neglected my family when I travelled for months at a time for work, so I felt that I must make up for lost time and do as much as I can for them.



Wendy loves cooking up a healthy meal.



# Ms Wendy Wong Woon Ee

Full-time Caregiver

I retired in 2007 when I turned 50 to care for my aunt and mother full-time. My aunt had dementia, while Mum had multiple chronic conditions including diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.

I used to do research and development work in textile technology. My work was intense, and I would be based overseas for three to six months at any one time. I would travel back to Singapore once a month for meetings.

Back then, we had a helper. As my aunt got weaker, I also noticed that Mum's diabetes was not well-controlled. It had been tough on my helper to care for the both of them alone, so I decided to retire and spend more time personally caring for them.

In 2008, my older sister, Woon Leng, was diagnosed with stage three colorectal cancer. It took about a year for her to complete radiotherapy and chemotherapy. She had a colostomy and needed a stoma permanently. With the help of other patients at the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), I learned how to change the pouch attached to her stoma.

From then on, I became a full-time caregiver for my mum, aunt and sister. I decided not to hire a helper anymore because I did not feel that having one would contribute much to the caregiving, and it also takes time to train one to reach the quality of care I desire for my family. I neglected my family when I travelled for months at a time for work, so I felt that I must make up for lost time and do as much as I can for them.

In 2014, Mum began to show signs of dementia as well. Once when she went to the market, a neighbour had to take her home. I did not think much of it at first, until I noticed that she often forgot to wash her hair while showering. There was also a time when she forgot how to unlock the bathroom door. These incidents convinced me that she did indeed have dementia.

A year later, my aunt passed away. In 2018, Woon Leng's cancer spread to her bones and doctors had to

remove a part of her hip. These days, she can only walk a few steps, so I have to wash her and make her meals.

Mum was immobile for about eight years until her passing in December 2022, probably due to the weakening of her leg muscles. I bought a special hoist to transfer her to her geriatric chair, where I would bathe her and change her diapers each day. I slept about three to four hours every night and had little time to rest, but I soldiered on because my family is always my priority. I know how important it is to ensure my own medical conditions—asthma and dyslipidemia, a condition where there is an imbalance of different types of fats in my body—are well-controlled so that I can be well enough to care for my loved ones.

Nowadays, I dedicate some time to contribute to causes I find meaningful. Since 2020, I've been a member of the PRAGMATIC research advocacy committee facilitated by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Family Medicine Academic Clinical Programme. I share my feedback from the caregiver's perspective to researchers on areas that affect patients, such as patient care services, use of technology and research studies that aim to improve healthcare for our community. I have given feedback on the effectiveness of smart watches for checking blood pressure and other wearable sensors, and am glad that I can contribute to medical research in my own small way.

Back when I was a manager at work, I learnt that there is nothing that cannot be solved. I apply this principle to my life and caregiving now, and tell myself that I can do anything if I put my heart to it.

**"Her unreserved devotion to her family is indeed exemplary of an inspirational caregiver, and a role model for many with aging parents and siblings."**

**Clinical Associate Professor (Dr) Tan Ngiap Chuan**  
Senior Consultant and Family Physician  
Director, Research  
SingHealth Polyclinics

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**Caregiving is a golden opportunity to do good... I believe that blessings will come when we care for our family sincerely and earnestly.**



*Asmah loves being in the kitchen, whipping up her family's favourite dishes.*

# Mdm Asmah Binte Abu Bakar

*Retired Religious Teacher*

I have been living under one roof with my older brother, Mr Hamzah Bin Abu Bakar, for as long as I can remember. So when he fell ill, I naturally became his primary caregiver.

My brother's functional decline began with a severe case of shingles. He would wake up feeling like his left hand had disappeared. He would also feel pain when clothing touched the skin on his left arm. He sought medical help and was hospitalised for over a month in 2006.

Even with countless medications and therapy, my brother's condition got progressively worse over the years. His left hand would hurt and he would feel weak on the left side of his body. He also had to undergo surgery for hernia twice, and was diagnosed with multiple conditions related to his heart and nervous system.

Since March last year, my brother has been bedridden. Although his body is stiff and he is unable to move, his mind remains relatively sharp. He has a good memory and is easy-going. He is still able to talk and can even banter with our helper. He will ask her to play his favourite songs on the radio and to cook his favourite dishes.

I care a lot for my brother and remember how he cared for us over the years. He was filial and dedicated to our family in his younger days. He loved our late mother deeply. He used to bring her shopping for Hari Raya in her wheelchair. He would also buy us new outfits and help repaint our home. Even when his health began to deteriorate, he continued to bring us out on leisure trips. The love I have for him is what motivates me to do my best as his caregiver, even though I have to manage my own health conditions such as colon cancer, osteoarthritis and nerve pain issues. I worry that if I go for treatment, I would be unable to care for him.

When taking care of my brother, I try to keep him as comfortable as I can. I know he is particular about feeling clean and fresh, so each time after we clean

and sponge him, I ensure that he feels dry and happy by applying powder on his body and completing the routine with a mist of cologne. As he hopes to continue connecting with God through his prayers, I help him with his prayer sessions five times a day.

Even though caregiving takes up most of my time, I have never seen it as a burden. I see it as a religious obligation to care for my family. In our religion, we have a prophetic narration which says that the best people are those who are the most beneficial to others. Caregiving is a golden opportunity to do good, and doing it makes me hopeful of God's mercy. I believe that blessings will come when we care for our family sincerely and earnestly.

One of my biggest blessings from this journey is having enough sustenance to tide us through. I may not have a lot of money, but I have enough to afford what I need without having to ask from others. I am also contented, having no worries or sadness, and enjoy a peace of mind—that to me, is another form of blessing.

To fellow caregivers caring for your loved ones, do not give up and remember that being able to have your loved ones by your side is already the biggest blessing.

**"Mdm Asmah has had her own share of health challenges. Yet, she puts Mr Hamzah's needs above hers—a testament to her selflessness, compassion and resilience as a person."**

## **Nur Zakiyyah Abdul Halil**

Senior Community Coordinator  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

## **Ng Lee Kiat Elizabeth**

Community Assistant  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

## **Nurul Shazwani Binte Hisham**

Community Assistant  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital

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**While the caregiving journey has been challenging, I always tell myself that each day I spend with my mother is a day that we can never get back.**



*Pamela loves gardening and has green fingers.*

# Ms Pamela Kwek Sok Hoo

Full-time Caregiver

I was a full-time caregiver for my father for about three years, before he passed away six and a half years ago. After his passing, I fully intended to return to work, but my mother asked me then if I would take care of her as well. Once again, I put off my plans of returning to work.

