

# SINGAPORE Health

THE FLAGSHIP  
PUBLICATION OF  
THE SINGHEALTH  
DUKE-NUS ACADEMIC  
MEDICAL CENTRE



*Celebrating our Nurses,*  
**the Pride of SingHealth!**

## PUBLISHER



## CO-PUBLISHERS



PATIENTS. AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO.®

## CONTENT ADVISORS

Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth

**Adj Assoc Prof Tracy Carol Ayre**

Group Chief Communications Officer,  
SingHealth

**Audrey Lau**

Deputy Group Chief Communications  
Officer, SingHealth

**Jennifer Wee**

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Gayathri De Silva, Celine Sim,  
Jenny Ang**



Read *Singapore Health*  
online at  
[www.singhealth.com.sg/singaporehealth](http://www.singhealth.com.sg/singaporehealth)

Selected photos featured were taken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. For all recent photo shoots, safe distancing measures were adhered to.

## PUBLISHING AGENT

**ThinkFarm Pte Ltd**

Managing Director

**Christopher Tay**

Editor

**Dang Hui Ling**

Head, Creative

**Sean Lee**

Art Director

**Lee Lily**

Head, Client Relationship

**Jessie Kek**

For advertising enquiries,  
please call 6831 1299 or email  
[advertise@thinkfarm.sg](mailto:advertise@thinkfarm.sg)

All rights reserved. Copyright by Singapore Health Services Pte Ltd (registration no.: 200002698Z). Opinions expressed in *Singapore Health* are solely those of the writers and are not necessarily endorsed by SingHealth Group and/or Thinkfarm Pte Ltd (registration no.: 201226362G), and their related companies. They are not responsible or liable in any way for the contents of any of the advertisements, articles, photographs or illustrations contained in this publication. Editorial enquiries should be directed to the Editor, *Singapore Health*, 168 Jalan Bukit Merah, #13-01 Surbana One, Singapore 150168, or email: [singaporehealth@singhealth.com.sg](mailto:singaporehealth@singhealth.com.sg). Unsolicited material will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and sufficient return postage. While every reasonable care will be taken by the Editor, no responsibility is assumed for the return of unsolicited material. ALL INFORMATION CORRECT AT TIME OF PRINTING. MCI (P) 065/08/2021. Printed in Singapore by Times Printers Pte Ltd (registration no.: 196700328H).

# Advancing nursing care through innovations

With their eyes and ears constantly on the ground, our nurses are dedicated to improving the patient experience. With a bounty of innovative ideas, these nurses have made a positive impact in various areas of healthcare.

By **Adaline Teo**



PHOTOS: VERNON WONG

Rui Qin led a team to develop a multi-chest tube holder that helps patients walk sooner after heart or lung surgery

## A heart for her patients

As a child, China-born Yang Rui Qin was drawn to television dramas portraying smartly dressed nurses who save lives. At the age of 18, she came to Singapore to take up a diploma in nursing. She joined the National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS) after her graduation in 2004.

One incident she witnessed early in her career taught her never to take anything for granted. A patient, who was to be discharged, unexpectedly took a turn for the worse and later passed away. She still feels sad thinking about the case, which constantly spurs her on to do her best for the patients under her care.

For patients who have undergone a heart or lung surgery, being ambulant soon after surgery improves the recovery process. However, these patients often have multiple tubes and drains attached post-surgery, and are usually reluctant to get out of bed, as they would need the help of nurses to do so. Rui Qin led a team of eight to design a multi-chest tube holder that helps these patients start walking sooner.

Inspired by the S-hooks often hung on baby strollers and marketing trolleys, the team worked to develop a multi-hook holder that can be put on the drip stand to hold all the chest and drain tubes. They also enhanced the design of the

## Helping patients hear better to see better

If Cheryl Kek, 47, could have her way, she would like all her patients to be able to hear and understand the nurses and pharmacists well so that pre-operative and post-operative care for their eye surgery would go smoothly.

Patients who are hard of hearing sometimes do not bring their hearing aids when they come for surgery. As a result, conversations between staff and these patients tend to get loud in the common areas, thus affecting other patients. Cheryl's search for a solution led her to work with then Assistant Director of Nursing, Ms Foo Lee Lian, whose mother had great success with a portable hearing amplifier.

Cheryl's team started a three-month trial that began in January 2021. The amplifier is worn like a headset, with a volume control that can be adjusted until the patient can hear the nurses. It is especially useful during the pre-operative stage, as nurses can better conduct their assessment and offer reassurance to patients. If required, patients can also bring it to the operating theatre to facilitate communication.

The initiative was well received among the eight patients who participated in the trial. They were happy to be able to hear the nurses, with some even claiming that the amplifier worked better than their own hearing aid. Encouraged by the feedback, Cheryl gathered a few team members to set up the



Cheryl initiated a project involving hearing amplifiers that improved communication between patients going for eye surgery and their nurses

'Eye (I) Hear You' project. They extended the trial by a year and recruited 22 more patients. Upon successfully completing the trial, Cheryl hopes the hearing amplifier can be a standard offering at Singapore National Eye Centre's (SNEC) day ward to better support patients with hearing difficulties.

"This all started because we wanted to enhance the patient experience and improve our communication with them so that patients can also take greater ownership of their care after surgery," Cheryl said.

It was a mission trip to Chiang Rai, Thailand, in her 20s, that sparked Cheryl's



**Cheryl Kek**  
Nurse Clinician  
Singapore National Eye Centre

desire to join nursing. Seeing how the local children were lacking access to medical services made her determined to make a difference as a nurse. After graduating with a degree in nursing in 1996, she spent eight years in a public acute hospital before joining SNEC in 2004. While most of her attention is focused on work and her twin daughters for now, Cheryl looks forward to travelling for leisure and missionary work again one day.

While nothing can replace the human touch, the use of advanced technology can improve the physical aspects of our job to prevent injuries and help make our work a little easier.

drip stand from a four- to five-legged one to increase stability. After 13 months of careful planning, meticulous designing and collaboration with vendors, the stainless-steel holder was implemented in January 2021, with a patent pending.

The impact was seen almost immediately. For Rui Qin and her team, it was heartening to see the patients' joy when they regain their independence with the use of the holder. Instead of five days, patients could start walking independently within two to three days after their surgery, making them fit for discharge sooner. On average, patients could be discharged a day earlier.

The multi-chest tube holder is Rui Qin's third award-winning Quality Improvement (QI) project. She previously won Team Excellence Assessment Awards by the Singapore Productivity Association for two other initiatives — the SSKIN Bundle for Hospital-Acquired Pressure Ulcer (HAPU) Assessment and Preventive Management in 2015 to prevent pressure injuries; and the creation of an electronic billing platform in 2018 to improve the inpatient billing process at NHCS.

Always on the lookout for ways to improve nursing care, Rui Qin hopes to inspire more nurses to innovate, especially through the use of technology.



**Yang Rui Qin**  
Nurse Clinician, Ward 56  
National Heart Centre Singapore



**66** Our nurses have big hearts and tremendous tenacity. Be it in times of a pandemic or in the daily discharge of care, you bring hope and comfort to our patients, and are a pillar of strength to all of us, never ceasing in your support and ability to make things happen. I deeply admire and appreciate your commitment to always give your best. Thank you for your dedication and hard work. You are truly the pride of SingHealth. Happy Nurses' Day!

**Prof Ivy Ng**  
Group CEO, SingHealth

**66** Compassion, collegiality and collaboration define the excellent care delivered to our patients and the positive interactions with colleagues. These timeless values are even more important and necessary in the new normal. Nurses stand tall in these areas and continue to lead the way forward. Happy Nurses' Day!

