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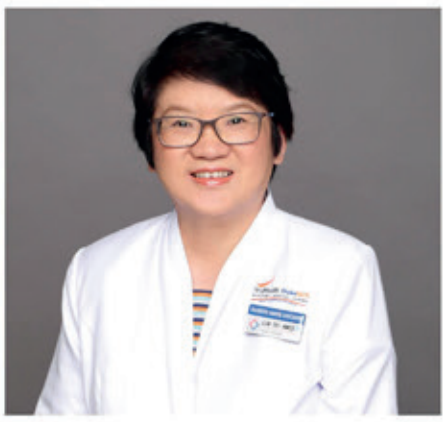
SPECIAL ISSUE

SINGAPORE Health

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

A SPECIAL EDITION ON NURSING



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Healing journeys

As SingHealth celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, six nurses who have journeyed the past 20 years of their career with SingHealth share the highlights of their lifelong passion, sources of inspiration and proudest moments.

by **Annie Tan**

As a perioperative nurse, Shuqin has supported numerous patients through surgery. Her career started at the Major Operating Theatre in Singapore General Hospital (SGH), and has been filled with unforgettable experiences, such as assisting with a heart and lung retrieval procedure for organ transplantation in the wee hours of the morning. Having gained experience across a range of disciplines, such as Cardiothoracic, Urology, and General Surgery, she joined Sengkang General Hospital in 2016 and led the team in setting up the Endoscopy Centre at the new hospital.

Ye Shuqin
Nurse Clinician
Sengkang General Hospital

"I feel a great sense of satisfaction and achievement knowing that I have played a part in improving patients' lives. It is a great honour to be able to do that for 20 years, and I look forward to contributing to healthcare for 20 more years!

Chitra D/O Pandiaya
Senior Nurse Clinician
Changi General Hospital

Chitra has dedicated her nursing career at CGH to caring for elderly patients. She was part of the team that planned and set up the Geriatric Outpatient Clinic and Geriatric Day Hospital, which started operations at the CGH-St. Andrew's Community Hospital Integrated Building in December 2014, and continues to manage them today. The clinics are focused on providing comprehensive medical and nursing care, and rehabilitation for elderly patients, some of whom may have complex needs.

Chitra's passion for patient care saw her taking on an expanded role three years ago to oversee the Psychological Medicine Centre and Neuroscience Rehabilitation Medicine Centre at the Integrated Building. She is also a core trainer for TeamSPEAK at CGH, which promotes psychological safety and a culture of speaking up for patient safety.

"The most memorable moments in my 20-year career would be the interactions I share with my patients. We connect despite language barriers, and these nurse-patient relationships fuel my passion for nursing.

With vast experience in the Coronary Care Unit and General Ward, Siti has spearheaded many Quality Improvement initiatives to enhance workflow, productivity, and patient care. She led a project to track patients' location on the SGH campus via their Radio-frequency Identification (RFID) tags, as well as a project to enhance night-time nursing procedures in the Cardiovascular Medicine wards.

She was also a Patient Navigator, where she guided patients through the tertiary, community, primary and home care aspects of the healthcare system. Over the years, she has learnt to help patients overcome their tough times with empathy and patience. For Siti, nothing compares to the joy of watching patients recover and regain their health.

Siti Fidawati Binte Jasman
Nurse Clinician
National Heart Centre Singapore

"It is SingHealth's culture to stand as one and leave no man behind. We help one another ensure that work is done as swiftly as possible and that patients are safe.

Ang Bee Leng
Nurse Clinician
SingHealth Polyclinics – Bukit Merah

Bee Leng has been providing care for the community at SingHealth Polyclinics (SHP) – Bukit Merah for 20 years. An advocate of lifelong learning, she believes in remaining inquisitive, being open to new ideas and picking up new skills. Her most memorable experiences as a nurse include participating in the Avian Influenza Contingency Plan exercise with the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore in 2006, and representing SHP to perform nursing duties in the SEA Games' medical centre in 2015. Throughout her career, Bee Leng has gained strength from the support of her colleagues, especially during tough times like the SARS epidemic in 2003 and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

"At SHP, we have a set of core values that guides our work culture, and how we interact with patients and colleagues. Our internal support system is strong and I am proud to be a part of the team.

Or Leng Leng
Nurse Clinician
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

For most of her 20-year career at KKH, Leng Leng has been caring for patients undergoing or recovering from the effects of anaesthesia. In recognition of her expertise, she was invited to speak at the Singapore Anaesthesia Refresher Course in 2016. She was also selected for the Ministry of Health's Health Manpower Development Plan in 2019, where she learned about advanced healthcare technologies, perioperative care, and management of breast cancer patients from nurses and doctors in the United Kingdom.

Her most unforgettable experience was volunteering as an anaesthesia and post-operative recovery nurse for Operation Smile in Urumqi, China, in 2008, where she worked alongside surgeons, orthodontists, anaesthetists and speech therapists from all over the world to treat patients with cleft lips and cleft palates.

"To be entrusted with the care of a patient — whether a child, a pregnant mother or an elderly woman — requires the absolute commitment on my part to give my best.

Jeraymin Yong
Senior Nurse Manager
Singapore General Hospital

Working tirelessly in operating theatres, Jeraymin has helped countless patients regain their functional abilities and quality of life. She is a leader in her field, and has led initiatives such as co-chairing the Nursing Track for the SingHealth Duke-NUS Surgical & Anaesthesia Congress in 2017.