My mum suffered from osteoporosis and bronchiectasis, and only needed help with light chores initially. Later, however, she started needing help with activities of daily living like bathing, especially after she became fully wheelchair-bound three years ago. Her bones are so fragile that even sitting for too long can cause hairline fractures. On top of that, both her lungs and heart are functioning at less than 40 per cent capacity.

All these make going to the hospital for her monthly visits increasingly difficult. Mum was recently placed on the Violet Programme, a home palliative care programme by Changi General Hospital (CGH) and St. Andrew's Community Hospital (SACH), to provide dignified and holistic care for patients with advanced illnesses.

As my mum's caregiver, my day revolves around her needs. I cook and feed her nutritious meals and ensure that she takes her medicines. I also bathe and change her, and soothe her when she is in one of her depressive moments.

I am grateful to have received much support in learning to care for my mum, having had the chance to attend various caregiving courses by SACH, CGH and the Caregivers Alliance. They have been very helpful in preparing me for the tough realities of caregiving, though I often have to make hard decisions and handle emergency situations on my own.

Recently, my mum threw a tantrum and refused to take any of her medicines, saying that they were all useless anyway. Her care team has since advised me to take her lead, and to let her decide if she wants to continue taking her medicines. Seeing her like this is heart-breaking but I know that I've done all I can to take care of her and coax her to take her medicines. At the end of the day, some things are out of my control.

While the caregiving journey has been challenging, I always tell myself that each day I spend with my mother is a day that we can never get back. This way of thinking has helped me reframe my perspective, and I am thankful for each day I get to be with her.

**"Pamela has never complained about being tired or begrudged having to sacrifice her own social and personal life to care for her mum. When her mother's condition deteriorated, Pamela immediately dived into learning the necessary skills to give her the best care she could offer."**

**Goh Qi Hao**

Community Assistant  
Changi General Hospital

**G Poongkothai**

Senior Community Assistant  
Changi General Hospital

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**I am happy when  
my mum is happy  
because I love  
my mum!**



*Ruby cherishes the time she has with her mum.*

# Ms Ruby Lye Keng Fong

Full-time Caregiver

**M**um means the world to me. We have been inseparable since I was young, so we share a strong bond. Out of eight siblings, I am the fifth in line and the closest to her.

When Mum fell ill several years ago, I became her main caregiver. She has many illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, osteoarthritis and dementia, so she relies on me for her activities of daily living. I do my best to take care of her, even though I have sub-optimal IQ and caring for a person with dementia is not easy for me. Despite my knee problems, I make sure that she is always clean and comfortable, and takes all her meals and medication on time.

My brother Robin also stays with us. He has medical issues like diabetes, so he needs to be careful with what he eats. I help him with some of his basic needs and buy his meals for him.

Once in a while, my sister Lilian drops by to see us. Occasionally, the community nurses will also pay us a visit to check on our health and to top up our medication. For Mum's sake, I do my best to follow their advice on caring for her.

On one occasion, Mum had to be hospitalised after contracting COVID-19. Despite the good care given to her by the doctors and nurses there, I knew she would rather be recovering at home. To bring her home, I needed to pass the caregiver training provided

by the hospital. It took me three tries before I finally succeeded, but I kept pressing on even though it was so hard to remember everything, because I know this was what Mum wanted. I was so happy when I finally passed! I made sure our home was clean and ready to receive Mum when she came home.

Life at home is simple but happy. Sometimes, we enjoy short trips out to the nearby mall or eateries where Mum gets to have her favourite strawberry cake with tea or coffee. Whenever we visit the supermarket, I buy the snacks that Mum likes.

Because we stay home most of the time and I do not leave her side for long periods of time, I try to do activities that bring me joy from the comfort of home. I love listening to the radio, and sometimes I will sing and dance along to the music. It makes Mum especially happy to watch me dance. As for me, I am happy when my mum is happy because I love my mum!

**"If we had to describe Ms Ruby, it would be courage, resolve and strength of character. Ms Ruby is a selfless individual who truly lives for others. Despite the heavy responsibilities on her shoulders, she remains happy and easy-going. Such selflessness is a trait that is hard to find."**

**Shermin Aw Yong**

Community Care Coordinator  
Changi General Hospital

**Farhanah Fawzi**

Community Care Assistant  
Changi General Hospital



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**It felt like a big achievement when Benedict crossed his first birthday milestone... My husband and I hope that one day, he will be able to do things on his own like other children. Although his prognosis has not changed, any plans I make for our future will always include him.**

*Mabel enjoys outdoor activities, especially cycling.*



# Mdm Mabel Kerk Mei Poh

Accountant

**W**hen I was expecting my third child, Benedict, I had no inkling that anything was wrong. My pregnancy was uneventful and the detailed scans were normal. However, after Benedict was born, he required significant respiratory support. Doctors could not identify the problem initially and he required multiple tests.

Three months later, we received the diagnosis on his genetic testing. Benedict has HIDEA syndrome, a rare disease that causes multiple disability and hypoventilation, which is a very serious problem that requires long-term ventilatory support. The doctors told us his condition is not curable and that his life expectancy is uncertain.

I was shocked by the diagnosis, but my biggest concern was, how could I bring my baby home and care for him safely? After all, Benedict had been on ventilatory support since he was born. We installed a ventilator at home and the staff from KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) trained and advised me how to read and monitor the ventilator. The KKH team also helped me understand the medical terms and find the best way to care for Benedict when he was at home.

It took four months for Benedict to be discharged from KKH. My two older boys were so happy and excited to have their baby brother home. Not only were they unfazed by the tubes that Benedict was connected to, but they would also alert me whenever the alarm on the ventilator machine went off. If there was anything that I was unsure of, I knew that the KKH team was only a message or a phone call away.

Our siblings helped look after my older boys when I had to be in the hospital with Benedict. My employer was equally supportive and allowed me to work from home. He even hired an assistant for me so that I could manage my workload while caring for Benedict.

It felt like a big achievement when Benedict crossed his first birthday milestone. Not only is he thriving at home, he has also started school at Rainbow Centre's Early Intervention Programme. My husband and I hope that one day, he will be able to do things on his own like other children. Although his prognosis has not changed, any plans I make for our future will always include him.