**Prof Fong Kok Yong**  
Deputy Group CEO (Medical & Clinical Services), SingHealth

**66** To our remarkable nurses, thank you for always being there for our patients and for all of us. Your unwavering tenacity, boundless courage and deep passion inspire us all. Today and every day, we celebrate each and every one of you. Have a wonderful Nurses' Day!

**Prof Kenneth Kwek**  
Deputy Group CEO (Innovation & Informatics), SingHealth & CEO, Singapore General Hospital

**66** Your steadfastness strengthens us, your compassion heartens us, and your passion and skills inspire us to continually excel. Thank you for all your contributions in your multiple roles, as we enable our population to keep well, get well and live well. Have a great Nurses' Day!

**Prof Lee Chien Earn**  
Deputy Group CEO (Regional Health System), SingHealth

**66** My deepest gratitude to our nurses for standing tall and rising to meet the many challenges over the past year. You have been short on hands, sleep and energy... but never short on compassion, courage and care. We salute you and appreciate your sacrifice. Happy Nurses' Day!

**Prof Ng Wai Hoe**  
Deputy Group CEO (Strategy & Planning), SingHealth & CEO, Changi General Hospital

**66** From the frontline and by the bedside, our nurses are leading so many innovation and quality initiatives across the cluster, while advancing education and research. We are so grateful to all of you for your commitment and dedication! The past two years have proven your incredible strength and perseverance to overcome national challenges. Happy Nurses' Day to all our Champions in Healthcare!

**Prof Terrance Chua**  
Group Chairman, Medical Board, SingHealth & CEO, National Heart Centre Singapore

**66** Nurses, thank you for your professionalism, courage and endurance. Your contributions have a significant impact on healthcare during the pandemic and beyond. Thank you for stretching your contributions beyond traditional nursing roles to develop innovative solutions. Happy Nurses' Day! Continue unlocking the power of nurses as a transformation catalyst, improving patient care together!

**Prof Teo Eng Kiong**  
CEO, Sengkang General Hospital

**66** We send our heartfelt thanks and deepest appreciation to our all beloved nurses. You are the anchor of strength and beacon of light for all of us in the healthcare family during these extraordinary times. We salute your selfless dedication and unwavering commitment to improve our patients' lives. Thank you for always pointing us to the true north in the care for our patients; you are a source of inspiration for all of us every day. Happy Nurses' Day!

**Prof Alex Sia**  
CEO, KK Women's and Children's Hospital

**66** Nurses, the nation joins us in thanking you for your tremendous dedication during unprecedented times. You stayed the course delivering genuine care, assuring and supporting patients, and being vigilant to ensure their safety. Heartfelt thanks to all of you for making our world a better place. Happy Nurses' Day!

**Prof William Hwang**  
CEO, National Cancer Centre Singapore

**66** Our nurses' contribution to research and education not only shape the next generation, it also significantly improves patient care. You continually do this by observing what needs improvement and innovating at work through evidence-based practices. Thank you, nurses, for always championing better care for our patients. Happy Nurses' Day!

**Prof Lim Soon Thye**  
Deputy Group CEO (Research & Education), SingHealth

**66** Thank you for your professionalism, resilience, compassion and teamwork. You have continued to play a crucial role not only in clinical care, but also in academic medicine! Thank you for redefining the role of nursing. We salute you! Happy Nurses' Day!

**Assoc Prof Au Wing Lok**  
CEO, National Neuroscience Institute

**66** Nurses, your steadfast and outstanding contributions during these challenging times inspire us. Your creativity and adaptability enabled us to move forward as a healthcare team despite the uncertainties of the pandemic, without compromising on delivering the best service and care to our patients. Thank you for all that you do!

**Prof Aung Tin**  
CEO, Singapore National Eye Centre

**66** Nurses, I have always been awed by your dedication and love towards our patients, whether it's ensuring their health needs are taken care of or by offering your signature warm smile to cheer them up. Your optimism and compassion have touched countless lives, and our days are brighter because of you. We appreciate and thank you for all that you do! Happy Nurses' Day!

**Ms Margaret Lee**  
CEO, SingHealth Community Hospitals

**66** Nursing is a most noble profession that demands a strong sense of passion and purpose. You continue to inspire us with your care and compassion, unyielding during the toughest of times. Our heartfelt thanks and admiration — Happy Nurses' Day!

**Assoc Prof Poon Choy Yoke**  
CEO, National Dental Centre Singapore

**66** Dear nurses, you are dedicated in caring for our patients, warm, professional and yet firm, giving of your best each day. These qualities shine so brightly and inspire us to press on as we emerge out of the pandemic. My deepest appreciation for all you do! Thank you and Happy Nurses' Day!

**Dr David Ng**  
CEO, SingHealth Polyclinics



PHOTO: VERNON WONG

**Siti Khadijah Binte Zainuddin**  
Nurse Clinician, Ward 73, Acute Medical Ward  
Singapore General Hospital

### Every idea counts

Sharing of knowledge and information is par for the course for Siti Khadijah Binte Zainuddin, who has been with the Acute Medical Ward (AMW) at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) since 2015.

As a lead coach for the SGH Quality Improvement (QI) Coach Faculty, the 37-year-old trains nurses under her charge on ways to improve AMW multidisciplinary rounds. She also guides fellow nurses on developing their QI ideas, and using the tools available to work on and measure the results of their projects.

To tap on her expertise in an AMW setting, Siti was also roped in to work on a project that encourages the use of clinical care pathways in the diagnosis and treatment of patients in AMW, under the Medicine Academic Clinical Programme – a SingHealth Duke-NUS framework for clinical specialties to advance in academic medicine. As doctors in the AMW are rotated on a monthly basis, nurses like Siti provide a consistent point of contact to familiarise them with the available resources. Together with her team of nurses, she guides the doctors on

the clinical care pathways, and encourages them to utilise these in their daily decision-making and treatment plans for the patients.

Siti's first QI project, 'Thicker and Thinner', was piloted in 2014. The idea came about when she noticed a patient coughing persistently due to difficulty in swallowing fluids, despite modifying the consistency with a thickener. She continued to closely monitor the patient and noticed that the thickener was added 'on estimation' by caregivers, instead of the prescribed levels by the speech therapist. Due to language barriers, caregivers found it difficult to understand and comply with the use of thickeners. This was also a safety concern for patients that could lead to possible complications.

To address this issue, Siti introduced a user-friendly pictorial guide in multiple languages, including Burmese and Bahasa Indonesia, on the exact number of scoops of thickener to be added. The guide was attached to the bedside for easy reference, and was of great help to caregivers and patients.

In 2021, Siti helped in another project to make the switch to the use of disposable biopsy sets. This move substantially expedites the diagnosis and treatment for patients. It was also a prudent move, given the need for even more stringent infection control measures due to COVID-19.

In the same year, Siti won the SGH QI Star award for positively impacting the QI culture in SGH by engaging staff from every level to make a difference.

QI doesn't always have to be a big grand idea. As long as it is effective and there is value in improving the process, it will make a difference.

### From clinical nursing to building robots

Melanie Tan, who has been a breast care Nurse Clinician for the past six years, decided to advance her nursing expertise by taking on a project management role for the new National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) building.

Slated to start operations by the end of 2022, the Ambulatory Treatment Unit (ATU) in the new NCCS will have seven suites, a significant increase from the current two suites. As part of efforts to improve efficiency and increase productivity, Melanie, a self-professed IT novice, is a co-lead for a nurse-initiated project to build Autonomous Mobile Robots (AMR), funded by Ministry of Health's Smart Nursing Ward Programme.

Melanie gamely took on this new challenge, working alongside a multidisciplinary team consisting of nursing, oncology pharmacy and operations staff, as well as colleagues from Integrated Health Information System (IHIS), SingHealth's technology partner, and Centre for Health Care Assistive and Robotics Technologies (CHART).