Beyond the hospital walls, being a nurse has given Jeraymin numerous opportunities to give back to the community. She has volunteered as a scrub nurse for mission trips to Cambodia and shared her knowledge with the nurses there. She is also an active volunteer for SGH's Project GroomOver, an annual spring cleaning project for less privileged and elderly SGH patients. An avid baker, Jeraymin contributes to the annual President's Challenge fundraising event by selling her delicious cheesecakes.

"I am thankful to have amazing colleagues, supervisors and seniors every step of the way throughout my two decade-long journey. Their support and guidance have made me who I am today.

"2020 is a defining time not just for healthcare, but the world, as we face an unprecedented and fearsome pandemic. We will all remember this time — crisis, Circuit Breaker, isolation in more ways than one, dorms, CCFs, SIFs and so much more. We will speak of this time to our children, grandchildren and the generations who come after us at home and at work.

Whenever we remember this time, the amazing way nurses have stepped up, taken all the challenges in their stride and given care and compassion to all patients will stand out. Thank you so much, dear nurses! You are indeed the pride of SingHealth! My best wishes and deep appreciation for each one of you.

– Prof Ivy Ng
Group CEO, SingHealth

"The spread of COVID-19 has stressed healthcare systems around the world — Singapore has not been spared. Nurses played an important frontline role, helping to manage the rapidly evolving situation. Your professionalism and excellent care for all patients has shone brightly throughout this difficult period. Happy Nurses' Day.

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

"A very big thank you from the bottom of my heart to all our remarkable nurses. In these unprecedented times, your tireless efforts, resilience and professionalism shone through brightly and made so many things possible. We are privileged to be working among you, and are touched each day by your genuine care, compassion and positivity. Thank you for giving so much of yourselves. Happy Nurses' Day!

– Prof Kenneth Kwek
Deputy Group CEO (Organisational Transformation & Informatics), SingHealth & CEO, Singapore General Hospital

"In these unprecedented times, we are comforted and encouraged by the steadfastness of our nurses, who have responded with equanimity to the challenges placed before them and continued to excel in their diverse roles. Truly, our nurses have cared to go beyond, showing us new depths of capacity, capability and compassion.

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

"In this extraordinary year and time, our nurses have been the cornerstone of our healthcare system, and have made endearing life-saving contributions to SingHealth and Singapore. Now, more than ever, we are inspired, encouraged and grateful for our nurses' service, dedication, and sacrifice.

– Prof Wong Tien Yin
Deputy Group CEO (Research & Education), SingHealth & Medical Director, Singapore National Eye Centre

"Dear nurses, you continue to inspire all of us with your incredible dedication and compassion, going beyond the call of duty to care for our patients and all Singaporeans. In this time of great challenge to our nation, many of you have given up time with your families, overcome fears and braved the uncertainties and stresses of the COVID-19 crisis. We salute and admire all your efforts!

– Prof Terrance Chua
Group Chairman Medical Board, SingHealth & Medical Director, National Heart Centre Singapore

"Nurses, you are our everyday heroes and inspiration. Your hands turn care into action, your touch conveys compassion and assurance, and your smiles bring comfort and joy. We are so proud of you. Happy Nurses' Day!

– Assoc Prof Ng Wai Hoe
CEO, Changi General Hospital

HAPPY NURSES' DAY

"The patient disconnected his ETT tube. A nurse rushed in to save him and he was COVID-19 positive. She was quarantined and thankfully remained well. Everyday, countless nurses put aside their own fears to protect us. They are selfless angels and we are eternally grateful. Please be safe.

– Prof Christopher Cheng
CEO, Sengkang General Hospital

"Nurses are the embodiment of a multifaceted healthcare professional — they are innovators, advocates, teachers and carers. But, most importantly, their greatest gift is one of comfort and hope. Thank you, nurses, for your courage and conviction, for always seeking excellence in care delivery and making a great difference on countless lives.

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

"Nurses, you have always risen to the challenge in the face of difficulty, extended your hands of healing when patients are sick and reached out to comfort when others are in anguish. You are the heart, soul and frontline of our healthcare. Thank you so much and Happy Nurses' Day!

– Prof Willliam Hwang
Medical Director, National Cancer Centre Singapore

"This year's Nurses Day is especially poignant for me. During these extraordinary times, I am struck by your unfailing selfless care for our patients and wonderful display of courage at the frontlines. Your grace and fortitude shine through wherever you are deployed. Happy Nurses' Day!

– Assoc Prof Poon Choy Yoke
Director, National Dental Centre Singapore

"Nurses, your professionalism, compassion, and heroism continue to inspire us every day. You are our pillar of support, our guardian angels, and our moral compass. On behalf of NNI, I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation for all that you have done for our patients and our nation. Happy Nurses' Day!

– Assoc Prof Au Wing Lok
Medical Director, National Neuroscience Institute

"Always ready on the frontline, you deliver care compassionately both inside and out of the hospital. Our nurses are strong, selfless and steady warriors whom we can always count on, rising unreservedly to combat COVID-19 this year. Happy Nurses' Day, and thank you for touching the lives of our patients and the many people around you!

– Ms Margaret Lee
CEO, SingHealth Community Hospitals

"No words can fully describe our appreciation for your contributions, sacrifices, and the unconditional love and care that you bring to our patients every day. Your commitment towards patient care inspires us all! Thank you for being the hands that turn caring into action. Wishing you all a Happy Nurses' Day!

– Dr Adrian Ee
CEO, SingHealth Polyclinics

Going the extra mile

Extraordinary compassion and empathy are the driving forces of nurses who willingly go beyond their day-to-day duties for patients, caregivers and those in need.