**"Despite the physical and psychological challenges of Benedict's condition, Mdm Kerk has shown great courage and adaptability to provide excellent care for her son. Her optimism and dedication to him is not only inspirational; it has also touched many of us."**

**Dr Tan Yi Hua**

Consultant  
Respiratory Medicine Service  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

**Dr Guadalupe Cara Jimenez Viegelmann**

Consultant  
Complex Care Service  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

**Tan Li Hoon Bettina**

Senior Staff Nurse  
Nursing Clinical Services  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital



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**To fellow caregivers of children with special needs, never underestimate yourself. Keep reaching for the horizon, no matter how unreachable it may seem. Let us give them our best so that their lives, too, can be beautiful and meaningful.**

*Salinah loves prawning.*

# Mdm Salinah Binte Parsiri

Homemaker

I first met my daughter, Anis Humairah Muchamed Elfian, through a foster care arrangement 10 years ago, when she was just a newborn. Her biological mother was unable to care for her due to Down syndrome and her biological family was unwilling to do so. When Humairah was six months old, Dr Tan Pih Lin, Senior Consultant, Department of Neonatology from the KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) suggested running genetic tests to check if Humairah had any hereditary conditions.

By that time, I had already grown very attached to her. It broke my heart that no one ever visited Humairah when she was still at the hospital as a newborn, and before the test results came out, I was already resolute in my decision. I told my husband that I wanted to adopt this baby into our family, no matter what the test results showed. My husband saw my determination and agreed to do so.

Tests revealed that she has a rare chromosomal abnormality which can cause delayed development. Nevertheless, we proceeded with our adoption procedures. Dr Tan also linked us up with the Early Intervention Programme for Infants & Children (EIPIC) so that we could learn and implement intervention strategies for our new special daughter. Humairah was diagnosed with autism and global developmental delay as well when she was five. Today, we continue to work closely with the doctors at KKH to manage her conditions and seek specialised services, such as dental treatments.

Although Humairah has high-functioning autism, we enrolled her into a school for children with autism as it was recommended by a doctor from KKH's Department of Child Development. She can read, count and do simple math. She also likes babies and gets along well with our biological daughter and other foster children. Over the years, we have learnt what her sensory triggers are, including loud public announcements and the texture of sand. We no longer bring Humairah onto the MRT, into shopping malls or to the beach, where she will get overwhelmed and have a meltdown. It is challenging for us to focus on soothing her while strangers stare at us.

I have never seen Humairah as "abnormal". She may have special needs, but I treat her like any other child and work hard to meet those needs. We say "I love you" to each other every night and every morning before she leaves for school, so that she knows and is comforted that we are here for her as a family. My husband and I teach all the children in our home that love is about expressing yourself openly and without regrets.

Taking care of Humairah reminds me of the times I took care of my late parents and late sister when they were ill. I find satisfaction in caregiving, especially when I see smiles on the faces of people I care for. It makes me feel like I have done my job well.

This is also why I have been actively participating in caring for foster children for the past 12 years. I love children, and because I have so much love to give, being a foster mother felt like the perfect choice. 13 children have come through our warm and inviting doors, and all of them have left a bit of themselves behind in my heart and gifted me precious memories.

As for Humairah, we want to see her grow into an independent adult who contributes to society. We hope that she can find a good job—perhaps in the food and beverage industry since she loves food—and be self-sufficient when we are no longer able to care for her.

To fellow caregivers of children with special needs, never underestimate yourself. Keep reaching for the horizon, no matter how unreachable it may seem. Let us give them our best so that their lives, too, can be beautiful and meaningful.

**"Mdm Salinah has inspired me to go the extra mile when caring for my patients and to view challenges as an opportunity to make a lasting impact in the lives of others."**

**Associate Professor Tan Ee Shien**

Head & Senior Consultant  
Genetics Service  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

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**We've made a commitment to each other and I want to be with him as he takes steps towards recovery.**



*Jean enjoys travelling and dreams of visiting Bhutan.*

# Ms Jean Sam Si Ying

Business Immigration Consultant

**I**t was a blissful seven months of dating Tianfu. We were very happy and in love, as all new couples are, when a life-changing illness struck him like a bolt from the blue in May 2022. He had Type A aortic dissection – a serious condition where a tear occurs in the inner layer of the body’s main artery.

I remember that Tuesday all too well. Tianfu was preparing dinner and he was taking a long time to cook the rice, so I went to check on him. I found him breathless and terribly pale. Immediately, his brother and I rushed him to Sengkang General Hospital. Thereafter, we were sent to Singapore General Hospital (SGH) for specialist care.

Over the next four days, Tianfu had three emergency surgeries. After the first surgery, he suffered a stroke and became barely conscious. He remained in a serious condition, where he required dialysis and breathing support. He was subsequently given a tracheostomy to help him breathe better but it resulted in him being unable to speak.

Due to the lack of blood flow to his left leg, Tianfu’s doctor warned that there might be a chance of him losing the limb. An incision was then made to resolve the blood clots. Two weeks later, an operation was also done to remove dead tissue from the leg.

After six weeks in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), all seemed good when Tianfu was moved to the Intermediate Care Area. However, we soon received shocking news—Tianfu’s left leg required amputation as the incision wound had become infected. As he was drifting in and out of consciousness, his family and I had to make the decision to save his life. It was devastating for everyone, especially Tianfu, who remained in disbelief and cried continuously when he awoke after the operation.

As much as I could, I would visit the hospital every day even when I was not allowed to enter the ward when Tianfu was in the ICU. Though my workload was heavy, I’m thankful that my manager allowed me to work remotely.

To ensure I know how best to care for Tianfu, I requested for a caregiving walk-through from the nurses. I moved into his house after he was discharged and became his primary caregiver. Given the space constraints, I sleep on a sofa bed next to his hospital-grade bed. I set the alarm to get up every three hours to check on him and help change his position. It can get quite stressful because I am constantly wondering if he is doing alright.

Slowly, I hope to help Tianfu to adjust to his new, less mobile life. It was difficult both physically and emotionally at the beginning, and he would get angry at the blow that life has dealt him. However, we have seen progress. He can now feed himself at mealtimes, while his mother and I help to bathe him, move him around, and assist him in activities of daily living. The two of us work together to care for him as he is about 1.8 metres tall.

Despite all that has happened, I know that my love for him keeps him going. We’ve made a commitment to each other and I want to be with him as he takes steps towards recovery.