During the first phase of the project, Melanie was involved in gathering detailed

user requirements, including technical and functional needs. After a thorough evaluation of proposals by participating AMR vendors, checking against the delivery targets and setting outcome measures, the team is now working to customise the requirements for ATU.

"Besides its functionality, we also considered the patients' experience. We wanted the robot to look friendly and greet patients so they do not feel intimidated," said Melanie, who is excited to have this opportunity to be involved in such a large-scale project.

When fully operational, the AMR will collect individualised chemotherapy drugs from the pharmacy and deliver them to the treatment suites to be administered to the patients by the nurses. The project team has planned for five robots to support the seven suites in the new NCCS building, which is estimated to serve about 200 patients a day.

The robots will ensure timely delivery of medications, improve efficiency and free up the healthcare staff's time to focus on caring for patients during the chemotherapy treatment.



PHOTO: MARK LEE

**Melanie Tan Mei Ling**  
Nurse Clinician, Specialty Care Services  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



66

Dear Nurses,

We cannot thank you enough for the hard work and contributions you have made in healthcare. The last 2.5 years have been particularly challenging for the nursing profession. Our manpower situation has taken a hard hit, and many of you worked long hours and sacrificed personal time. Yet, you kept to your call of duty, and your strong sense of purpose, compassion and dedication prevailed. You have shone a dazzling light of hope and service to humanity! We are so proud of each and every one of you!

As the nation moves forward from the COVID-19 pandemic, the journey ahead may hold uncertainties. But one thing is certain – if we look out for each other and keep patients at the heart of all we do, we will find new strength to forge on. Thank you for choosing to be a nurse, and for making a difference in the lives of the patients and the communities you serve.

Paulin Koh

Chief Nursing Officer, Ministry of Health

66

My dearest nurses, the pandemic has been so hard on you, but I have never been prouder of you for your immeasurable contributions to keep your patients and Singapore safe. I'm especially touched by the camaraderie among you, and how you have supported each other during these trying times. Despite the challenges, each of you is a trailblazer in your own right, adapting swiftly to changes, and seizing opportunities to innovate, improve and lead in your field to deliver your best to patients and their loved ones. You are inspirational and I thank you from the depths of my heart for all that you do.

Wishing you a most Happy Nurses' Day!

Assoc Prof Tracy Carol Ayre

Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth

Ng Gaiik Nai

Deputy Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth &amp; Chief Nurse, Singapore General Hospital

Stephanie Teo Swee Hong

Deputy Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth; Director, Community Nursing, SingHealth Office of Regional Health &amp; Chief Nurse, SingHealth Polyclinics

Png Gek Kheng

Chief Nurse, Changi General Hospital

Christina Lim

Chief Nurse, Sengkang General Hospital

Wong Sook Thow

Chief Nurse, KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Amy Tay

Chief Nurse, National Heart Centre Singapore

Stephanie Yeap

Director, Nursing, SingHealth Community Hospitals

Lian Siew Bee

Director, Nursing, National Cancer Centre Singapore

Loh Huey Peng

Director, Nursing, Singapore National Eye Centre

Yeo Bee Chin

Deputy Director, Nursing, National Dental Centre Singapore

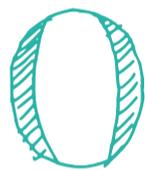
Ng Wai May

Deputy Director, Nursing, National Neuroscience Institute

# Stepping up her research game

Assistant Nurse Clinician Darshini Devi D/O Rajasegeran believes that nursing-led research is crucial to providing better care for patients.

By Elena Owyong



One of the things Assistant Nurse Clinician Darshini Devi D/O Rajasegeran loves about her job is how it allows her to care for patients and conduct research to improve patient care.

As a nurse specialising in critical care at Singapore General Hospital's (SGH) Burns Unit, the 33-year-old treats patients with varying degrees of burn injuries, ranging from burns sustained from cooking to industrial accidents where patients may suffer from large surface area wounds.

She is also responsible for allocating patients to beds and managing the unit's resources, in addition to ensuring that every aspect of patient care is conducted properly.

"The Burns Unit is very specialised in critical care. You see injuries that you won't encounter in any other areas of critical care, such as inhalation injuries and larger percentages of burnt body surfaces," she said.

The unit is also self-contained, with a Burns Intensive Care Unit, two operating theatres and a skin bank, so patients stay there from admission until they are discharged.

## Innovation that benefits patients

For two days every week, Darshini works with the Nursing Research Unit, where she collaborates with a multidisciplinary team on research projects that aim to enhance patient care.

"It is usually when you are working on the ground that you notice the things that can be improved," she said. "We have team meetings to discuss and find out the pain points that we come across in the course of our work."

During one such meeting, the Nursing Research Unit observed that older adults who are hospitalised tend to stay longer. Even when they have recovered, these patients may experience mobility issues, including unsteady gait or inability to resume physical activities.

To help these individuals, the team researched and developed a bedside activity device that encourages patients to move independently without the aid of healthcare professionals.

The resulting prototype is a portable frame equipped with a monitor and stepper, which can be locked onto the hospital's existing geriatric chairs. These large chairs are padded and designed to help the elderly with limited mobility.



PHOTO: VERNON WONG

Once the device is in place, patients can play two interactive video games using the monitor – Stepping and Sit-to-Stand – to strengthen their lower body.

Feedback on the device has been positive so far, with patients reporting improved physical function after using it. Darshini is working on the design and planning process to improve the prototype, and hopes to eventually expand its use to all patients at SGH.

## Foundation of best practices

Darshini first became intrigued by research when it was introduced as part of her nursing course. Subsequently, while working in the Burns Unit, Darshini had the opportunity to conduct her first clinical research study in 2018 as the Principal Investigator. The study analysed the effectiveness of two types of dressings in absorbing wound-healing fluids and reducing the pain of dressing removal for skin transplant patients.

Nursing research is an important way to improve nursing practices, said Darshini.

"In healthcare, the best practices are always informed by research evidence. So, the main purpose of nursing research is to improve the point of care and the process of delivering that care. To me, that is very appealing," she explained.

Her dedication to research was recognised when SGH awarded her a scholarship to attain a two-year postgraduate certificate in health services innovation in 2021. The course teaches her how to translate data into technological interventions, which will help her directly in her research work.

For individuals keen on pursuing nursing research, Darshini encourages them to seek out research clinics and immersion programmes offered by SingHealth to nurture these skills.

# Upgrading self to uplift others

Two nurses, who gamely took on challenges beyond their roles, share memorable moments in their long-running careers.

By Elena Owyong

## Stepping up for a new role

When Senior Nurse Manager Elizabeth Leong set foot on Sengkang General Hospital's (SKH) construction site in 2017, she could not imagine how it would look like when it was completed.

"It was all concrete. There were no ceiling boards and I could see the exposed pipes," said the 38-year-old. Donning safety gear and a helmet, Elizabeth was there to inspect the site, as part of her work to set up the new hospital.

"We walked around in *Phua Chu Kang* boots! It was eye-opening and a rare opportunity to see a hospital in its raw state," she added.

The journey to establish SKH began in December 2014 at Singapore General Hospital (SGH), when Elizabeth volunteered to be part of a team tasked with setting up the first internal medicine ward at SKH. The team was made up of SGH staff from different departments, so they had to figure out issues such as aligning clinical workflows while preparing the ward to be operational.

At that time, Elizabeth was a Nurse Clinician at SGH who handled clinical matters. She did not have any experience in setting up a hospital or a ward, but volunteered to join the pioneering team to try something new. Though daunting, she was excited to take on new responsibilities and challenges.