Lim Pei Kwee
Nurse Clinician
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Pei Kwee is a Diabetes Nurse Educator who guides and counsels numerous young patients with diabetes and their caregivers to help them better manage the condition. In the course of her work, she often goes beyond her nursing duties by taking time to befriend her patients.

In one case, she coached a patient on writing effective job applications, provided advice on interview techniques, and encouraged her to study nursing. The patient went on to become a nurse and now volunteers with the KKH Diabetes Support Group. Pei Kwee's spirit of giving has touched the lives of many whom she has come in contact with.

"I feel privileged to be able to reach out to our patients. It is so rewarding to see them overcome challenges and become stronger at their own pace. I am inspired by their resilience and perseverance.

Adele Woon
Senior Staff Nurse
National Cancer Centre Singapore

As an oncology nurse, Adele is responsible for administering chemotherapy for cancer patients. Outside of work, she finds fulfilment in volunteering, both locally and overseas. She has been part of overseas medical missions that provided health screening to villagers in Yunnan, China, and helped improve infrastructure and sanitation in rural Cambodia.

Closer to home, she volunteers with HealthServe, a non-profit organisation that provides medical care to migrant workers. She performs basic nursing tasks such as dressing wounds, taking blood, and dispensing and administering medication at clinic sessions.

This year, Adele stepped forward to support the national efforts to contain COVID-19. Before officially returning to work at NCCS after completing her Master of Nursing programme at National University of Singapore, she volunteered at the Community Care Facility (CCF) at Singapore EXPO. Adele was involved in setting up and improving the workflow at the sick bays and also performed swab tests for patients.

Adele attending to an elderly villager in Thailand.

"I find meaning in journeying through the ups and downs with my patients. I hope to improve myself to be a better nurse and to do more for my patients. It is my dream to be able to use my nursing knowledge and skills to give back to the community.

Moh Yoke Ping
Nurse Clinician
Sengkang General Hospital

Yoke Ping is a nutrition nurse who looks after patients requiring total administration of nutrients intravenously or through feeding tubes.

In 2016, Yoke Ping supported the wife of a patient who was severely ill. After the patient was discharged from the hospital, she visited the couple to lend emotional support to the patient's wife and taught her how to care for him. Because of her compassionate nature, Yoke Ping even purchased daily necessities for them to alleviate their financial burden. When the patient passed away several months later, the dedicated nurse maintained her friendship with his wife and made sure that she was coping well with the loss.

In her free time, Yoke Ping volunteers at Chong Hua Tong Tou Teck Hwee and visits the elderly at Society for the Aged Sick in Hougang.

"I am motivated by the courage and tenacity of my patients, especially when they are going through a tough time. Serving my patients and extending a hand to those in need bring me a great sense of fulfilment.

HAPPY NURSES' DAY

"We have been battling COVID-19 for more than half a year. Your contributions and sacrifices have been tremendous. I would like to thank each and every one of you for your steadfast battle against COVID-19 while continuing to deliver care to all other patients at the same time. You have stepped up to perform your nursing role bravely in an unprecedented crisis, responding to a call to deliver care with a "higher purpose" to keep Singapore safe. This makes me feel proud of nursing. Your dedication, professionalism and tireless contributions to healthcare is truly commendable.

– Paulin Koh
Chief Nursing Officer, Ministry of Health

"As nurses, you have fearlessly answered the call to serve the nation during this pandemic. You readily took on extra workload to ensure proper measures are taken when caring for patients and selflessly volunteered to serve at a moment's notice at various care settings around Singapore. Thank you for the sacrifices that you have made, from the time away from your loved ones to tend to those in need, to the way you stepped out of your comfort zone to take on something new in these evolving times. Your resilience, professionalism and camaraderie are truly inspirational!

– Assoc Prof Tracy Carol Ayre
Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth

Ng Gaik Nai
Deputy Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth & Chief Nurse, KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Stephanie Teo Swee Hong
Deputy Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth & Chief Nurse, SingHealth Polyclinics

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Chief Nurse, Changi General Hospital

Christina Lim
Chief Nurse, Sengkang General 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

Heroes of the storm

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses went beyond the call of duty by stepping up to serve in various COVID-19 care settings across Singapore. Putting aside their fears and working together to respond to the rapidly evolving situation while ensuring care for patients is not disrupted, they experienced a renewed sense of purpose in their work, developed a sense of camaraderie with their teammates, and rediscovered strength in unity.

1. (right) Anuradha D/O Ramasamy, Nurse Educator, NHCS **2.** Muhammad Ridhwan Bin Razali, Senior Staff Nurse, SKH **3.** (left) Kerlyn Lee Mei Ling, Senior Staff Nurse, NDCS **4.** Ganchalee Sae Gan, Senior Staff Nurse, SNEC **5.** Vithiya Kaliammah Chandrasegaran, Senior Staff Nurse, KKH **6.** An Xue Qi, Senior Staff Nurse, SGH **7.** Nerissa Ramirez Lontoc, Senior Staff Nurse, NCCS **8.** Quek Yih Jen, Senior Staff Nurse, CGH **9.** Ng Hwee Lan, Nurse Clinician, NNI **10.** Jessica Ow, Senior Staff Nurse, SHP

1 When COVID-19 first hit our shores, Anuradha volunteered to conduct N95 mask-fitting sessions for staff at the National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS) and Singapore General Hospital (SGH). She also prepared NHCS nurses for deployment to Community Care Facilities (CCFs) through infection control refresher training on personal protective equipment (PPE). Her work was critical in keeping healthcare workers safe and mitigating risks of viral transmission.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
Due to heightened infection control measures, there were many changes to the workflow when conducting training. Regular disinfection of the equipment and environment had to be done, and face-to-face training had to be carried out in small groups while complying with safe distancing guidelines. With this, I was mindful to communicate in a clear, concise and effective manner. I kept a positive mindset and accepted that this was going to be the 'new normal'.