**“Jean is infectiously positive and always presses on with a smile in spite of the challenges that she and Tianfu face.”**

**Liew Siok Moey**

Nurse Clinician  
Nursing Administration  
National Heart Centre Singapore

**Norashikin Binte Sarip**

Nurse Clinician  
Cardiothoracic Intensive Care Unit  
National Heart Centre Singapore

**Lim Jing Kai**

Medical Social Worker  
National Heart Centre Singapore

*Ms Sam’s partner, Mr Heng Tianfu, is a winner of the Singapore Health Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Awards 2023 – Patient Category. His story is on page 23.*

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**My dream is to buy a house for Mum and give her the life that she had always dreamed of when she was a kid – a life that she could not have due to her disease. If I study hard at being a nurse, I know I can make it happen.**



*Singing is Aqilah's favourite past-time.*

# Nur Aqilah Andrelina Binte Muhammad Andisufian

*Nursing Student*

**M**y mother, Mdm Haslina Wannor, was only 29 when she was diagnosed with pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), a rare disease affecting her heart. I was only four years old at that time, and I remember that she would cough, vomit and struggle with frequent breathing difficulties. She was hospitalised many times, but I did not understand what was happening then. All I knew was that she required oxygen therapy round the clock and needed an aqueous oxygen therapy tank, together with other complicated medications.

Things got clearer as I got older. When I was in secondary school, I started accompanying mum for hospital visits and tried my best to understand what the doctors were saying. I wanted to know if there was anything we could do to improve her condition. My mother became wheelchair-bound when I was a teenager and my father spent a lot of time taking care of her. I learnt how to carry out home-based intravenous epoprostenol therapy for my mum and made sure the oxygen tank was filled with water at all times.

In secondary school, I joined the concert band as my co-curricular activity. Juggling band activities and studies was no mean feat, and I struggled with helping out at home. Our rehearsals would end quite late, especially during the competition seasons. It was only in Secondary Four when I stepped down from the Band that I could spend more time with her and ease my dad's load.

Today, my mum and I are best friends. She is the main reason why I chose to study nursing. I know she dreams of performing her umrah pilgrimage one day, but her condition prevents her from travelling without a medical expert as she requires oxygen therapy at all times. To help her fulfil her dream, my goal is to

become a trained staff nurse so that I can accompany her overseas as a qualified medical expert. This is why I am working hard to complete my nursing course at the Institute of Technical Education before furthering my studies at a polytechnic.

As a nursing student, I am happy that the things I have learnt in class have helped me in my mother's care. I feel more confident about changing her dressings and managing the complex medications now that I am familiar with these procedures and medical terms.

Last December, I had a scare when I missed an emergency call while in class. My mother was admitted to hospital for high fever. She was doing poorly and the doctors did not think that she would make it. As the primary caregiver for my mum, they needed me to make the difficult and urgent decision of whether to resuscitate my mum as she had signed a Do-Not-Resuscitate order. As a teenager, this was one of the toughest, most complex decisions I had to make in my life. I had little time to think and no one around for me to consult, as my father was not around at the time.

My dream is to buy a house for Mum and give her the life that she had always dreamed of when she was a kid—a life that she could not have due to her disease. If I study hard at being a nurse, I know I can make it happen.

**"As a young student, caregiving can be draining but Nur Aqilah's positive disposition and compassion for her mother has helped them through tough times."**

**Aidila Binte Ismail**

Nurse Clinician  
Nursing Specialty Care Unit  
National Heart Centre Singapore



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**I hope to help other caregivers understand the importance of self-care. Only when we are mentally and physically well, can we provide the best care to our loved ones.**

*Jessie loves dancing and conducts dance fitness classes for seniors.*



# Mdm Jessie Toh

Counsellor

Sometime in 2006, I sensed something was amiss when I noticed my husband, Pui Kee, dragging his feet while walking. I suggested that he get himself checked, and I was thankful he did, for he was diagnosed with mild Parkinson Disease (PD).

Over the next four years, Pui Kee's condition started to deteriorate. He would feel stiff, achy and unable to function as he did before. Whenever these symptoms set in, he needed to take time off from work. As the occurrences grew more frequent, he felt bad about the work disruptions and decided to retire at the age of 55.

The next challenge my husband faced was his speech, which made it difficult for him to communicate his needs. I was anxious to know how I could make him feel more comfortable, so I tried to read up on the condition. However, information was not readily available on the Internet back then and I would consolidate my many questions to ask the doctors at each clinic visit.

In 2013, I discovered the Parkinson Society Singapore (PSS) and that was a turning point for us. I attended PSS caregiver workshops, which helped me better understand PD and how I could help Pui Kee. I also felt reassured that I was doing things right for him.

Through the workshops and activities at PSS, I made friends with patients and caregivers battling the same condition and joined related support groups. There is so much to learn from one another, not just on the disease, but also on important aspects such as coping strategies for both patients and caregivers, and available resources that we can turn to for help.

These days, Pui Kee and I are happier even though his disease has progressed to the last stage. I continue to gain new knowledge on how I can make him more comfortable as his disease progresses. I have also

found a good helper to share my load—she now accompanies my husband for therapy services at the day care centre thrice a week.

I am passionate about sharing my experience with other caregivers and am active in several support groups. Most of them will walk a similar journey as I did, and I want to equip them with useful information to help them through it. This was also why I helped initiate the Youthful Parkinson Circle in PSS for patients who are diagnosed before the age of 50.

Our journey has not been easy, especially in the early days of uncertainty when I was often frustrated and worried. Today, I hope to help other caregivers understand the importance of self-care. Only when we are mentally and physically well, can we provide the best care to our loved ones. As a counsellor by training, I have been able to self-regulate and seek counsel from friends whenever I needed emotional support.

It has been 17 years since I started walking this journey with Pui Kee. I am very thankful for the help and encouragement from our family, friends and the PD community along the way. With the resources and support that I now have, I am positive that I can continue to support and care for Pui Kee for the next 17 years and beyond!

**"Jessie's daily caregiving efforts may seem ordinary, but her dedication and commitment to caring for her husband in the last 17 years demonstrates her extraordinary perseverance. With a 'never give up' spirit, she is a role model to fellow patients and caregivers."**

**Li Wei**

Advanced Practice Nurse  
National Neuroscience Institute

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**We also have a new motto now, which is to cherish our time. If there is something that we want to do, we get to it immediately.**

*Clayton enjoys badminton and is always ready for a game!*

# Mr Clayton Hosanna

Administrative Executive

**M**y wife Nooridah Binte Mohd Noor, or Idah as we call her, is mother to our two boys aged five and two, and also a brave triple-negative breast cancer survivor.

In mid-2020, Idah started experiencing pain from a lump in her breast. We had it examined at Sengkang General Hospital and found out that Idah had cancer. I still remember how both of us blanked out in the doctor's consultation room. We were speechless, unable to process the shock.