The entire process took close to four years – from setting up the first ward in SGH in 2014 to subsequently moving to Alexandra Hospital to set up a ward there, and finally to SKH in 2018. When SKH was under construction, Elizabeth and her team had to ensure that the wards were operationally ready. The tasks included inspecting the site for defects such as sharp edges and cracked surfaces, standardising the layout of items for over 30 inpatient wards, and reviewing the numerous clinical and operational workflows.

"Our team even spent a night in the wards to experience the stay from a patient's perspective and participated in synchronised flushing of the toilets to stress-test the plumbing," said Elizabeth.

One of the biggest challenges the nursing team faced was dealing with changes on the ground. For instance, plans were subjected to changes because of issues such as delayed construction timelines. In the midst of it all, Elizabeth also chaired the organising team of SKH's first Nurses' Day celebrations in July 2018, before the hospital's official opening in August.

Elizabeth counts the experience of setting up SKH as a defining moment in her 19-year career as a nurse. Besides forging new friendships with her team, the experience also honed her leadership skills, and improved her ability to guide and empower others.



PHOTOS: VERNON WONG

“Patient care is our top priority. When times get tough, I remember my purpose and that helps me find the determination to carry on.”



“We give patients medicine and also dress their wounds, but most of all, nursing is about a calling to care. When we take time to build rapport with our patients, we make a difference by putting the human touch and the care in healthcare.”

## Making a difference in patients' lives

Principal Enrolled Nurse Fatimah Binte Taha Suhaimi, 54, knows that the little things nurses do can improve a patient's recovery journey. A veteran in the nursing profession with 33 years of experience under her belt, Fatimah recounted a memorable experience at Changi General Hospital (CGH) with a teenage patient who had a bad fall.

"The patient's hair was matted and caked in blood, but she did not want it cut off. So, I applied hair oil every night, and after a few days, I managed to wash off the blood using my conditioner."

"She was so happy to be able to keep her hair! When a patient is sick and feeling down, little things like that can make them feel better," Fatimah explained.

Upon graduating from the former School of Nursing in 1989, Fatimah was deployed to the Institute of Health (now known as the Health Promotion Board) to carry out immunisations and health checks in schools for a year. She then worked at a private hospital in the subsequent year. Following a relocation to the United Kingdom, Fatimah worked as an agency nurse, caring for a wide spectrum of patients for the next 10 years until her return to Singapore in 2001, when she joined CGH.

With the wealth of experience gained in various nursing roles over the decades, Fatimah remains convinced that the passion to care makes all the difference.

"It's really about nursing care – keeping the patients' best interests in mind, and the hands-on patient care not found in the manuals but gained from many years of experience. Even for simpler things like preventing pressure injuries, there are best practices learnt through hands-on action and accumulated knowledge through the years of care, observation and experience. These are things that we pass down to the junior nurses, which simply cannot be replaced by technology or machines," she said.

Fatimah's steadfast dedication to excellent care from the heart shines through, and her exemplary professionalism has been recognised and affirmed throughout her long career. Most recently, Fatimah was the Overall Champion at the 14<sup>th</sup> Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award for Enrolled Nurses in 2020. This is the highest accolade given to enrolled nurses in Singapore, in recognition of outstanding efforts to advance the profession. Other awards she has bagged include the SingHealth Nursing Award for Enrolled Nurses in 2018, Nurses' Merit Award in 2012, and the CGH Service Awards in 2005 and 2006.

Patients are not the only ones impacted by Fatimah's passion and generous care. Today, her eldest son works as a nurse in CGH's surgical ward, while her younger son will join the profession next year. And the reason is clear when Fatimah shares the mantra she often tells her sons, which also aptly sums up her conviction in the love for nursing: "If you want to give, give abundantly and sincerely from your heart."

# Levelling up on patient care

Besides being adept at what they do, these nurses, with their extraordinary passion and heart for providing care, spare no effort in improving the life of every patient who crosses their paths.

By Adaline Teo

## Powering a close-knit community

An oncology-trained nurse who has been working in KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) since 2004, Teresa Ng has a heart for breast cancer patients.

Her dedication to cancer patients began when she was just a teenager taking care of her father who had liver cancer. Her father's illness drove Teresa to pursue a career in nursing so she could make a difference in the lives of patients with cancer.

Today, the biggest challenge for Teresa is getting patients to come to terms with their cancer diagnosis so that they receive timely treatment. When patients are in denial, she helps them understand the disease and treatment process, and supports them with evidence-based facts on how breast cancer is treatable and has high survival rates.

In addition to seeing inpatients and running an outpatient clinic, Teresa

chairs a breast cancer support group, KK Alpine Blossoms Breast Cancer Support Group, at KKH – a role she has embraced since 2009.

"Patients need support and reassurance not just during diagnosis and treatment, but also after recovery, as there is always a fear of relapse. This is where the support group comes in handy and it is something I am passionate about," she said.

The support group runs a Blossom Buddy programme, where volunteers, who are breast cancer survivors, share their experiences to help newly diagnosed patients come to terms with their condition. Teresa helps by addressing questions on treatment plans. The group also organises activities such as talks on nutrition and Traditional Chinese Medicine, exercise and dance classes, choir sessions, and initiatives in conjunction with the annual Breast Cancer Awareness

*This is what I am passionate about, and I find it very rewarding when patients get better and move forward in life healthily. When they return to the clinic, a simple hello after they have recovered sparks joy and meaning in my career.*

**Ms Teresa Ng**  
Assistant Director of Nursing,  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital



Month. For its outstanding work in providing invaluable support to patients and caregivers, the group won the Singapore Health Inspirational Patient Support Group Award in 2016.

Teresa's other ventures include a project titled 'The Yarn Wonders', which won the Singapore Patient Engagement Initiative Award at the Singapore Patient Conference in 2018. The Yarn Wonders aims to provide a hand-knitted bag to hold surgical drainage bottles attached to patients after breast cancer surgery, so they can move around with ease. Funds raised from the sale of these bags

knitted by the volunteers are donated to the KKH Health Fund to help patients in need and promote early detection of breast cancer. Recently, Teresa's team also completed the 'Knuckle Project', where they tested the feasibility of knitted prosthetics that can be customised to fit patients better.

The self-driven 56-year-old prides herself in doing things differently and is often brimming with ideas for her patients. Winning awards is a great motivation for her team, but her real joy comes from a simple "hello" from patients who have recovered after treatment.

## Demystifying young-onset dementia

Linda Lim has been fascinated by how the brain works ever since her first encounter with neurosurgery during her first posting as a nurse at National University Hospital in 1997. She joined National Neuroscience Institute (NNI) in 2005 and was subsequently introduced to dementia as a possible area of

specialisation just before she embarked on her Master of Nursing in 2010.

Prior to this, she, like most, had the misconception that dementia is "all about the elderly population being forgetful and getting lost".

"I learned that there is so much more to dementia that I didn't know, especially

at NNI, where my focus is on young-onset dementia, which afflicts patients between the ages of 30 and 65," she said.

Unlike elderly patients with cognitive impairment who display symptoms of dementia, the investigation and treatment for young-onset dementia is less straightforward. This is because younger patients may initially exhibit bizarre behaviour or have difficulty reading, and they tend to seek out a psychologist or an eye professional rather than a neurologist.

It could take some time before a patient with young-onset dementia

develops memory impairment, and by the time they are referred to a neurologist, the condition may have already deteriorated greatly.

As the condition of each patient varies, Linda can spend up to two hours addressing the needs, challenges and concerns of both the patient and caregiver.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Linda was involved in organising large-scale events, such as public memory screening and forums, to raise awareness of dementia and young-onset dementia. The comprehensive public memory screening was a free hour-long one-to-one session, and the results were assessed by a team of doctors, nurses and psychologists.