What kept you going?
Even though it was tiring to manage my usual duties on top of conducting mask-fitting exercises for so many staff, the gratitude of my colleagues, their eagerness to learn, and understanding my role in ensuring a successful fitting — so they can continue their frontline work — kept me motivated. I was also touched when members of the public, colleagues and senior leaders asked after us and wished us well. The outpouring of support was very encouraging.

2 At Sengkang General Hospital's Emergency Department, Ridhwan receives suspect and confirmed COVID-19 cases at the isolation area. He looks after these patients closely to ensure that they are not experiencing respiratory distress, and monitors their movements to limit contact with other patients. He also assists in collecting swab samples and reinforcing the discharge advice for Swab and Send Home patients.

How did you prepare for your role?
Regular and timely updates about the process changes due to the evolving situation from our management through emails and during roll calls helped us better prepare for our roles. These updates are important to help us tighten processes, such as determining area layouts and planning workflows, for the safe management of COVID-19 patients.

What was the most uplifting moment you experienced?
A migrant worker invited me to join him in a video call with his family back in India while I was taking his vital signs. His wife and son thanked me for taking care of him, and gave me words of encouragement. Although the interaction was short, it was heart-warming.

3 When the COVID-19 situation intensified, patients conveyed by designated ambulances to SGH were sent to the multi-storey car park, which was converted into a fever screening and triaging area. Kerlyn was deployed there to do triaging, assessments and nursing interventions, such as taking vital signs, and performing ECGs. She was also attached to the Mobile Swab Team at various locations to help with registration and ushering, and collating and dispatching swabs.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
Tending to the needs of the migrant workers was tough due to the language barrier. To overcome this, we used pictorial charts and online translation tools to communicate with them more effectively.

What was your biggest takeaway?
Different departments have different roles to play, but we share a common goal of giving our best care to our patients. It was an eye-opener to work with doctors, anaesthetists, allied health professionals and nurses from different institutions and specialties. This is an experience that I am very thankful for.

4 Ganchalee usually works at the Day Ward at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC), but was deployed to the triage area at SGH's Emergency Department, where she assessed patients who were suspect COVID-19 cases and assisted in collecting swab specimens.

Did you have any concerns when taking up this role?
As the first line of contact with suspect cases, I was concerned because I stay in a household of 10 people with young children and elderly parents. But I strongly believed that there would be no issue if I adhered to infection control measures. I was extra vigilant when attending to patients, and made an effort to stay healthy and hydrated as much as possible. Caring for the sick is my call of duty, and I am willing to contribute wherever my service is needed.

What were your memorable moments?
At the SNEC Day Ward, I did not have the opportunity to put on the full PPE. During my deployment, I had to gown up whenever I attended to patients — now I can even do it with my eyes closed! The group of doctors I worked with was very generous and caring. They would order small treats occasionally to show their appreciation for us. In times of crisis, teamwork among healthcare workers is especially important.

5 Vithiya provides nursing care for suspect and confirmed COVID-19 patients in the KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) isolation ward, where she performs nasal swab tests and monitors their condition. She also looks into the psychological and emotional well-being of patients and caregivers by taking time to explain the condition and care rendered, and partnering caregivers in their child's care.

How did you feel about caring for COVID-19 patients?
Initially, I felt nervous. But I knew I needed to be brave. It helped to be doing this with my team, with strong support and encouragement from my supervisors and senior management. My ward took care of high-dependency patients and those who required intensive care. As we were not trained on such specialised procedures, my team participated in a two-week attachment at KKH's Children Intensive Care Unit (ICU), which boosted our confidence.

What was the most uplifting moment?
The first paediatric COVID-19 patient in Singapore was fully cared for by my team. Before the caregiver was admitted into KKH, the young patient would cry when left alone in the isolation room. After a few weeks, the child started to recognise me and smiled whenever I entered. The caregiver was very appreciative of our efforts. I am happiest when my patients recover and get discharged without complications.

6 When the call came for nurses to be deployed to Changi General Hospital's (CGH) ICU to supplement its manpower, Xue Qi stepped forward and was posted there for one month. She also volunteered to be posted to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases' (NCID) ICU when SGH was asked to assist with the NCID ICU ramp-up. She was able to optimise her skills and knowledge in managing ICU patients through these valuable experiences.

How did you feel about being on the frontlines of this pandemic?
Instead of being anxious, I felt honoured to be a part of the team on the frontline. The experience gave me the opportunity to work with and learn from healthcare workers from various institutions. Although we had different working cultures, we gelled as a team and exchanged ideas to improve processes for better patient outcomes.

What was your biggest takeaway?
Being deployed at NCID exposed me to new work procedures, and allowed me to pick up valuable skills and knowledge to manage complex cases. For example, I learned to care for patients using the ECMO machine, which I have never handled before. This experience also taught me to appreciate everyone in the healthcare setting, from housekeeping staff to frontline workers. By working together and trusting each other, we can overcome this crisis.

7 Immunocompromised patients, such as those suffering from cancer, are at a higher risk of being infected with COVID-19. At the National Cancer Centre Singapore's (NCCS) Ambulatory Treatment Unit (ATU), Nerissa ensures that each patient is cared for with extra vigilance. For patients who have a potential risk of COVID-19 but are fit for chemotherapy treatment, Nerissa cares for them in a separate room.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
We had to adapt to evolving instructions and precautionary measures in line with the situation, so my colleagues and I would remind each other about them. Putting on and taking off the PPE repeatedly was also challenging, but these safety measures are in place to protect us and our patients, and we soon got used to it. As a team leader, I try to adopt a positive attitude to encourage my colleagues.