One week later, we received another piece of unexpected news. Our gynaecologist called to inform us that Idah was four weeks pregnant. Under better circumstances, we would have been ecstatic to welcome a second child, but at that point in time, we were most concerned if it was safe for both Idah and the foetus to be battling cancer while pregnant. After the call, Idah and I cried and hugged each other, uncertain of our future. After discussing, we eventually decided to keep the baby and start cancer treatment.

Idah began chemotherapy in her second trimester. Both my mother-in-law and my mother were extremely supportive and shared care duties with me. Usually, one of us would take care of Idah, while the other watched over our son, who was two years old at the time.

When our second son was born prematurely at 30 weeks, we were relieved to hear from the doctors that both mother and baby were safe. He was admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit, and we visited him as much as we could between Idah's treatment and surgery to remove the cancerous lump in May 2021.

Taking care of Idah meant accompanying her for treatments and providing her with everything she needed, be it food, medicine or just soothing massages. I had to be strong for her, no matter how tired I was.

I am not a person who is open about my emotions. I took things one day at a time, making sure that Idah and my sons were okay and that our household ran smoothly. I made sure to set aside time alone every night to unwind after everyone else had fallen asleep. I would play games on my phone, read comics or watch TV.

Open and honest communication is extremely important for any couple in a relationship, and it brought Idah and myself closer together when we shared our feelings, hopes and fears with one another.

I am happy that Idah's cancer is now in remission. Cancer has forced us to re-evaluate our priorities. We have learnt to appreciate life more and are living a healthier lifestyle. Our biggest priority now is to create as many happy family memories as we can and spend more time with our kids. We also have a new motto now, which is to cherish our time. If there is something that we want to do, we get to it immediately.

**"Clayton's dedication to his wife and family showed me that love withstands all obstacles in life. His perseverance and unwavering support for his wife inspired the care team, and we are moved by his resilience."**

**Sumathi Sagayamary D/O Lourdusamy**

Nurse Clinician/Advanced Practice Nurse  
Sengkang General Hospital

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**As we see our friends get married and start their families, we have come to accept that our lives will take a different path. But as long as we have each other, I am contented no matter what path life takes us.**



*Ronnie loves to exercise and keep fit!*

# Mr Pang Ronnie

Teacher

**M**y wife Deborah and I first met in 2011 at the school where I taught. I had been teaching for several years when she joined as a trainee teacher. We started going out in a group with our colleagues. Deborah and I got along very well, and I was drawn to her bubbly and easy-going personality. That was how we started dating.

We enjoyed each other's company and went everywhere together, just like any other loving couple. In particular, we loved nights out at museums, so much so that I proposed to her at the MINT Museum of Toys. With the help of the museum staff and two close friends, we placed the ring in one of the display shelves. Deborah walked by and as she was gazing at the ring, I popped the question.

However, our lives changed when Deborah was diagnosed with kidney failure in 2013. She wanted to call off the wedding after hearing the news, and even suggested that we go our separate ways. Even though I was upset and shocked by the news, I understood that she needed time to come to terms with her condition. I reassured her that no matter what lay ahead, I would walk the journey with her.

Prior to her diagnosis, we would take part in events like vertical marathons and 5km runs. We could no longer do so when she got hospitalised, but we gradually picked things up again—albeit at a much slower pace—after her condition stabilised. Just recently, we participated in a 3.5km Jurassic Mile walk with our families.

Living with a chronic disease requires courage and tenacity, and can get demoralising, especially without the strong support from family and friends. Knowing this, I am actively involved in Deborah's care plan. Each night, I prepare the dialysis machine for her before she goes to bed and help her dispose of the waste fluids in the morning. I also help her with a hormone injection that she requires once a month to enable her body to produce red blood cells.

In early 2023, Deborah had to be taken off the transplant list after they detected some heart anomalies in her routine check-up. I encouraged her to stay positive and keep herself healthy, so that her body will be ready should a kidney become available.

As we see our friends get married and start their families, we have come to accept that our lives will take a different path. But as long as we have each other, I am contented no matter what path life takes us.

**"Mr Ronnie shows his support for Ms Deborah by participating actively in her care. His love and devotion towards her have helped make the treatment process easier for her, allowing her to adapt to home therapy quickly."**

**Luo Xiaohong**

Nurse Clinician  
Sengkang General Hospital

*Mr Pang's wife, Ms Deborah Tay, is a winner of the Singapore Health Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Awards 2023 - Patient Category. Her story is on page 27.*



**Jane's battle with cancer turned me into a better person... I prioritised taking care of Jane and helping her live a normal life as best I can.**



*Michael enjoys traveling and never says no to mission trips.*

# Mr Michael Yeap Tong Ming

*Semi-retired*

**2**003 was a big turning point in my life. That was the year my beloved wife Jane found out that she had stage four nasopharyngeal cancer. The doctors found the cause behind her severe headaches and migraines—a large tumour at the back of her nose, near her brain. She was just 45 years old and a mother to our two then-teenage children.

Jane gave up her career as a preschool teacher to undergo treatment. It took 39 sessions of intense chemotherapy and radiotherapy before the doctors declared the all-clear. However, our joy was short-lived. The cancer relapsed five years later. At that time, my mother's health was also failing. I was, at the same time, caring for my stepmother and her husband; a promise I made to my late father. Caring for so many people at once was taking its toll on me.

I would say that Jane's battle with cancer turned me into a better person. Before she fell ill, I was focused on my career and left the task of raising our children to my wife. She did a wonderful job. Whenever I faced frustrations at work in my role as a workers' union leader, she never failed to calm me down, make me reflect on my behaviour and look at the situation from a different point of view. Her illness shifted my focus inwards to my marriage and family. I prioritised taking care of Jane and helping her live a normal life as best I can.

Despite two relapses in 2009 and 2015, Jane successfully battled cancer for 20 years in total. I was heartened that she managed to see her children graduate, start their own families, and even got to meet and build relationships with our three grandchildren.

However, when the cancer returned in 2022, doctors gave Jane a prognosis of just two months. Even then, our faith kept her strong. She stayed brave and wanted to continue treatment despite our doctors' recommendation for palliative care. In fact, she outlived her prognosis by a good six months before succumbing to pneumonia in October. Shortly after, my mother also passed away. I would say that period of time was the lowest point in my life.

Although our family still misses Jane dearly, we believe that she is now in a better place. I try to honour her wishes by living my life to the fullest. Once I complete my studies at the Bible College, I hope to give back to the community by volunteering at the Singapore Cancer Society (SCS). It has been a huge source of encouragement and comfort for Jane and I throughout this journey. SCS staff and volunteers reassured and advised us whenever we faced issues and attended to our needs expeditiously. They always made sure that Jane was comfortable and I am grateful to them for the service they provided us.