Linda hopes that these screenings, which were very well received, can make a comeback soon, as they are an effective platform for getting the public to come forward to receive a cognitive assessment.

Linda Lim, Senior Nurse Clinician (APN) at National Neuroscience Institute, shares some symptoms of young-onset dementia:

### Vision issues

Difficulty reading and reaching for objects

### Speech issues

Difficulty with word-finding and pronunciation

### Behaviour changes

Inappropriate social conduct, decline in personal hygiene, preference for sweets and carbohydrates



## Keeping your heart healthy and happy

As an Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) in the Heart Failure team at National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS), Elaine Ng sees patients whose ages range from 20s to 90s.

To date, the Heart Failure team has seen around 4,000 patients, and continues to care for about 1,000 of them through various programmes and consultations.

Elaine's team oversees the more complicated cases, with some requiring the use of a left ventricular assist device (implanted in the patient's chest to pump blood from the lower left heart chamber to the rest of the body) or a transplant.

Apart from clinical work, Elaine also offers a listening ear to patients who are having a hard time adjusting to their condition. She remembers a particular case of an elderly patient whose sole caregiver was his wife, which made her realise that more could be done in the

community to help patients resume normality in their daily lives after discharge.

Like an answered prayer, a generous donation received last year allowed Elaine's division to set up the Community Heart Programme in June 2021. Her team has since conducted 10 training workshops for community nurses and medical social workers. This year, teleconsultations with community nurses and medical social workers were kick-started for case discussions and easy access to advice on the management of heart failure patients. A self-monitoring health kit for patients is also in the pipeline.

Optimistic that the programme will help forge close partnership with community nurses, Elaine is enthusiastic about taking community care for patients up a notch.

*Heart failure can be quite debilitating. Through our programmes, I hope to see a smooth transition from acute care in the hospital to the community, so our patients can manage their symptoms better and continue to have a good quality of life.*

**Elaine Ng**  
Advanced Practice Nurse,  
Nursing Specialty Care Unit for  
Heart Failure, National Heart  
Centre Singapore



*Never underestimate what we do. No matter how small a gesture, it does make an impact on the patient or caregiver.*

**Mohammad Najib Bin Ibrahim**  
Senior Staff Nurse,  
Ward 58 (Dementia  
Ward), Changi  
General Hospital



## Personalising dementia care

Mohammad Najib Bin Ibrahim always knew that he wanted a meaningful job that can help people. Since completing his Advanced Diploma in Gerontology in 2019, he has done just that, as part of the multidisciplinary care team at the dementia ward in Changi General Hospital.

The team, comprising doctors, ward nurses and Allied Health Professionals, adopts a Person-Centred Care (PCC) model to care for dementia or elderly patients who are cognitively impaired. The individualised care plan aims to meet the patients' needs based on their interests, remaining cognitive abilities, personal routines and preferences — an approach that focuses on the person with dementia, rather than the disease.

The PCC model of care begins with ward nurses like Najib getting to know the patient through an in-depth 'knowing a person' questionnaire with the family. This questionnaire sheds light on the patient's lifestyle habits, preferences and hobbies, and aids the team in customising care for persons with dementia.

"For instance, pre-morbid sleeping habits may surface similarly to symptoms of sleep-wake reversal, and

the PCC model of care helps avoid unnecessary medical intervention," Najib explained.

Engagement is key for the patients' well-being and reduction of behavioural issues. Through understanding the patients' preferences and hobbies, activities such as music, art and gardening therapy can be customised to engage persons with dementia in a meaningful way as part of their care plans.

For nurses and caregivers looking after persons with dementia, it can be challenging as there is no real recovery in sight. Najib recounts an instance when he counselled a caregiver who was on the verge of burnout, as the patient regularly displayed behavioural issues. Najib encouraged her to see the patient's behaviour as a result of the medical condition and care for him as the person he is, which helped her to view him from a different perspective.

"I think that treating every patient as an individual with his or her own personality encourages me and the team to keep caring despite the challenges, and continue my passion as a nurse," Najib said.



# Building the foundation of lifelong health

Nurses are broadening the spectrum of services available in the community to enable seamless care for mother and child.

By **Dang Hui Ling**

“**M**aternal and Child Health programmes are critical in setting the right foundation in a person’s life. It paves the way for good health and better quality of life,” said Stephanie Teo, Deputy Group Chief Nurse (Care Integration and Community Nursing), SingHealth, and Chief Nurse, SingHealth Polyclinics (SHP).

To strengthen early childhood development in Singapore and bring maternal and child health services closer to home, SingHealth institutions are working together and with partners in the community.

At the forefront of this concerted effort are nurses whose clinical expertise and close community ties make them natural drivers in shaping maternal and child health programmes with partner agencies. These initiatives complement Singapore’s shift to a community care model and a whole-of-population approach.

## Integrated Maternal and Child Wellness Hub

Aimed at supporting the health and well-being of mothers and young children, the Integrated Maternal and Child Wellness Hub (IMCWH) in Punggol, where many young families have made their homes, was launched in January 2020 at Punggol Polyclinic.

It was a three-year pilot programme between KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH), SHP and Temasek Foundation. It aimed to enhance support and care for maternal health and child development through structured screening and holistic care.

Khoo Shi Min, Senior Nurse Clinician and Advanced Practice Nurse (APN), KKH, together with Joanna Tan, Nurse Clinician, SHP, led the training of the IMCWH community nurses. They also reviewed and produced patient education materials for mothers and children up to four years of age on various maternal health and child development topics.

Shi Min was also involved in streamlining the work processes to help the nursing and medical teams from KKH and SHP work more seamlessly and efficiently together.

The stress of parenting a newborn can be overwhelming, especially for new mothers. “At SHP-Punggol, we referred a new mother, who didn’t know where to seek help, to a psychiatrist in KKH because she was at a high risk of harming herself and her baby. When she returned to SHP-Punggol for her child’s 18-month screening, I was happy to see her coping much better and bonding well with her baby,” said Shi Min, who is also part of the Ministry of Health’s Child and Maternal Health and Well-being Strategy work group.

Besides the clinical aspect, nurses at IMCWH act as the bridge that link residents to resources that can improve their health and lives. “These programmes equip people with information on areas such as preconception health, motherhood preparation and self-care,” said Stephanie.

Now run independently by community nurses, IMCWH is a free service for all Singaporeans and permanent residents who live in Punggol. There are plans to expand this programme in other SHPs in future.

## Advancing maternal and child health through nursing education

The success of IMCWH inspired Shi Min to do more to enhance support and care for women and children. She worked with KKH’s Department of Advanced Nursing Education and SingHealth Academy College of Clinical Nursing to develop the Graduate Certificate in Advanced Clinical Care for Women and Children. Launched in March 2022, the programme focused on nurses working with women and children in the community.

The eight-month long programme covers a range of modules, including foundation in care provision for women and children, women’s health across the

Stephanie Teo

PHOTO: SINGHEALTH POLYCLINICS

Wong Sook Thow

PHOTO: MARK LEE

Khoo Shi Min

PHOTOS: MARK LEE

Lindy Koh



PHOTOS: VERNON WONG

## Breastfeeding tips

Did you know that you can visit the polyclinic for help if you need advice on breastfeeding? Lindy Koh Ai Keng, Nurse Manager, SHP-Sengkang, trains community nurses in the lactation skills enhancement programme, which aims to assist new mothers in their breastfeeding journey. The community nurses are trained to guide mothers on latching techniques, breastfeeding positions, management of common issues, and how to increase milk supply.