What kept you going?
Being a nurse is not just a job but a calling, and I always endeavour to treat patients with the care and respect they deserve. I feel a great sense of fulfillment knowing that I have done my part to keep our patients safe. It also warms my heart when patients appreciate and encourage us during this trying period.

8 Yih Jen was part of the CGH Mobile Rapid Triage team that went to different dormitories to triage and treat migrant workers. As the nursing lead of the team, she oversaw the smooth running of the team's operations, including nursing manpower assignments as well as ensuring that medical supplies were sufficient and equipment were functional. She also performed tasks, such as monitoring vital signs and conducting blood and swab tests.

How did you prepare for your role?
I started by getting to know my teammates better, as this would help us work cohesively and bring out the best in everyone. I also underwent training about the right procedures and precautions to note of during swab tests, and learnt how to run a medical post in a dormitory to ensure that we meet the needs of the migrant workers.

What kept you going?
It was quite a sight to see staff from different departments come together, work closely as a team, and persevere through rain and shine. As a healthcare worker, I feel proud to be able to serve the nation and protect people from invisible enemies, such as COVID-19.

9 Hwee Lan volunteered to be a part of the Mobile Swab Team (MST) in foreign worker dormitories and was subsequently deployed to the CCF at Singapore EXPO. As part of the MST, she visited different dormitories and did swab tests for migrant workers. At the CCF, she assisted the Hall In-Charge as a team leader to run the hall and guard everyone's safety. The team also brainstormed and planned activities for the hall residents to facilitate their holistic recovery.

Why did you volunteer to serve at the frontline?
I saw the task as a mission similar to National Service. I had worked through the SARS outbreak in 2003, so I was not fearful to be at the frontlines. It is a privilege to care for the migrant workers. They helped build our nation and now, it is our turn to help them get back on the road to recovery.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
Although the 12-hour shifts at Singapore EXPO were draining, it was very meaningful to witness the hall residents regain their health. The support from my family, as well as the National Neuroscience Institute's (NNI) senior management who visited us on-site several times, boosted our morale and assured us that we were not alone in this battle.

10 Jessica was deployed to the Swab Isolation Facility at Village Hotel Changi, where she triaged and screened patients who were undergoing self-isolation while they awaited their COVID-19 test results.

How did you prepare for your role?
I attended a refresher course on infection control and conducted an audit on screening processes. Besides adhering strictly to safety measures, such as frequent handwashing and proper wearing of PPE, I kept myself updated with the latest information from the Ministry of Health and SingHealth Polyclinics (SHP), and familiarised myself with the new procedures and protocols.

What kept you going?
My sense of responsibility towards our patients motivates me every day. During my deployment, I saw that some patients were anxious because they did not understand certain protocols. By addressing and clarifying their doubts, they felt more assured and calm. Some of them even thanked us for our patience when we took the effort to explain the situation. The sense of achievement from being part of the team combatting COVID-19 also kept me going.

Senior Staff Nurse Naw Hser Gay Thaw acclimated to the full PPE when BVH was designated a CCF.

Assistant Nurse Clinician Raihanah Abdull Ghafar training temporarily grounded airline cabin crew to become Patient Care Ambassadors at CGH.

(above left) Staff Nurse Abillar Lilac Delima taking the blood pressure of a patient at SKCH. (above right) Assistant Nurse Clinician Shaifullah Abu Bakar doing a shift handover with teammates at OCH. (left) Patient Care Ambassadors at SGH learning how to lift and transfer a patient.

The fight behind the scenes

COVID-19 is a pandemic that is battled on several fronts. Among these are nurses who work behind the scenes to ensure resources are directed where they are most needed.

Adapting to change

In April this year, the Ministry of Health (MOH) designated Bright Vision Hospital (BVH) as a Community Care Facility for clinically well COVID-19 patients who still require medical care. Naw Hser Gay Thaw, Senior Staff Nurse, BVH, took on the challenge of caring for these patients.

"I felt anxious and fearful at first because I was diving into the unknown. But as a nurse, I wanted to do my part in fighting the pandemic," said Gay Thaw.

In order to transition from a community hospital to a COVID-19 care setting, Gay Thaw and her team had to adjust to new procedures and protocols. They participated in refresher training on infection control practices, and encouraged open communication with one another to help them prepare for the changes.

"We could freely raise and clarify any doubts that we may have. We also reminded each other to seek medical advice if we felt unwell, and kept an eye on our stress levels to prevent burnout," she added.

Gay Thaw and her team got into the groove of things quickly. Besides nursing duties, such as monitoring the patients' vital signs closely, they even organised activities to keep them mentally engaged during their isolation.

The biggest challenge for Gay Thaw was getting used to wearing full personal protective equipment (PPE). She learned to cope with it by taking intermittent breaks and ensuring that she stayed hydrated. "We are used to running to attend to our patients quickly, especially during emergency situations. Now, I have to ensure that my team and I are well-protected in PPE before doing so."

At Outram Community Hospital (OCH) and Sengkang Community Hospital (SKCH), other nurses raced against time to prepare and receive BVH patients who had to be transferred to accommodate this change.