**"Michael showed unwavering perseverance in his care towards his wife, Jane. Not only did he take care of her physically, but also supported her spiritually and emotionally. It was very moving to see someone so committed to his marriage covenant."**

**Amanda Tay Shu Ying**

Senior Social Worker  
Singapore Cancer Society



**Looking back, the caregiving journey was intense but I found immense satisfaction and joy in knowing that I helped fulfil my mother's final wishes.**



*Wahidah enjoys cooking and constantly explores new recipes.*



# Mdm Wahidah Binte Omar

Homemaker

**M**y mother, Mdm Azizah Binte Ahmad, passed away in September 2022 after battling end-stage cancer and kidney failure.

A year before, my mother had asked me out of the blue about her next appointment with the gynaecologist. I sensed something was amiss because she was usually reluctant to go for her check-ups. She confessed that she had been bleeding for months even though she was already past menopause.

After a series of tests ordered by the gynaecologist, we learned that she had cancer in her uterus and pancreas. In December 2021, she underwent a major operation and recovered well. We were very relieved.

A few months later, my mother began experiencing constipation. When medication did not seem to work, I brought her to the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) in June 2022 to get it checked. I was in disbelief when her doctor informed me that she had end-stage endometrial cancer which had spread to her bowel and lungs.

My mother had to be warded at SGH and I called her often when I wasn't visiting to keep her company. Initially, she sounded happy during our phone conversations. However, as the days stretched on, she sounded more and more distressed and wanted to go home. She was given injections to manage her various conditions, which she knew were incurable, and they were getting painful and unbearable as well. She spoke to my siblings and I, and wanted me to be her caregiver.

Even though there were adjustments to our daily schedules and lifestyle, as 2022 was also the year my daughter sat for the Primary School Leaving Examinations, I adapted easily to my new role as my mother's caregiver. I bathed her, combed her hair, helped her prepare for her prayers and cooked the food that she craved for.

Each night, I hugged and kissed my mother good night. I truly cherished the time I got to spend with

her. She enjoyed chatting with the stream of visitors who came to see her. In particular, she loved revisiting fond memories of the good old days with her siblings.

To ensure that my mother continued to receive dedicated care, I hired a nurse for extra support in the day so I could spend more time on my daughter's revision as her exams approached.

In late August, my mother started complaining of chest pains during dialysis, which she had been undergoing for years. She could no longer continue the treatment. We consulted the renal doctor, who said she only had about a week to live. Being the strong and resilient lady she is, we managed to spend another three weeks and two days with her, surpassing the prognosis, before she passed away peacefully.

Two days before she breathed her last, my mother told me she had a feeling that her end was near. We spent precious time together in each other's company. We chatted and I apologised for my shortcomings. She shared how grateful she was that I was caring for her, though I told her it was my duty to do so as a daughter.

Looking back, the caregiving journey was intense but I found immense satisfaction and joy in knowing that I helped to fulfil my mother's final wishes. It was her wish to be cared for at home and to be surrounded by all her loved ones up till her last moments. I am thankful that we managed to spend precious moments together while she was still around.

*"2021 and 2022 were challenging years for Mdm Wahidah. Just before her mother's cancer diagnosis in September 2021, her young daughter underwent surgery for a lung condition and her husband met with a car accident. I am touched by Mdm Wahidah's selflessness and strong faith in persevering through each storm."*

**Vivian Koo**

Social Worker  
Singapore Cancer Society

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**A silver lining that has come out of this is how much more time we have been able to spend together. Before she fell ill, we were both focused on our careers and hardly found time for each other... I am very thankful for the time we get to spend together.**



*Sean is an avid gamer who loves playing games on his PlayStation.*

# Mr Sean Chew Han Siang

Full-time Caregiver

**K**aren and I got married in 2019 and received the keys to our new home in February 2021. Like most young newlyweds, we were looking forward to starting a family.

However, shortly after we moved into our new home, Karen's health started to worry us. She would wake up from severe pain in her lower back in the middle of the night. She also had bowel problems that would not go away. It got so bad that she also had trouble walking properly.

Numerous visits to different general practitioners did not uncover any problems. All we were told was that she might have haemorrhoids.

In August 2021, the frequency of Karen's faecal incontinence was increasingly worrying and we went to the Emergency Department at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) in desperation for an answer. The diagnosis was grimmer than we could have ever imagined—Karen was found to have stage four colon cancer. She was only 28 years old then.

It has been close to two years since her diagnosis, and her cancer journey has been fraught with many ups and downs. Initially, we were very hopeful that she would be able to get her tumours removed through radiation therapy and the 16 rounds of chemotherapy she underwent, as they were shrinking fairly quickly.

However, her tumours have since stopped shrinking and surgery has become an increasingly distant hope that we cling on to. The tumours are stuck to multiple major organs and surgery would only be possible if the tumours shrink further.

Karen also has a stoma wound that cannot heal properly due to her chemotherapy regime. I used to take her to SGH every three to four days to get her stoma wound cleaned and dressed by Sister Ong Choo Eng and her team. However, commuting to and from SGH on such a frequent basis has been taxing on Karen, so I decided to learn how to clean and dress her wound at home. Today, I only need to bring Karen to the hospital every two weeks to get her wound checked thoroughly.

A silver lining that has come out of this is how much more time we have been able to spend together. Before she fell ill, we were both focused on our careers and hardly found time for each other. Thankfully, we had bought insurance for Karen before her diagnosis, so I could quit my job to care for her single-mindedly without worrying about the bills.

We still have hopes that Karen will be cured from her cancer one day. For now, I am very thankful for the time we get to spend together.

**"Sean has shown great care and love for Karen, and has always stayed by her bedside. He overcame his sensitivity to the sight of Karen's stoma wound to learn dressing techniques to clean and dress it."**

**Ong Choo Eng**

Senior Nurse Clinician  
Specialty Nursing  
Singapore General Hospital

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**When things got overwhelming, we reminded ourselves that if Sumayyah is such a warrior, we have to be even stronger for her.**



*Siti and Rahman enjoy spending time with their children.*

# Mdm Siti Abdillah and Mr Abdul Rahman

Full-time Caregiver

Security Officer

When our third and fourth children were born, they did not cry like other newborn babies. The doctors had to have them warded in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for various health complications. So when our fifth child, Sumayyah, was born in December 2020 bawling like other babies, we felt so relieved. Finally, we thought we were going to be able to take our child home without a trip to the NICU.

Our relief quickly turned to distress when doctors told us that our little Sumayyah had to be sent to the NICU in a transport incubator.

It was only four days later that we got to see Sumayyah for the first time at the NICU. We broke down when we did, because her body was red all over, including her scalp, torso and arms. The healthcare team told us that she had Aplasia Cutis Congenita, a rare disorder where babies are born with the absence of certain layers of skin. With 37 per cent of her body affected, we were told that our precious Sumayyah's condition is one of the most extensive cases seen worldwide.

As it was a rare condition, the treatment process was very new to us, and the doctors at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) worked together to find the best treatment plan for her. In the beginning, she underwent a two-stage process—the first involving the use of artificial skin to provide temporary coverage over vital areas such as her head and body, followed by using skin that was grown from her own cells in a laboratory about a month later. She required sterile dressing every two to three days, and this regime continued until she was six months old.

Thereafter, Sumayyah was attended to at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) for a different treatment regime where healthy strips of skin were taken from her thighs and grafted onto her scalp.

Through those trying times, Rahman adjusted his work schedule as a security officer to take on only

night shifts so that he could help with the family in the day. We both took turns to accompany Sumayyah in the hospital while shuttling back home to care for our four other kids.

Despite the challenges that life has thrown her and the many procedures she has had to go through at such a young age, Sumayyah's bubbly personality continues to bring joy and smiles to everyone who interacts with her. Our hearts ached watching her put on the anaesthesia mask on her own, all too familiar with what would happen next. When things got overwhelming, we reminded ourselves that if Sumayyah is such a warrior, we have to be even stronger for her. Leaning on each other for support, we pushed ourselves to stay positive and hold the family together.

In July 2022, Sumayyah achieved total skin coverage a few months before her second birthday. As she is still a growing child, she would still have to undergo surgeries to loosen the hard skin at her joints to ensure her movements are not inhibited. We continue to be proud of how far she has come. All her little milestones would not have been possible without the dedicated care of the healthcare teams at SGH and KKH.

We know that our daughter will continue to face many obstacles and setbacks as she grows older and goes to school, but we are determined to stay by her side and remind her that she always has us to count on.

**"Sumayyah's parents and siblings have demonstrated tremendous strength in accepting her rare and life-threatening disease from the beginning. Their dedication and sacrifices in caring for Sumayyah have truly epitomised the meaning of resilience."**

**Dr Alvin Ngeow Jia Hao**

Consultant

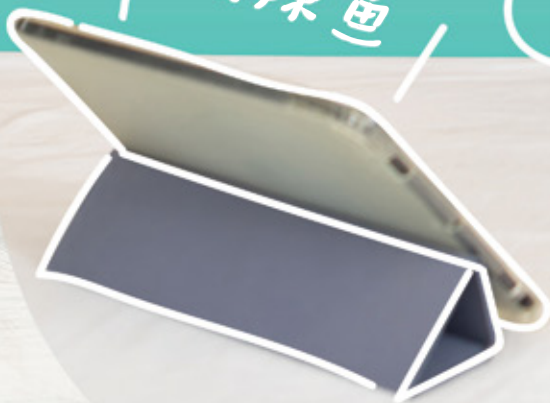
Department of Neonatal and Developmental Medicine  
Singapore General Hospital

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**It has been a year since her passing and I miss her very much, but I am very thankful that we got to have Ewe-Hsuen with us for 17 good years. I am also glad I got to spend the last eight years caring for her full-time as her Mummy.**



酸辣鱼



*Jennie loves cooking and can whip up a mean dish of sour and spicy fish!*

# Mdm Jennie Lim Chieh Nee

Operations Administrator

**E**we-Hsuen was my daughter; my pride and joy. She was born with a cleft palate, and my husband and I initially thought that fixing it with surgery would allow her to lead an active, happy life. Little did we know that this was only the beginning. Her immunity had been poor since birth and as she was always falling sick, we were advised by her doctor to bring her for further tests. She was diagnosed with Loeys-Dietz Syndrome in 2007, a genetic disorder that affects connective tissue and can cause life-threatening complications. The condition was first described and formally named in 2005, so it was very new even to the medical community.

From enduring a 10-hour heart surgery when she was just 11 years old, to having to insert multiple metal plates in her legs after fracturing them twice in two years, and battling failing eyesight at the tender age of 15, Ewe-Hsuen bore it all like a champ. Of course, as she grew older, she would sometimes ask “Why me?”, to which I could only console and encourage her. She always came round to it eventually and made sure to live life to the fullest.

Growing up, Ewe-Hsuen poured herself into her studies. I think it was her way of proving herself, because it was the one thing she could push herself in without her small stature or health concerns holding her back.

In her first semester in Temasek Polytechnic as a Law & Management student, Ewe-Hsuen scored a perfect 4.0 GPA even though by this point, she had totally lost sight in one eye and had only 20 per cent of her vision in the other. She was unable to read much anymore and relied heavily on a magnifier, as well as voice recordings of her lectures.

To show our support, all of us in the family took turns to read out her course textbooks to her. Her older sister was her greatest cheerleader, even taking the time to explain concepts with concise summaries.

On 9 Feb 2022, Ewe-Hsuen and I had a great time watching a movie together till midnight. After the movie ended, she went to finish her homework before heading to bed at 1am. However, she woke up around 3am as she was experiencing chest pains. She then suffered a seizure and passed away.

It has been a year since her passing and I miss her very much, but I am very thankful that we got to have Ewe-Hsuen with us for 17 good years. I am also glad I got to spend the last eight years caring for her full-time as her Mummy.

*“From the way Mdm Lim arranges her daily activities and planned her own medical appointments around her younger daughter’s school and hospital visits, we had a glimpse into the life and inner strength of a woman who is selfless and placed the importance of being a mother above any other personal priorities.”*

**Tay Hwee Ching Janie**

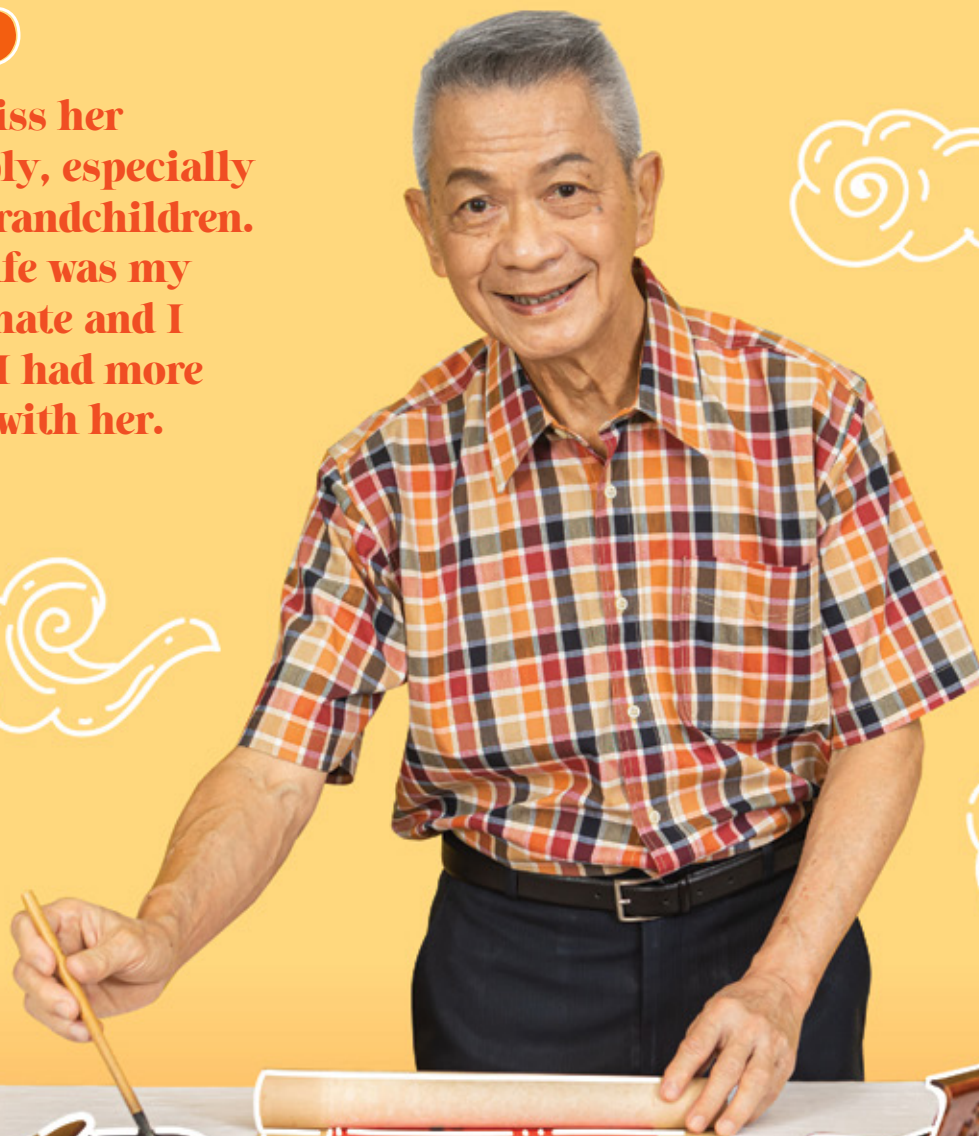
Associate Research Coordinator  
Singapore Eye Research Institute

**Dr Doric Wong Wen Kuan**

Senior Consultant  
Surgical Retina Department  
Singapore National Eye Centre

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**We miss her terribly, especially our grandchildren. My wife was my soulmate and I wish I had more time with her.**



*William has a knack for Chinese calligraphy.*



# Mr William Woo Show Kee

Retired Business Owner

**M**y wife, Chwee Gim, was diagnosed with end-stage lung cancer in May 2020, after a persistent cough that lasted for more than six months. It was a challenging time as she became ill at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Medical appointments had to be deferred as healthcare professionals were mobilised to cope with the pandemic.

When it was clear she did not have COVID-19, she was seen at the respiratory clinic of National University Hospital, where she had been treated for tuberculosis about 20 years ago.

The X-rays did not reveal she had cancer then. But when she started losing weight rapidly, from 48kg in February to 42kg in April, I knew something was wrong. In the middle of 2020, we received the devastating news that she had lung cancer, which had since spread to her bones.

Despite being an incredibly strong person, my wife's diagnosis was a blow to her. She was shocked. She did not smoke or drink, yet she was struck with such a terrible illness. Scans revealed the cancer had spread to her hips. To improve her mobility, doctors inserted a femoral shaft to support her thigh and hip. She told me she was depressed and wondered how long she could survive.

After her diagnosis and initial treatment, she was warded at Outram Community Hospital (OCH) from the middle of 2020, but I was unable to visit her in-person due to pandemic restrictions. To ease her loneliness and depression during this period, I cooked or bought food for her and brought them to OCH, and we would have long phone calls every day along with messages of encouragement throughout the day. I remember how she insisted on being discharged so that she could celebrate my birthday at home. That was how loving she was, and I am very touched and grateful to have had a wife like her.

As part of her treatment, she was prescribed a daily oral medication for her cancer. When Chwee Gim realised how costly the oral medication was—about \$7,000 a month before subsidy—she told me she was not keen to spend my hard-earned money on the drugs. Doctors said she had about three months to live if she did not

take the medication, but two to three years, if she did. Over the next two weeks, I tirelessly persuaded her to continue with treatment and assured her that money could be earned again. I wanted us to spend as much time as possible together as a family.

In early 2022, Chwee Gim's condition started deteriorating after a fall at home, and by March 2022, she did not have enough strength to walk on her own. She was hospitalised in SGH for further diagnosis, but was soon transferred to OCH's palliative ward. With COVID-19 restrictions gradually easing, I would visit her twice a day. During her stay there, she told me she did not have much appetite and craved the food she used to love, so I made it a point to plan and prepare different meals for her each day to keep her motivated. I would also massage her, clean her, and feed her medicine whenever I visited. Often, I was the last visitor to leave the ward. While I tried my best to always be there for her, I could not have done it without the support of both our sons.

Around June 2022, I noticed that the vision in her left eye was failing, and her eyes started to take on a grey tint, which gradually got worse. Around this time, scans also started showing evidence of cancer cell progression. The oncologist shared that this meant Chwee Gim was no longer responding to the oral medication that she had been on for about two years. She stoically accepted it, and the whole family made the commitment to spend as much time as we could to keep her company. A few months later, Chwee Gim passed on.

We miss her terribly, especially our grandchildren. My wife was my soulmate and I wish I had more time with her.

**“William devoted himself to ensure his wife's well-being in the ward and to make the most out of their remaining time together. Our team is inspired and touched by his love for her.”**

**Sandy Koh**

Principal Medical Social Worker  
Medical Social Services  
Outram Community Hospital