She shares some tips for breastfeeding mothers:

- Be consistent with the breastfeeding routine and avoid bottle-feed at night.
- Pumping does not produce as much milk as latching. Latching allows the body to know how much milk the baby needs, and the milk supply will naturally increase in tandem with the baby’s growth. It is recommended that babies be breastfed for two years.
- Fenugreek supplements and foods like unripe papaya and papaya milk fish soup can help boost milk supply. It is also important for mothers to keep hydrated.
- Breastfeeding is an effective way to lose postpartum weight.
- Fathers are encouraged to be more supportive and play an active role in other areas of parenting, so breastfeeding mothers can have sufficient rest.



lifespan, women in pregnancy and child's health from birth to pre-school, which are taught by specialists, Nurse Clinicians and APNs from KKH.

"SingHealth community nurses are trained to manage chronic illnesses. However, this programme enables them to pick up new and specialised skills to better care for new mothers and children," said Stephanie, who is actively involved in nurturing future-ready nurses at SingHealth with expanded skill sets to meet emerging needs in the community, and integrating nursing care practices and processes across the continuum of care.

### Plans for a more holistic approach under way

"A family's financial situation can impact their overall health, as they tend to prioritise other concerns before their own health and well-being. SingHealth nurses are developing programmes that bring together agencies that can offer support services and make them more accessible to the families," said Wong Sook Thow, Chief Nurse (Nursing Transformation), SingHealth, and Chief Nurse, KKH.

Paediatricians, nurses and APNs from KKH are collaborating with community nurses from Sengkang General Hospital and community partners to build capability in assessing children's developmental milestones and vaccination schedules, and inculcating the right lifestyle habits.

Such programmes are essential because children to be orientated towards seeking healthy behaviours from young. This is where community nurses play a crucial role to ensure that the next generation is educated and empowered, so that they can continue to live well and take greater ownership of their own health.

"A healthy baby grows up to be a healthy adult. It's not about adding years to your life; it's about adding life to your years. It is about living to a ripe old age, and enjoying the journey," said Sook Thow.

IMCWH is located at selected SHPs and aims to prevent early-childhood obesity, improve vaccine knowledge and compliance, increase breastfeeding rate, and provide anticipatory guidance on parenting and injury prevention. Cases that require follow-ups are referred to KKH for early intervention.

It also provides screening for mothers and children who visit the SHPs for immunisation and development assessment. For children, screening includes child development, nutrition and growth, and enhanced assessment tools for early detection of developmental delays and autism at 18 and 30 months. To support the health of mothers, IMCWH provides postnatal depression screening, lactation support and management for women who had gestational diabetes.

For more information on IMCWH, scan the QR code:



PHOTOS: MARK LEE



Clara was a part of Michael's journey, as he progressed from a newborn who needed support from numerous machines to a five-year-old boy who is able to walk well and communicate via sign language.

## Care at your doorstep

For children with specialised needs, home care nurses are a pillar of support

By Dang Hui Ling



As a biomedical engineer by training, Clara Lam made a career switch to nursing 13 years ago to fulfil her passion of caring for paediatric patients through the Career Conversion Programme. After seven years in the Children's Intensive Care Unit at KKH, she moved on to her current role in the Children's Complex and Home Care Services department. Clara works closely with families and caregivers of children with complex conditions who rely on medical equipment for basic needs, to support and care for them.

"I chose to work in KKH because I love children and am passionate about paediatric care. As a home care nurse, part of my role is to help children with complex needs integrate into the community while supporting their families to establish a lifestyle for their child, which would include regular outings to the park or mall, regardless of the medical equipment the child has on his or her body," she said.

Clara's primary responsibility is to provide training and support to caregivers of children who require specific care, such as ventilator support for breathing and gastrostomy tubes for feeding assistance. Clara teaches caregivers how to remove secretions from the child's nose, mouth or tracheostoma (an opening in the throat for a trach tube), as well as emergency care skills like basic cardiac life support.

Clara also goes on home visits to check on the child's condition, ensure that the caregivers are coping well, and monitor the appropriate placement of medical equipment in the patient's home. These visits help her assess the home environment, revise care procedures where required, and address the patient or caregivers' concerns. Children who may require further medical assistance will be referred to their doctor, while caregivers who may be facing difficulties coping with home care will be offered

the necessary support.

### A special bond

Patients under Clara's care range from newborns to 18-year-olds. Some require support while undergoing treatment or therapy, while other patients with genetic conditions may require lifelong care. Through regular interactions with caregivers, Clara would often find herself becoming a friend or a shoulder to lean on, as she supports them alongside their journey of caring for the child.

"Over time, we become good friends and talk about things beyond medical care for the child. I really cherish the rapport, which motivates me to continue wanting to do this job better," said Clara, who is a mother of a two-year-old herself.

"One of the parents even got her older child to be the flower boy at my wedding!" she chimed.

In addition to recommending suitable support groups to caregivers, Clara and her team of nurses would also organise annual gatherings before the pandemic. These gatherings were good opportunities for patients and caregivers to widen their support circle, and offer or seek support from other patients and caregivers whom they may be able to relate to.

"I find it most rewarding when I am able to play a part in empowering caregivers to care for their child independently. It is heartening to witness the patients' progress over the years, as their parents become more confident in caring for them," she explained.

Offering a shout-out to all caregivers, Clara said, "Believe in yourself that you are the best caregiver for your child. And we are here to support and guide you in your caregiving journey."



## Complex and Home Care Services

Launched in 2001, the Home Care Nursing Programme has evolved into a multidisciplinary department known as the Children's Complex and Home Care Services since 2018. Currently, there are 435 patients under its care. Since its inauguration, the department has successfully transited 2,300 technology-dependent children from the hospital into the community.

# Bridging the gap

Nurses at SNEC's satellite clinics ensure that patients in the community continue to have access to quality eye care.

By **Cassandra Yue**



PHOTOS: VERNON WONG



calling compelled Susan Chiew, Assistant Nurse Clinician at Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC), to make a mid-career switch to nursing some 15 years ago and she hasn't looked back since.

Throughout her nursing career, Susan, 47, has been based at SNEC's satellite clinics in Bedok, Tiong Bahru and the National Heart Centre Singapore, with occasional stints at SNEC's main centre. Appointments at SNEC's satellite clinics are referred by eye doctors at SNEC when the condition of a patient is stable. Nurses like Susan then take over the care of patients.

At each community clinic, Susan conducts observation clinics, where she performs visual acuity tests, measures eye pressure, and counsels patients on their conditions and medication regimen. She also follows up with them to ensure prescriptions are issued and patients stay on their prescribed treatment plan. Susan will periodically update the doctors on their patients' progress and work with her colleagues to set up tele-consultations with doctors if needed.

"Patients often feel that the delivery of care is incomplete if they don't see a doctor at the main centre. We have to change that mindset and instil confidence in patients, so they can continue to have access to the best eye care in their community," she said.

## Building rapport

Some may view the work of community nurses as secondary to that of nurses at SNEC's main centre, but Susan begs to differ.

"As healthcare in Singapore shifts from a hospital-centred to a community-centred model, nurses like us play an increasingly important role in keeping Singaporeans well-supported in the community," Susan

explained. "We are a bridge and a channel of communication and care between SNEC and patients in the community," she added.

Besides carrying out clinical and follow-up duties, Susan also has to build trust with the patients. "Initially, the patients did not associate us with SNEC. They thought their appointments are with an entity known as Tiong Bahru Eye Clinic," she said.

Over time and with gentle persuasion, Susan and her colleagues were able to assure patients, build rapport and provide them with the same level of care that is closer to home.

Due to the demographic profile of the residents in Tiong Bahru, Susan and her team had expected the patients to be seniors who require mobility aids or are accompanied by caregivers. "To our pleasant surprise, most of the time, the patients came for the appointments on their own, even those in their 80s and 90s. It is good to see them being independent and going strong," said Susan.