"We had to open six more wards to prepare for an influx of patients due to BVH's conversion to a COVID-19 Hospital Facility. It seemed like an impossible task within the short timeframe, but with strong teamwork and communication, we accomplished it," said Shaifullah Bin Abu Bakar, Assistant Nurse Clinician, OCH.

Other than receiving patients from BVH, Shaifullah also had to prepare the wards in anticipation of a possible scenario where patients had to be decanted from other acute hospitals to create capacity for more COVID-19 patients.

For Abillar Lilac Delima, Staff Nurse, SKCH, the frequent changes in the hospital's visiting policies increased the difficulty of managing the situation. However, she took these challenges in her stride.

"We had to explain the changes to the patients' families and relatives thoroughly because these measures were implemented for their safety. While there were many adjustments for everyone to get used to, we had to be patient and follow the guidelines so as to keep everyone safe," she said.

"When I chose nursing as my profession, I knew that it would not always be smooth-sailing. But I will see through the tough times and take this as an opportunity to grow. Battling COVID-19 has taught me the importance of being resilient in the face of challenges, and reaffirmed my commitment to the calling to be a nurse."

From airplane to hospital

As part of the Job Support Scheme announced by the Government to support industries affected by COVID-19, MOH initiated a programme where cabin crew from Singapore Airlines, SilkAir, Scoot, and JetStar were trained to become care ambassadors at public hospitals. Under the supervision of nursing staff, they were assigned to non-COVID-19-related wards to boost support in basic caregiving duties, such as serving meals and assisting patients in eating and grooming.

Raihanah Abdull Ghafar, Assistant Nurse Clinician, Changi General Hospital (CGH), was one of the trainers who prepared 70 cabin crew for their new responsibilities as Patient Care Ambassadors (PCAs) at CGH. Under the supervision of Nurse Educator Grace Ho, Raihanah and the project team developed a five-day training programme for the PCAs within a short span of five days.

"We had to ensure that the curriculum was concise yet comprehensive to equip the care ambassadors with the essential knowledge and skills, and to give them the confidence to care for our patients. This includes familiarising them on topics such as infection control and patient safety," Raihanah explained.

Raihanah continued to work with some of the PCAs who were posted to her ward for their clinical training. With PCAs in the wards, manpower resourcing was boosted and more healthcare staff could be reassigned to care for COVID-19-related patients.

Similarly, at Singapore General Hospital (SGH), 80 SIA cabin crew members underwent an intensive five-day programme conducted by nurse educators at the SingHealth Alice Lee Institute of Advanced Nursing.

They were trained in infection control practices, such as donning of PPE, proper hand hygiene, and mask fitting. They also learned how to monitor vital signs, assist patients to use mobility devices, patient lifting and transferring techniques, and Basic Cardiac Life Support and Automated External Defibrillation (BCLS+AED) skills.

"The care ambassadors have been proactively carrying out their duties in the wards. They do not hesitate to offer their assistance to our nurses. Our patients are full of praise for them," said Tan Soon Hock, Senior Nurse Manager, SGH.

Leading positive outcomes

Spearheaded by nurses, these award-winning Quality Improvement projects open new pathways to enhance patient care and experience, and greatly increase efficiency.

Bedside handovers: improving care for young patients

KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Recipient of the Singapore Health Quality Service Awards (SHQSA) 2020 Best Team Award – Patient Experience Improvement Category

> "By engaging caregivers during the bedside handover, we create an environment of open dialogue and trust. This improves the patient experience and clinical outcomes.
>
> **Farhana Begum**
> Assistant Nurse Clinician, KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Photo taken in 2019

Traditionally, shift handovers between outgoing and incoming nurses between shifts do not involve caregivers. At KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), paediatric patients are often too young to make decisions about their own care, thus there is a need to empower caregivers to play a more active role in the care of such patients.

To make this possible, a team of 12 nurses and members from the Quality Safety & Risk Management and Marketing Communications departments came together to form the Bedside Handover Team and redesign the handover process.

The team conducted analyses and used the findings to redesign and pilot a new bedside handover process involving caregivers in a KKH paediatric ward. Under the new system, outgoing nurses do their handover and updates to incoming nurses in the presence of a caregiver by the patient's bedside. This allows caregivers to receive timely updates of their child's condition, progress and treatment plans.

With closer communication, nurses can enhance caregivers' knowledge about their child's care and address any issues they face. For example, during one bedside handover session, the nurses found out that a parent had been giving expired medication to the child. Fortunately, they promptly raised the alarm and educated the parent on its harmful effects.

For the caregivers, their increased involvement helps allay any anxieties they may have about their child's condition. Following the success of the trial, the new bedside handover system has been officially implemented in all KKH paediatric wards.

Eradicating medical device-related nasal pressure injuries

National Heart Centre Singapore

Recipient of the SHQSA 2020 Best Team Award – Clinical Practice Improvement Category

> "It used to take up to two minutes to secure a NGT, but the time has since been reduced to just 14 seconds. There have been no cases of medical device-related nasal pressure injuries ever since this new protocol was implemented.
>
> **Mirana Wu**
> Nurse Clinician, National Heart Centre Singapore

Photo taken in 2019

Patients who require a nasogastric tube (NGT) can be at risk of nasal pressure injuries from incorrect taping methods used to secure the tube. Wrong taping methods can also lead to skin abrasions and infection around the nasal area; in severe cases, patients may require plastic and reconstructive surgery.

In early 2018, seven nurses from the National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS) formed a team called "Revivors" to stamp out medical device-related nasal pressure injuries. Led by Mirana Wu, Nurse Clinician, NHCS, the team conducted a survey among 150 nurses from NHCS inpatient wards to evaluate the common causes of such injuries, and found that there was no standardised protocol and method for NGT taping. The tape used was also excessively sticky and can cause skin injury when removed.

This motivated them to come up with a standardised NGT taping protocol and find the ideal medical tape. They experimented with different materials, and eventually found a fabric tape that was soft and easily removable without compromising on the adhesiveness. They also visited other hospitals to learn taping methods that can reduce nasal pressure and the risk of injury, while working to refine the shape of the tape for a more secure and comfortable fit.

With their findings, the team piloted a standardised NGT taping protocol with the new NGT tape prototype in the NHCS wards. To familiarise nurses with the new protocol and prototype, they put up information posters at the nurses' stations and provided hands-on training on the correct taping method using a specially designed mannequin. They also obtained feedback from the nurses in each ward so as to make further improvements.

The success of the pilot project catalysed the official roll-out of the new NGT taping method to all NHCS inpatient wards by the end of the year. Subsequently, the team worked with a vendor to produce pre-cut tape to save time on manual cutting.

Brightest stars in healthcare

These nurses' remarkable efforts to empower themselves and others serve as a source of inspiration for staff and patients alike.

Putting others before self

R. Kalai Senthilkumar K
Principal Enrolled Nurse
Singapore General Hospital

Recipient of the 13th Tan Chin Tuan (TCT) Nursing Award for Enrolled Nurses 2019

With more than three decades of nursing experience, Kalai lives by the mantra "putting others before self" and demonstrates this in her interactions with patients. She treats them like her own family, often taking extra care to comfort them by listening to their problems, and provide them with emotional support by applying the skills she obtained from a counselling course.

"I feel happy whenever my patients recover from their illnesses and their problems are resolved," said Kalai.

Kalai with her husband at the TCT Award ceremony in November 2019

Always eager to learn, Kalai actively participates in training programmes to pick up new skills, such as doing eSwabs for multi-drug resistant organisms screening. She was also one of the first Senior Enrolled Nurses who took up development courses to become a Principal Enrolled Nurse. This inspired many of her peers to follow in her footsteps.

Kalai also passes on her knowledge by guiding junior medical students on basic nursing skills and taking on the role of a preceptor for new Enrolled Nurses in the ward.

Outside the hospital, Kalai volunteers with the Hindu Endowment Board, where she assists in counselling work and annual health screenings. She also provides medical support for Thaipusam and firewalking events, as well as during the SingHealth President's Challenge.

Pillar of support

Sinnatamby Savithri
Senior Nurse Manager
Changi General Hospital

Recipient of the Singapore Health Quality Service Award 2020 Superstar Award – Nursing Category

Caring for a loved one with dementia can be challenging and emotionally demanding, especially when the caregiver has difficulty understanding the patient's behaviour and needs.

Savithri was instrumental in setting up the first dementia ward at Changi General Hospital (CGH) in 2015 to provide personalised care for these patients and support for their caregivers. At the ward, Savithri always avails herself to offer help and advice to patients, caregivers, and other nurses.

The veteran nurse has also contributed many ideas to improve the quality of life of dementia patients. One such initiative is the robotic pet therapy programme, which uses a life-like robotic cat or dog to calm patients who show signs of agitation or depression. The programme, which started in 2017, has proven to be successful in improving the mood of many patients, particularly those who used to keep pets.

Another programme she introduced is the Snoezelen Sensory Board, a multisensory stimulation therapy programme that uses items to stimulate the senses and help reduce patients' behavioural issues.

Besides patient care, Savithri is a peer supporter for the nurses in her ward. She shares tips on coping with stress and offers a shoulder to lean on when needed.

Despite her busy schedule, Savithri volunteers at several social welfare organisations, including the Infant Jesus Homes and Children's Centre, where she bakes cookies with the children and teaches them hand-hygiene practices.

"Volunteering gives me the chance to give back to the community and to make a difference in someone's life. It is gratifying to see others happy," she said.

Leading by lifting others

Lee Hwee Khim
Senior Nurse Clinician
SingHealth Polyclinics – Outram

Recipient of GCEO Excellence Awards 2019 – Outstanding Nurse Award

At SingHealth Polyclinics (Outram), Hwee Khim oversees a team of Case Managers who provide a seamless continuity of care for patients who have been discharged from the hospital. Having been in the primary care setting since the start of her nursing career almost 20 years ago, Hwee Khim effortlessly collaborates with Community Nurses, Patient Navigators, and social service partners to ensure that patients remain well in the community.

While Hwee Khim's commitment towards patients is at the heart of what she does, it is her exemplary leadership and willingness to share that has gained recognition and the respect of her colleagues.

She often creates meaningful learning opportunities for younger nurses by delegating tasks that allow them to upgrade their skill sets, monitors their efforts closely, and gives them constructive feedback. In addition, she constantly reviews training needs and identifies those with potential for career advancement.

"I believe in the importance of lifelong learning, especially for nurses. We need to keep abreast of the latest developments in clinical practices to make sure that we provide the best care possible for our patients," said Hwee Khim.

As someone who leads by example, Hwee Khim frequently attends workshops and seminars in her spare time. She subsequently shares about what she learned with her patients and colleagues so that they, too, can benefit.

Called to serve

Nursing is a calling. These SingHealth nurses share their motivations to join this noble profession.

Melvin Lew (right)
Staff Nurse, National Heart Centre Singapore, looks after cardiac patients in the High Dependency Unit. Patients here need closer observation, and more intensive treatment and nursing care than those in a general ward.

"Both my parents are nurses and I grew up listening to them talk about their work and experiences. When I first shared that I wanted to be a nurse, too, they tried to dissuade me as they knew that nursing is a very challenging job, but I was not deterred. I eventually convinced them that I have what it takes to be a good nurse, and they have been fully supportive since. They are my inspiration and mentors in my nursing journey. I love caring for my patients, and it is a joy to see them recover and get discharged.

Khairunnisa Jumat
Senior Staff Nurse, Sengkang General Hospital, is part of the pioneer batch of nurses who helped set up the hospital's Emergency Department, which opened in 2018.

"I was accepted into medical school when I was 21, but after a major injury, I gave up my dream of becoming a doctor. However, that sense of purpose and desire to help others in need never left me, and I took a leap of faith to enrol in nursing school. Nursing is a profession with diverse career tracks, where you can chart your own career growth and development. Being a nurse is one of the best decisions that I have made in life. As an emergency nurse, I enjoy the fast-paced environment that requires me to recognise life-threatening conditions, prioritise patient care, and carry out resuscitative actions quickly, all while remaining calm.

Chua Ying Jie
Assistant Nurse Clinician, KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), pursued a Professional Conversion Programme at Nanyang Polytechnic and joined KKH in 2007. She later obtained an Advanced Diploma in Midwifery and became a certified Lactation Consultant.

"When I was expecting my first child, I was so moved by the care of the midwives at KKH that I decided to switch careers. If I had stayed in my previous job, I would never have felt the sense of satisfaction I now experience. I cannot put into words the wonderful feeling of nursing people back to health. It has helped me appreciate life much more.

Goh Choon Hua
Senior Staff Nurse, Changi General Hospital, started as a staff nurse at the hospital's Cardiac Catheterisation Laboratory. In 2013, he began specialising in Nursing Informatics, and has since been implementing systems to improve work processes, training nurses to use the systems, and conducting clinical data analysis to improve patient safety.

"When SARS struck Singapore in 2003, I became a part-time health screener at a hospital. I observed how the nurses dealt with the crisis, which fuelled my interest in nursing. Encouraged by my wife, I began pursuing a career as a nurse. I am thankful that I embarked on this journey, as being a nurse has taught me to be caring, more tolerant, and less judgmental.

Photo: Care To Go Beyond

Jason Mok
Staff Nurse, Singapore National Eye Centre, is a scrub nurse who assists surgeons directly during surgeries. He anticipates the needs of the surgeons and hands the specific instruments for their use, ensuring a smooth procedure and reducing the time taken for surgery.

"I did not choose to be a nurse originally — I only joined the nursing course in ITE after some persuasion from my parents. But my first nursing stint at the Singapore General Hospital changed my mind about the vocation. I was a ward nurse then, and took care of an elderly patient who was in a vegetative state. He was prone to infections, and was constantly in and out of the hospital. Each time he was readmitted, his family would choose to have him stay at my ward as they appreciated the care my colleagues and I gave him. What really made the difference was that the family treated us with respect and took our opinions seriously. Since then, my passion for nursing has grown, and I've become more motivated to develop my career and upgrade myself.

Juraidah Abdul Rahman
Senior Enrolled Nurse, National Neuroscience Institute, cares for patients who require specialist care for neuromuscular conditions.

"To me, nursing is the greatest profession on earth as it allows me to love, care for, and dignify others. When I was young, my late grandmother was admitted into the intensive care unit for two weeks, and I was fascinated by the nurses there. I watched them care for their patients meticulously and passionately, sometimes even skipping meals to attend to patients' needs. Every one of them had a heart of gold. As I cared for my ailing grandmother, I knew that I, too, wanted to become a nurse. It is an honour to be able to help patients get better, and be part of the team that brings them one step closer to going home.

Take care of yourself so that you can care for others

Nursing is a noble calling, but the job comes with heavy responsibilities and commitments. Nurses, as you care for others, it is important that you also look after your own physical and mental health, and develop healthy ways of responding to challenges and stress.

Here are some dos and don'ts to help you keep healthy in mind and body while giving your best to patients.

Dos

Take short breaks throughout the day to stretch and relax to release tension in your muscles and body, and help you to feel present.

Practise relaxation techniques, such as the "4-7-8" breathing exercise. Breathe in deeply for four seconds, hold your breath for seven seconds, and then exhale slowly for eight seconds.

Check in on your well-being at the end of each day. Ask yourself questions, such as "How am I doing?" or "What feelings am I bottling up?". Write or doodle these thoughts on paper to help alleviate anxiety.

Stay active! A quick stroll or a short dance session to your favourite tunes can help relieve stress.

Spend quality time with yourself. Take your mind off work and spend time on activities that you enjoy to feel rejuvenated. You can read a book, watch your favourite television programme, or simply enjoy a cup of tea.

Have sufficient rest. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, such as listening to soothing music. Avoid using electronic devices as blue light from the screens will affect your ability to sleep.

Don'ts

Isolate yourself. Reach out to your colleagues and loved ones for support, even if it is through phone calls or text messages.

Blame yourself for negative emotions. Recognise that negative emotions are also valid emotions, and it is okay to feel them.

Spend too much time on social media or catching up on the news. Information overload may result in distress.

If you need emotional support, you can reach out to the SingHealth Staff Care Centre.

SingHealth Staff Counselling: 9720 3360

SGH Safe: 8879 3342

CGH PEER Network: 8125 8452

CGH Staff Counselling: 9299 0041

SKH Pals: 6930 3577

KKH Carers' Support Programme: 8181 7655

These hotlines are available daily from 9am to 5pm, including weekends during the COVID-19 period. You can also email to **staffcare@singhealth.com.sg**.