## When crisis struck

The critical role that community nurses play was emphasised during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which nurses like Susan ensured that the delivery of eye care for patients continued unimpeded.

During the initial period of the COVID-19 outbreak, Susan noted that a large number of patients failed to turn up for their appointments. "When the reported number of daily cases was high, there was a corresponding high no-show rate the next day," she said.

A silver lining, however, was that patients became amenable to having their appointments at community clinics. "This is a good thing because it helps to spread out the patient load and reduce waiting times at the main centre."



👉👉 We bridge eye care between Singapore National Eye Centre and patients in the community. Our first priority is to ensure that these patients have access to the best eye care. 👈👈

Being a community nurse does come with one drawback, Susan admits. "Since I don't have a permanent work station to set up my stationery, put up pictures or place a drinking cup, I do sometimes feel unsettled," she said. "I have a 'mobile office', where I need to pack and carry all my belongings from one satellite clinic to the other."

As someone who loves to travel, and did so extensively pre-pandemic, Susan eagerly looks forward to the day she packs a vacation bag in place of her 'mobile office' and heads to Changi Airport for some rest and recuperation.

# Bringing wellness to the fore

Recognising the importance of mental wellness, SingHealth is putting in place programmes to support nurses.

By **Cassandra Yue**

**S**taff wellness has always been a key focus area for SingHealth. In the past two years, as we battled COVID-19, the importance of ensuring that our staff keep well has become even more important and is today a strategic priority in the organisation.

The impact of the pandemic on our nurses' mental wellness became more evident as social interactions got curtailed due to isolation and safe distancing measures. Younger nurses with families also tended to be more prone to burnout due to their multiple commitments.

"In my younger days as a nurse, terms such as mental wellness and resilience were not part of the vocabulary. Today, we are working towards more structured training and support systems," said Ms Loh Huey Peng, Director, Nursing (Nursing Wellness & Engagement), SingHealth, and Director, Nursing, Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC).

"However, the old-school style of training that I received, with its substantial exposure to clinical areas, laid a strong foundation for my mental resilience, something that I hope to impart to younger nurses," she added.

## SingHealth's wellness initiatives

- SingHealth increased the number of surveys and engagement sessions helmed by leaders during the pandemic to understand the concerns, needs and sentiments of our nurses. In the last quarter of 2021 alone, 11 focus group sessions were held for almost 280 nurses across the cluster.
- Feedback revealed that team camaraderie plays a major role in enhancing wellness. "Our staff are happy to come to work because of colleagues who have their backs. Therefore, it is crucial to continue to build peer support and trust within the team," said Ms Loh.
- The Joy at Work task force was set up by Professor Ivy Ng, Group CEO of SingHealth, with the objective of helping all staff, including nurses, stay well and find joy, meaning and purpose in their work.
- SingHealth has started to look systematically into solutions for key concerns such as burnout by delving into the root causes such as working hours, processes, manpower requirements and individual needs.



PHOTO: VERNON WONG

### Loh Huey Peng

Director, Nursing (Nursing Wellness & Engagement), SingHealth, and Director, Nursing, Singapore National Eye Centre

## 6 questions with Ms Loh Huey Peng

### 1 Can you share some of the work you are involved in when promoting wellness?

Apart from my role as Director of Nursing in SNEC, I chair the Nursing Wellness & Engagement shared service at SingHealth. As Chair, I bring together nurse representatives across the cluster to brainstorm ideas to improve the wellness of our nurses, and to share best practices that can be adapted by sister institutions. Another initiative we are considering is increasing the awareness and practice of the concept of mindfulness, which is currently practised among some groups of nurses. One way to do it intentionally is to set aside five to 10 minutes of timeout for nurses to regain their composure and reset their emotions during a busy period. This initiative can be scaled up for implementation across SingHealth.

### 2 You have been a nurse for close to 30 years. How has your experience helped you manage issues related to wellness and mental health?

When I encounter difficult tasks or situations, I discover that I have certain strengths or opportunities for me to grow. If I can improve something, I will do something about it. If it is not the right time, I take a step back or find opportunities to be involved in other ways. One of the biggest changes I saw in myself is being able to adapt and be flexible in my approach to handling situations and people.

### 3 How do you keep yourself motivated?

Staying motivated is a deliberate mindset. I make it a point to ring-fence an hour every day to reflect on my experiences during the day or week. I identify the learning points, recalibrate my mindset, and then move on.

### 4 How do you boost the morale of your nurses?

I try to be on-site as much as possible even during the pandemic. Sometimes, all the nurses need is for you, as their leader, to be present as a show of support. Leadership presence in times of adversity is very important.

### 5 What is one message you would like to tell fellow nurses?

You are never alone. We all stand shoulder to shoulder with you to get through challenges that come our way. I would like to assure all nurses that the SingHealth leaders are prepared to listen to them through various channels, including their supervisors, Joy at Work representatives, peer support groups, and institutional leaders. They can also communicate directly with the Group Chief Nurse or their Chief Nurse or Director of Nursing.

### 6 In what ways is support from the public helpful towards improving the wellness of nurses?

The public can support nurses and healthcare workers by being more understanding and showing respect when speaking to or interacting with nurses. By working with the care team, including nurses, to take charge and ownership of their own health, collectively, we will be able to make a huge and sustainable impact on the wellness of our healthcare professionals in the long run.

# Breaking down barriers

We celebrate nurses who are united in their mission to break down barriers and provide better care for patients and support their colleagues. From picking up a new language to helping colleagues adjust to our multicultural landscape, at the heart of it all is the passion to help others and make a difference.

By Adaline Teo

## Her keen observation helps save lives

As a Senior Enrolled Nurse at the Geriatric Special Care Dentistry Clinic in National Dental Centre Singapore (NDCS), Ramah Prabah D/O Ramasamy is always on the lookout for patients who may need help. It is an important part of her job, as some of the elderly patients may be non-verbal due to stroke, disability or other medical conditions.

One lunch break, Ramah noticed a patient choking. The patient, who was waiting to go home after his procedure, had accidentally swallowed his gauze and was unable to talk. She performed the Heimlich manoeuvre and thoroughly checked his vital signs before he was assessed to be fit to go home.

“It is what I am taught to do. I am always ready for action,” she said, adding that she puts into practice everything she has learnt in her nursing career.

Ramah is conversant in Malay, Hokkien and basic Mandarin. For her, being able to communicate with her patients helps her do her job better. It puts patients at ease, and makes it easier for her to perform the necessary

*I love to help people. I am always there to serve them. Their happiness and happy faces motivate me to go further.*

procedures while reassuring them every step of the way.

In one case, it even helped her save a life. She was chatting with a patient who was looking pale and sweaty, and she suspected that he had low blood sugar. With the help of

## His smile represents his heart

Enrolled Nurse Romeo Jay Binoya Awayan begins each day with a smile. Whether he is helping to shower a patient, bringing them meals or taking their vital signs, he always makes it a point to stay cheerful.

“I am happy when I make others feel happy,” he said, though he admitted that it is not always easy, especially during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Romeo came to Singapore to seek better prospects in 2019. Prior to this, he was a nurse for three years in the Philippines. It was challenging at first to catch the nuances of Singlish and different dialects as well as master the different uses of equipment. But he persevered, as he promised himself to be better at taking care of the sick. He never wanted to feel as helpless as he did when he was young and did not

know what to do when his mother had a stroke.

Romeo took Mandarin lessons so that he can communicate better with patients and colleagues. Now, he is proficient in basic conversational Mandarin and can confidently sing the famous Chinese song, ‘The Moon Represents My Heart’.

Romeo enjoys surprising patients by speaking Mandarin. He delights in seeing their smiles but more than that, he finds that it helps him carry out his duties better.

“Some patients get angry if you don’t explain what you are doing, so if I can communicate, it helps a lot,” he explained.

He also took the initiative to put basic information, such as the day, month and year and hospital name, on a board in English and Mandarin to help orientate patients with

**Ramah Prabah D/O Ramasamy**  
Senior Enrolled Nurse, Geriatric Special Care  
Dentistry Clinic, National Dental Centre Singapore



PHOTOS: NATIONAL DENTAL CENTRE SINGAPORE

her colleagues who got him a sweet drink, she was able to save him from slipping into a diabetic coma. For her quick action, she received the Target Zero Harm Award in 2021.

Working with geriatric patients often means encountering caregivers who may feel burned out. As she also

helps look after her elderly father, Ramah is able to empathise. In a gentle way, she will take over from the caregivers for the short time they are in the clinic and tell them to take a rest. It may be a small gesture, but it offers some respite to the caregivers, which really makes their day.

**Romeo Jay Binoya Awayan**  
Enrolled Nurse, Sengkang General Hospital



PHOTOS: VERNON WONG

dementia of their surroundings.

While he tries to stay upbeat at all times, there are times when he misses his wife and two children

back home in the Philippines.

Fortunately, he was able to return for a visit in February to spend time with his newborn baby girl.

## Overcoming cultural barriers for love



**Muhammad Shahril & Jen Li**  
Senior Enrolled Nurse and Staff Nurse, Singapore General Hospital

When Jen Li, 26, first came to Singapore, she felt overwhelmed by the language barrier and the many protocols that differed vastly from her nursing experience in Taiwan. Seeing how she was struggling with her e-learning courses, her colleague Muhammad Shahril, 28, stepped in to help despite his initial misgivings.

“I thought she was very arrogant because she didn’t talk to me at all,” he said laughing. He soon realised that Jen was just shy about speaking English. On the other hand, she was completely bowled over by his kindness and patience.

“I thought this Singaporean guy was so sweet,” she said, adding that she was touched by how he tried hard to communicate with her and taught her to be observant when working with patients. It wasn’t long before they started dating and eventually fell in love.

Being a mixed-race couple has its challenges. For one, her mother needs her to translate when she speaks to Shahril. The communication barrier and cultural differences also took some getting used to. When they decided to get married, Jen readily agreed to convert to Islam, even though it was very challenging for her. Her willingness to take on the halal diet moved Shahril, especially as pork is widely used in Taiwanese cuisine.

Being in the same profession helps them understand and share each other’s triumphs and frustrations. Wise beyond their years, Shahril and Jen have a ground rule — whatever arguments they have must stay at home and should never affect their work.

Today, married with a child on the way, the couple looks forward to growing together in their work and family life. While Shahril is looking to take his diploma in nursing, Jen, whose mother is also a nurse, is hoping to hone her specialty skills and gain deeper knowledge as a wound nurse.

## Bonding through a shoe donation drive



**Kyi Kyi Wai**  
Senior Staff Nurse,  
SingHealth Community Hospitals

Like many Myanmar nationals in Singapore, Kyi Kyi Wai was shocked and devastated when she learnt of the unrest that gripped her home country in early 2021.

Her job as a Senior Staff Nurse at Bright Vision Hospital kept her busy, but she could not help but worry about her family, especially at times when they could not be contacted for days. The 51-year-old felt helpless, as she could not be with her elderly mother. Her sole consolation was

that her three siblings were there to shoulder this responsibility.

When Kyi Kyi learnt that many civilians were often without proper footwear in what could be a chaotic environment, she was inspired to initiate a shoe donation drive. She was touched when all her colleagues from SingHealth Community Hospitals stepped forward to support this initiative. Together with two fellow colleagues from Myanmar, she collected 200 pairs of second-hand shoes to ship home.

“I just wanted to help in my own way and pray for my family to be safe,” she said.

Thankful that her hometown is safe and she is able to call home every day, Kyi Kyi finds consolation in prayer and in offering encouragement and support to fellow nurses from Myanmar.

When the group size for social gatherings was still limited, Kyi Kyi organised virtual sessions to ensure nurses stayed connected. With the measures now eased, the avid cook looks forward to gathering in-person and cooking her specialty dish *Ohnuk Taojuay*, a beehoon soup similar to *laksa*. It is her way of sharing her culture and a taste of home with her fellow nurses in the ward.



(From left) Adeline Tanhueco, Senior Staff Nurse, Outram Community Hospital (OCH); Maritess Pestano, Staff Nurse, Sengkang Community Hospital (SKCH); Eileen Soliman, Staff Nurse, SKCH; Jocel Yap, Staff Nurse, SKCH; Anneline Laylo, Staff Nurse, SKCH; Michelle Flora, Senior Staff Nurse, SKCH; Karl Louise Romero, Enrolled Nurse, OCH

## Bringing kids to work

For more than two years, the pandemic has kept foreign healthcare workers away from their loved ones back home. Thanks to the ‘Bring Kids to Workplace’ initiative by SingHealth Community Hospitals (SCH), the children of staff from India, the Philippines and Malaysia could catch a glimpse of their parents at work.

The initiative, which was launched on 21 December 2018, provides an opportunity for children of SCH staff to follow their parents to work for a day to understand their roles and bond through the experience. In June 2021, the initiative went online and was extended to the families of staff who are overseas for the first time.

It featured live interactive sessions and videos for children aged five to 12.

Healthcare workers comprising nurses, doctors and allied health professionals from SCH were roped in to produce short videos showing their typical work day. In less than a month, the seven-member nursing team created entertaining videos that were not only informative, but also featured

choreographed song and dance routines! These motivated the children to pay close attention for the chance to win prizes during the pop quiz.

Eileen Soliman, Staff Nurse, Sengkang Community Hospital, who is from the Philippines, recounted how the team had to consider the attention span of the children when planning the line-up as well as match the scenes they need to shoot with the ward schedules. She also recalled how some of the older kids were sharp enough to notice that she was presenting in one frame and acting as a patient in another.

“They were excited to see what their mummies and daddies do, and interact with children from other countries,” said Eileen, who hoped that the videos would inspire the little ones to become healthcare workers, too.

Her mentor, Adeline Tanhueco, Senior Staff Nurse, Outram Community Hospital, also from the Philippines, added that making the videos was great for de-stressing and the team bonded over the experience. She enjoyed her role of editing one of the videos, which featured the ABCs of taking precautions against COVID-19, and would happily participate again.



# Join us! Be a SingHealth Nurse

At SingHealth, we are committed to nurturing generations of nurses. Whether you are a student or doing a mid-career switch, there are various schemes to equip you with the essential skills for a career in Nursing.

## Scholarships

Healthcare scholarships are awarded by MOH Holdings (MOHH) on behalf of the public healthcare sector. Candidates who wish to develop their nursing career with us can indicate SingHealth as their preferred cluster, subject to allocation by MOHH.

## Sponsorships

Our institutions offer sponsorships so that students can get a head start in their career. Monthly sponsorship allowances are given to eligible individuals.

## Career Conversion Programmes (CCP)

It is never too late to embark on a rewarding journey in Nursing. The CCP enables those looking for a mid-career switch to undergo training to become Registered Nurses or Enrolled Nurses.

## Return to Nursing (RTN)

SingHealth offers the RTN Programme to help nurses who have left service for 5 years or more to return to nursing practice.

**FIND OUT MORE AT**  
[www.singhealth.com.sg/careers/nurses-the-heartbeat-of-healthcare](http://www.singhealth.com.sg/careers/nurses-the-heartbeat-of-healthcare) or scan the QR code:

