

— SINGAPORE HEALTH —  
**INSPIRATIONAL  
PATIENT &  
CAREGIVER**  
— AWARDS 2018 —



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# About the Award

The Singapore Health Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Awards is an annual award which honours individuals for their strength, courage and resilience in the face of healthcare challenges. It is also a platform to recognise outstanding patient support groups who have provided invaluable support to our patients and caregivers.

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

This year, we recognise 44 winners who have motivated healthcare professionals to deliver better care and inspired many with their zest for life.

Organised by



Participating Organisations



# Inspirational Patients



Mr Lim Geok Seng  
Mdm Aslena Binte Abdul Rahim  
Mdm Hawa Binte Haron  
Mr Hosni Bin Awi  
Miss Celeste Chang Ning  
Ms Goh Sing Yee  
Ms Yolenda Chua  
Mdm Jamilah Tan Binti Abdullah  
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Ms Serene Tan Tah Chng  
Mr Javier Lim Jun Hui  
Mr Tan Poo Koon  
Mr Royston Tan





*Forever Remembered.  
Forever Missed.*

**MR LIM GEOK SENG**  
(1953-2017)

My late older brother, Geok Seng, and I come from a big family. With nine siblings, Geok Seng and I were always close, because he was the fifth child and I was the younger sister who arrived right after him. It was heart-wrenching for me when he was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer in April 2017 and passed away in July that same year at the age of 64.

Growing up, Geok Seng was the rebellious child in the family. He had a brush with the law and was jailed for 10 years for taking drugs. Thankfully, he was determined to change and turned over a new leaf after his release.

He worked hard as a fishmonger and had a stall at Tampines Round market. Business was good and many of his long-time customers remember him as an easy-going, kind and hardworking man.

In 2001, Geok Seng got married and had a son. He was the sole breadwinner who devoted his life to caring for his wife, who struggled with mental health problems, and his son who was born with autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). When he was not running his fish stall, he would be at home doing household chores or cooking for his family.

In October 2016, Geok Seng started to experience pain in his leg. He ignored it at first but it got so bad that he had to stop working. When he saw the doctor at Singapore General Hospital in April 2017, he was diagnosed with end stage liver cancer and had to undergo surgery immediately. However, the cancer had spread to other parts of his body.

Geok Seng broke down when he told us that he had less than half a year to live. We were so sad but reminded ourselves that our duty was to help him make the most of his remaining time. As a Christian, he believed that it was all part of God's plan.

After Geok Seng was discharged from hospital, he was weak and wheelchair-bound. Although he was often in

pain and had no appetite, he always wore a bright smile and never complained as he didn't want us to worry.

As his condition deteriorated, he was admitted to Bright Vision Hospital (BVH) in June 2017 for hospice care. We are very grateful to the doctors and nurses at BVH who took such good care of him.

During his last days, Geok Seng worried about his wife and his son who is in a Boys' Home. His church friends visited him every day and helped to make arrangements for one of his close church friends to be his son's guardian. We are very thankful that they were by his side to support him throughout his battle with cancer.

Before Geok Seng passed on, he gave each family member a handwritten thank you card. As he didn't have a formal education and was unable to read or write, he asked the social worker to help him pen his thoughts and express his gratitude. We were all so touched by Geok Seng's gesture.

It has been almost a year since he passed on, but we still miss our brother dearly. We hope that his story will inspire others to live with positivity despite their illness.

**Story recounted by Ms Lim Geok Lian, younger sister of the late Mr Lim Geok Seng.**

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**"Mr Lim's courage in facing life's challenges without complaint reminds us to never give up on life and to treasure the time we have with family and friends. Despite his condition, he was always appreciative and polite to everyone."**

**Lynn Chong Lai Har**  
Medical Social Worker  
Bright Vision Hospital





“With a strong mind, I believe that I will be able to overcome this illness.”

**MDM ASLENA BINTE ABDUL RAHIM, 40**  
Housewife

I am a proud mother of three children, aged 19, 15 and nine. They are my pillars of strength who get me through any difficulties I face in life.

I was diagnosed with gestational diabetes when I was pregnant with my youngest son. I didn't take my condition seriously and often forgot to take my medication.

Life went on until 2014, when my doctors at Changi General Hospital (CGH) diagnosed me with kidney failure and referred me for dialysis. I refused, even though I was growing weaker and often felt breathless. I was scared to go for treatment. My eyesight was affected due to the diabetes, I had high blood pressure, my heart was weak and my kidney was failing, but I still did not want to face the fact that I was so ill.

I had my wake-up call when I was admitted to hospital several times over the next year, due to pneumonia and severe water retention. I knew I could not put off treatment any longer if I wanted to be around to take care of my children, especially my youngest son who is autistic.

With end-stage renal failure, I started dialysis treatment in January 2016. After a few sessions, I felt less breathless and slowly regained my strength. Since then, I have been living with my parents during the week, so that they can help to watch over me, while my children are in school. My parents are in their 70s and I feel bad to impose on them. I hope I can recover soon so that I can do my duty as a daughter and look after them instead.

There are times when I break down and cry when I think of my condition. Thankfully, I have strong support from my parents, children, siblings and friends. They are always

there for me whenever I need a listening ear or shoulder to lean on.

I try to keep myself busy. I enjoy crocheting and am now working with friends to sell crocheted keychains, coasters, and bookmarks online and at flea markets.

My youngest son is only nine years old but he knows when I am not feeling well. He hugs me to cheer me up. I am also very comforted that my two older children are independent and never complain about helping with the household chores or looking after their younger brother. I know they have sacrificed a lot for me, and I feel very blessed and thankful to have them.

I used to worry a lot and have many negative thoughts. It's easy to get carried away worrying. But today, I am more determined than ever to get better for the sake of my children and parents. With a strong mind, I believe that I will be able to overcome this illness.

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**“Aslena's positive outlook on life is very admirable and inspiring. It has not been easy for her to manage her chronic illness and take care of her special needs son at the same time. Yet, she is determined to take the challenges in her stride.”**

**Nurul Aliah Binte Omar**  
Community Assistant  
Community Care Department  
Changi General Hospital



Mdm Hawa (seated, middle) and her husband Mr Hamin with the CGH community care team

“Honestly, it’s not easy to keep smiling when you have multiple illnesses, but I want to look on the bright side and stay happy for my family and friends.”

## MDM HAWA BINTE HARON, 70 Retiree

I was diagnosed with diabetes about 30 years ago. At first, I struggled to control my blood sugar levels and diet but with daily diabetes medication and insulin therapy, my condition seemed to be under control.

In 2009, I experienced shortness of breath and felt swelling in my stomach. I was referred to a specialist at Singapore General Hospital (SGH). I thought it was just weight gain but the doctor told me that I had liver disease which caused fluid to accumulate in my abdomen.

I had to be hospitalised every two weeks for a procedure to deal with the build-up of fluid. Anaesthesia would be applied before they made a small cut in my abdomen to drain the excess fluid. It was painful but I tried to keep smiling because I didn’t want my family to worry. Some days the doctors removed up to five litres of fluid from my abdomen!

Unfortunately, my condition did not improve and in August 2015, my doctor told me that I needed a liver transplant to survive. The news stressed me out. I got scared about having to undergo such a major operation and began to worry about the medical bills.

It was my husband Hamin and three children who encouraged me to go for the transplant. I was very touched when they volunteered to be my donors. Unfortunately, none of them were a good match and I was placed on the liver transplant waiting list.

Luckily, the wait for a suitable donor was shorter than expected. In October 2015, I received a call from the SGH transplant coordinator in the middle of the night. She told me that there was a suitable donor and I had to go to SGH immediately for the transplant surgery. It felt like a dream when Hamin rushed me down to the hospital that night.

The surgery was a success and after two weeks I was discharged from the hospital with no complications. I recovered well and resumed my daily activities. I was so relieved to no longer feel breathless!

However, age is catching up with me now. I need a wheelchair to move around as my legs have grown

weaker. Since January this year, I have been going for dialysis three times a week at a private dialysis centre in Tampines due to kidney failure. I am very thankful to the community care teams from SGH and Changi General Hospital, especially Wah Tiang and Nora, for constantly looking out for me.

As I am prone to falls, they arranged for grab bars to be installed in my bathrooms at home. When they found out that Hamin and I were financially strapped, they helped me to apply for healthcare subsidy schemes such as the Pioneer Generation Disability Assistance Scheme.

The care team also visits me every month to make sure that I am coping well, taking my medication and going for my medical appointments. They are helping me apply for subsidised dialysis at National Kidney Foundation’s Dialysis Centre which is near my home. Since it’s hard for me to get around easily, this will really make a difference. We wouldn’t have known who to turn to without all their help!

People often ask me how I stay so positive despite all the challenges. Honestly, it’s not easy to keep smiling when you have multiple illnesses, but I want to look on the bright side and stay happy for my family and friends.

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**“What is admirable about Mdm Hawa is her zest for life, tenacity and courage as she deals with different health challenges. She treasures each day and never gives up hope. She is an inspiration to all of us!”**

**Ling Wah Tiang**  
Senior Community Coordinator

**Nora Ardany**  
Community Assistant

Community Care Department  
Changi General Hospital



Mr Hosni and his wife Mdm Isreena

“I may have a prosthetic leg but that does not stop me from helping others or leading an active life.”

## MR HOSNI BIN AWI, 66

I have been battling diabetes for more than 30 years. In the past, I didn't take my condition seriously. Sometimes, I would drink up to four cans of soft drinks a day, and forget to take my medication. My wife would remind me to eat healthily but I wouldn't listen and continued to indulge in the unhealthy food I like.

I used to work as a radiography assistant. In 2012, I fell down at work one day which left a cut on my left leg. The wound didn't heal but I ignored it. A week later, my wife had to force me to see a doctor because I developed a high fever and was in great pain.

By that time, the infection had spread to my bone. I was told that if my left leg was not amputated, I might die if the infection spread further to the rest of my body.

I cried for days when my doctor at Changi General Hospital (CGH) broke the news to me. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to walk on my own after the surgery. Thankfully, he assured me that I would still be able to walk with a prosthetic leg. With support and encouragement from my wife and children, I eventually agreed to the surgery.

It took me more than six months to learn how to walk with the prosthetic leg and get used to it. It is not very comfortable but I am thankful that I can still walk and remain active.

Two years ago, I developed kidney failure and felt weak and breathless. Dialysis was my only hope but the cost was too much for me to bear. I didn't want to burden my family further as my wife was the sole breadwinner since my leg was amputated.

The medical social workers at CGH knew about my situation and helped me to apply for financial assistance. With their help, I started going for dialysis three times a week at the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) Dialysis Centre. After a few sessions of dialysis, I felt better and more energetic.

Thanks to my wife and children, I have been keeping to a strict diet. They nag at me if I ask for a sweet treat. I know it is for my own good, so I listen. Once in a while, my wife lets me have one small piece of dark chocolate and that really makes my day!

In 2016, I started volunteering as an NKF Ambassador to motivate fellow patients at the Dialysis Centre. I was once in their shoes - feeling scared, sad and lost. By sharing my personal journey, I want them to know that they are not alone. Whenever they face obstacles, I encourage them to never stop believing in themselves.

On other days, I help out with the activities organised by the Resident Committee in the neighbourhood such as block parties as well as outings for elderly residents.

I may have a prosthetic leg but that does not stop me from helping others or leading an active life. My life mantra has always been “If I believe I can do something, I will and I can”.

**“Mr Hosni's resilience and positivity is very commendable. With his renewed zest for life, he has been helping other patients stay positive when they are diagnosed with similar health challenges. He is an inspirational role model for patients and healthcare staff.”**

**Ho Teng Beng**  
Community Assistant  
Community Care Department  
Changi General Hospital



Celeste and her mother Mdm Jackie Lee

“I am thankful that I still have legs to move around freely, hands to touch and eyes to see.”

## MISS CELESTE CHANG NING, 15 Student

When I was in Primary One, I suddenly came down with a pounding headache on my way to school. My mother got worried when the pain got worse and took me to KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital.

After doing a scan, the doctor found a tumour the size of a ping pong ball in my brain. My parents explained that the doctor would have to cut my head open to remove the tumour. I didn’t really understand what was going to happen, but it sounded frightening. I was scared that I would wake up while the doctor was operating on me. I was so relieved when I only woke up after the surgery was over!

While I was in hospital, I had a tube running out of my head to drain liquid to prevent infections. The doctors also had to make a hole near my chest, called a chemo port, to inject medicine into my body. Initially, I was very scared and cried when the doctors injected the medicine through the port. After a few injections, I told myself to stop crying because that would not make anything better. I needed many injections every day and the medication made me vomit a lot. As a result, I lost a lot of weight and looked very skinny.

After one month in hospital, I could finally go home. For the next one and a half years, I was often admitted to hospital for radiation therapy or chemotherapy. There were times I felt scared and in pain but I would keep it to myself unless it was really unbearable. I didn’t want to make my parents worry and feel stressed as they also had to take care of my younger brother and sister. They would always praise me and say that I was very brave and mentally tough. Their words of encouragement really helped me stay positive.

After discharge, I could not go back to school for about one and a half years. I needed physiotherapy and occupational therapy for six months just to learn how to write and walk again.

I was so excited to finally go back to school when I was nine years old. However, I struggled to keep up as I could not write as fast as before and took longer to finish my homework. The doctors explained to me that these

were the cognitive side effects of the chemotherapy and radiation therapy and suggested that I move to a special school. However, I persevered as I wanted to be with my primary school friends.

I did well enough during the Primary School Leaving Examinations to get into a secondary school, but life in school was a nightmare because some of my classmates bullied me. They put chewing gum on my hair or mean notes on my table. I was also excluded from activities and over time, I felt isolated and sad. Despite what I have gone through, I told myself to always show empathy to others. My parents decided to home-school me in 2017 and I am loving it!

Last year, I painted more than 20 bags to raise money for the Brain Tumour Society Singapore. I really enjoyed making the bags as I love to draw and paint. I hope to continue to use my love for art to help others, just like how my doctors and nurses helped me.

I have to be on medication and need growth hormone injections for life. I stay strong by reminding myself that I am blessed in many ways. I am thankful that I still have legs to move around freely, hands to touch and eyes to see. Every night before I go to bed, I pray for all the children in hospital to get better soon.

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“Although Celeste has suffered a lot because of her brain tumour, she is determined to keep learning from her experiences to help others. She has a selfless nature and simply wants to ‘give back’ by helping other young patients.”

**Dr Alexis Clarke**  
Senior Psychologist

**Dr Henny Tan**  
Psychologist

Psychology Service  
KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital



“I want others to know that having postnatal depression is nothing shameful. It can happen to anyone, and recovery is possible with the right help.”

**MS GOH SING YEE, 35**  
Property Agent

Depression can be tricky to beat. It took me four years to gain control over postnatal depression, which I first experienced after my son was born in 2012, and again when I had my daughter in 2014. During those dark periods, I had no motivation or energy to do anything. I was also highly irritable and often quarrelled with my family over the smallest things.

After the initial diagnosis in 2012, I received counselling and saw a psychiatrist for a few months. When the psychiatrist went on maternity leave, I didn't bother to continue with treatment as I thought that I was better.

However, depression hit again in 2014 after I gave birth to my daughter and was dealing with a failed business deal in my work as a property agent. It was a very stressful period as I was also helping out to do administrative work at my father's company.

The different stresses piled up to weigh heavily on me. It got so bad that I even thought of crashing the car to kill myself. That was when I knew I really needed to get help so I went straight to KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). The medical team there made me feel comfortable enough to open up and share my problems. The team has been really helpful and supportive, especially Dr Sandy Umboh. They genuinely care for my well-being and I'm thankful for them. Dr Umboh was also careful to adjust my medication dosage, so that I could continue to breastfeed my children.

The medication helped to improve my symptoms, but sometimes made it hard for me to take care of my children as I was often tired and spent most of my time sleeping. Thankfully, my husband and domestic helper were there to look after the children.

By 2016, I felt much better. Over time, my medical appointments at KKH reduced from weekly visits to just once every six months. I regained my energy and motivation to spend time with my children and enjoy activities, like exercising and taking care of my pets.

When I came across stories about mothers ending their lives, sometimes with their young children, it made me

wonder if they had suffered from postnatal depression. These sad stories prompted me to openly share my personal experience on my Facebook page. By doing so, I want others to know that having postnatal depression is nothing shameful. It can happen to anyone, and recovery is possible with the right help.

When The Lavender Blues\*, a KKH patient support group for mothers with depression or anxiety, asked to share my posts on their Facebook page, I readily agreed. Since then, I have joined the group and I post messages on their Facebook page to encourage other members. I also reach out to those who need a listening ear, and try to provide advice and encouragement. Last November, I was invited to share my experience to raise awareness for postnatal depression at an event organised by Clarity Singapore, a charity that serves those with mental health issues.

My condition has greatly improved over the past six years and I hope to fully recover one day. To anyone who suffers from postnatal depression, my advice is to be honest with yourself and don't be afraid to seek help. Take your medication and follow through with your treatment – that is how you win the battle.

*\*The Lavender Blues patient support group is open to patients of KKH's Department of Psychological Medicine. For more information about postnatal depression please contact: [pnd@kkh.com.sg](mailto:pnd@kkh.com.sg)*

“Sing Yee has demonstrated resilience in overcoming her financial difficulties and depression. She is also generous in giving her time and sharing her experiences to help other mothers overcome postnatal depression.”

**Ong Li Lian**  
Senior Case Manager

**Dr Sandy Umboh**  
Consultant

Department of Psychological Medicine  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital





“I have learnt to appreciate the simple things in life because of my illness. I know how easily it can all be lost, so I now cherish life more than ever.”

## **MS YOLENDA CHUA, 44** Online Marketer

I started my own YouTube channel “ThisAbleLivingYo!” in May 2017. My videos show how I cope with my disability and manage simple day to day activities like getting out of bed, hanging up laundry and cooking. These tasks may sound simple but they can be daunting for people who have disabilities. Through my YouTube channel, I also have the chance to connect with audience around the world, answer their questions and help them understand more about disability.

I wasn’t born disabled. I was at the peak of my career in sales and marketing when I was diagnosed with chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP) 14 years ago. CIDP is a rare neurological disorder which causes weakness and numbness in my arms and legs. As a result, I had to rely on a wheelchair to move around during the initial few years and when I suffered a relapse.

It was very hard for me to accept my condition at first because I used to be very active. I loved partying, hanging out with my friends and travelling. As my arms and legs grew weaker, I had to stop working, was homebound and felt isolated.

I even refused to take the steroids which my doctor had prescribed because I was afraid of the side effects. It was my ex-General Manager and mentor who helped to counsel me. He said to me: “What’s worse than not being able to walk again? If there are any side effects, we’ll just deal with them later.” That really got me thinking and I decided to start on the treatment so I could get my life back on track. I will always be grateful to him for being my guiding light.

After months of treatment and rehabilitation, I was able to walk again in 2006. However, I suffered a serious relapse in 2014. It was my new-found faith in Christianity that gave me the strength to press on.

I have been undergoing treatment and therapy to slowly get back on my feet. I am now able to walk short distances without crutches and I know I will be able to walk normally again one day.

I have been living on my own for more than 10 years. I may be disabled but that doesn’t stop me from being independent. With a friend’s help, I was offered a marketing communications job in October 2017. My boss is very understanding of my condition and allows me to work from home.

I find great joy in cooking, spending time with family and friends and making inspirational videos. I have learnt to appreciate the simplest things in life because of my illness. I know how easily it can all be lost, so I now cherish life more than ever.

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“Yolenda is very positive and has never given up on regaining functional independence. With her strong fighting spirit, she has had tremendous progression in her rehabilitation. She always explores ways to innovate and apply the skills she picks up during therapy sessions. We believe she can inspire and motivate other patients with similar conditions.”

**Richard Lao Tayer**  
Occupational Therapist  
Home Nursing Foundation



Mdm Jamilah and her husband Mr Zainal

“I knew there was no guarantee that the new drugs would cure me but I was willing to give it a shot. I didn’t want to give up without a fight.”

## MDM JAMILAH TAN BINTI ABDULLAH, 49 Housewife

I am a mother of five children; my youngest child is six and my eldest is 20. As a housewife, my life revolves around my family and managing the household. Family always comes first. If I have to make a decision, I always think about how it will affect them.

When I was diagnosed with lung cancer in December 2014, the cancer had already spread to the lymph nodes. I was really worried because the five-year survival rate is just 10 per cent. My youngest daughter was only two years old then and was still being breastfed. The one thought that kept going through my head was: “Who will take care of my kids if anything happens to me?”

The anxiety actually became my motivation to undergo treatment and get well. I refused to succumb to cancer because I want to see my children grow up and I want to grow old with my husband.

I was referred to the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) for seven cycles of chemotherapy treatment. I showed no progress and my doctors mentally prepared me that I might have less than a year to live. At that time, I had lost quite a lot of weight and was so weak I sometimes could not get out of bed on my own. I felt really helpless.

The turning point came when my doctor asked if I wanted to be part of a clinical trial for a new lung cancer drug. I immediately agreed. I knew there was no guarantee that the new drugs would cure me but I was willing to give it a shot. I didn’t want to give up without a fight.

I started on the clinical trial in August 2015 and so far, have been responding well to the oral medication and infusion treatment. There were some side effects during the first three months, but that was resolved after my doctor adjusted the dosage.

I have since regained my strength and am able to resume my daily activities like picking my children up from school, going to the market and cooking.

My appetite has improved and I now weigh even more than before I was diagnosed with lung cancer! While it can get tiring juggling the household chores and going for the medical appointments, I’m very happy that my life is close to being back on track. My older children try to help out with the housework and take care of their younger siblings when they can.

I am really grateful to all the healthcare staff at NCCS for their care. They have given me another chance to live and see my children grow up. I cherish every moment I get to spend with my family because I can’t be too sure that my cancer is completely gone.

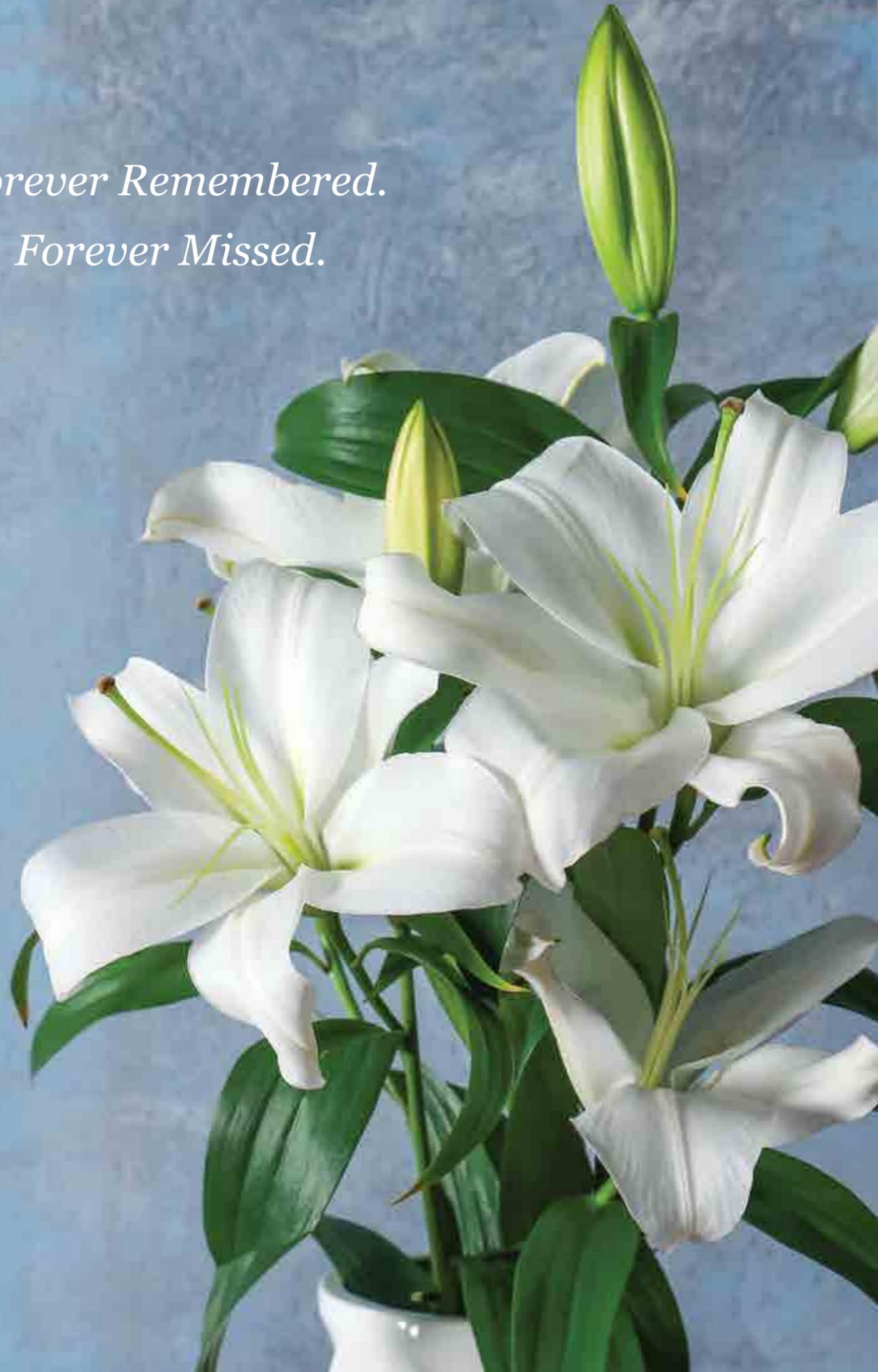
Participating in a clinical trial may not suit everybody, but I hope that my story will inspire other patients to maintain a never-give-up attitude.

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“Mdm Jamilah’s children were very young when she was first diagnosed with lung cancer. Part of the reason why she undertook this clinical trial was so that she could get better and see them grow up. Her children are her main priority and she has been able to take good care of them while keeping to the schedule of the procedures required for the clinical trial!”

**Dr Daniel Tan Shao Weng**  
Senior Consultant  
Division of Medical Oncology  
National Cancer Centre Singapore

*Forever Remembered.  
Forever Missed.*



**“I stay positive, not just for myself, but also for the people around me who have helped me so much throughout my battle with cancer over the past 18 years.”**

**MDM TAN GEK POH**  
(1965 - 2018)

I was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer in 2000, when I was 35 years old. My first thought was how it would affect my ability to take care of my daughters who were only 3 and 6 years old then. I had a good life with a stable job, and a wonderful family. I thought to myself multiple times “Why me?”. I was afraid that I would not be able to see them grow up, and this became my motivation to battle the disease.

When I was first diagnosed, I had to undergo chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and a surgery to remove part of my breast. After all that, I felt hopeful that I had recovered but my cancer relapsed not once, but three times in 2008, 2011 and 2014.

I had to undergo further surgery between 2008 and 2011 to remove both my breasts and it took me a while to come to terms with it. In 2014, the cancer progressed to stage 4 and spread to my skin. I started to suffer from lymphedema, which caused swelling in my arms due to excess fluid build-up. The doctors told me that it was probably caused by the removal of my lymph nodes as a part of my cancer treatment. Now that my arms are swollen and heavy, it is hard for me to keep my balance and I am more prone to falls.

The wound on my chest caused by the cancer has since grown and now covers most of my chest down to my abdomen, including parts of my back. I take strong painkillers as it is very painful. To prevent infection, the wound needs to be cleaned and dressed daily, which takes about an hour as the pain is sometimes unbearable. At first, I could do this on my own, but as my condition worsened, I had to get my family to help me.

With my multiple conditions, it has been increasingly difficult for me to independently perform daily activities. I am lucky that my family takes care of me and my daughters accompany me to my weekly medical appointments to see the oncologist and wound nurse.

To keep me occupied, my family drops me off at my

mother’s house every day. I spend my time there playing mahjong with my siblings. On weekends, I go out with my family and enjoy a good meal with them.

I am on oral chemotherapy, so I just take the pills at home. I have been in and out of the hospital since March 2017 and as a result I developed a bedsore that needs to be dressed daily. Sometimes, I wonder how I could be so unlucky to suffer so many cancer relapses and complications. Each time I face a setback, I feel less hopeful of recovering and even question whether there is any point in undergoing treatment.

My family is my main source of motivation and strength to overcome all the hurdles these past 18 years. They have never given up on me. Their love and support keeps me going and has helped me come to terms with my condition. I have even discussed end-of-life matters with them, so that they know my wishes.

Everyone calls me a fighter. I stay positive, not just for myself, but also for the people who have helped me so much throughout my battle with cancer over the past 18 years. I will not give up. I hope that my cancer can be cured one day as I want to be able to see my daughters settle down.

**Afternote: Mdm Tan has passed away on 11 April 2018. Her indomitable spirit remains an inspiration to all of us.**

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**“Mdm Tan is a true warrior. Her positive mindset, determination and courage inspire me to do my best for my cancer patients and fight alongside them.”**

**Looi Woan Tyng**  
Assistant Nurse Clinician  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



“I am worried about having cancer, but instead of feeling angry or stressed, I choose to focus my time and energy on the things that I love. My doctor told me that my positivity helps my condition a lot.”

## MDM TAY SAI TEEN, 74

In 2010, I went to see the doctor to check on three lumps that I had found near my neck. The doctors told me that it was most likely caused by cancer that had spread from another part of my body. After going through scans, tests, and surgery, I was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma, which is advanced skin cancer in 2011.

When I first heard that I had cancer, I did not want to undergo any treatment. I felt it was both pointless and futile since I was already so old. However, my son and daughter encouraged me not to give up for their sakes and urged me to go for treatment. Their support gave me the courage to face my illness. The thought of being with my family, especially with my grandchildren, as long as possible was the prime motivating force as I prepared myself mentally for what was to come.

My treatment options were limited because of the advanced stage of the cancer. When my doctor at National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) asked if I wanted to go on a clinical trial to try a new oral medication, I readily took it up, with the support of my family. The doctor explained how the medication works and its potential side effects, including the possible risk of blindness. Despite the risks and knowing that the medication may not work for me, my family and I felt assured that the medical team would closely monitor my condition and take good care of me.

After a blood test, I was found to be suitable for the clinical trial and have been on the new oral medication since June 2012. Every four weeks, I go to NCCS to see the doctor for a routine check-up which includes a blood test, as well as eye and skin check. I also go for a CT scan every six weeks and a heart scan every three months.

I have been on the clinical trial for 6 years now and it has helped to keep the cancer under control. I feel lucky that I have not experienced any severe side effects so far, other than having dry skin and eyes. I am thankful to the doctors and nurses, especially my clinical research coordinator Low Lishan, who has been so thoughtful and always tries to help arrange the medical appointments on the same day to make it more convenient for me.

I live together with my daughter's family and dote on my three mischievous grandsons. They love my cooking, especially my curry chicken, chilli fish and nonya kueh. Besides cooking for them, I love to spend time gardening and growing flowers.

I am worried about having cancer, but instead of feeling angry or stressed, I choose to focus my time and energy on the things that I love. My doctor told me that my positivity helps my condition a lot. I will continue to remain positive and cherish the time I have with my family.

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**“Mdm Tay never misses a single appointment with us. She has a very positive attitude and is determined to live life to the fullest with her loved ones.”**

**Dr Daniel Tan Shao Weng**  
Senior Consultant  
Division of Medical Oncology  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



“You’re not alone on this journey so don’t be afraid to reach out for help and support.”

**MS ADELINE LIM, 55**  
Project Manager

For over 20 years, I enjoyed a successful career in the banking industry and my health has been good. In mid-2015, I was diagnosed with gynaecological cancer and that hit me hard. I remember how touched I was, when a staff approached me after my chemotherapy session, and asked if I wanted a knitted hat. Her gesture was very comforting, as I was feeling vulnerable and shaken.

My biggest supporters when I was undergoing cancer treatment, besides my family and friends, were the nurses and doctors from KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital, Singapore General Hospital and National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS). All of them treated me with amazing patience, warmth, care and empathy. I tended to repeat my questions, and they were happy to answer and reassured me every single time.

When I completed my cancer treatment, I wanted to give back by helping other patients. During my younger days, I used to volunteer with the Girls’ Brigade, and I helped to man suicide prevention helplines when I studied overseas. Over time, I stopped because work commitment took up my time, but that spark of volunteerism never faded.

Since June 2016, I have been volunteering at NCCS every week. I serve as a Patient Guide to offer assistance to patients and their caregivers when they come to the Centre. Besides helping them to get around, they usually ask questions about what will happen and what they should do, so I give them advice based on what I personally went through as a patient. I encounter some who can be very demanding or rude, but that makes me even more determined to be patient and help them. A friend of mine once said, “They feel a loss of control because of the illness, so they’re just trying to gain control over other things.” Her words really struck a chord with me.

On Saturdays, I volunteer for Knit for Hope to teach cancer survivors, caregivers and volunteers to knit hats to give to cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy.

I still remember how the knitted hat I was given made me feel that someone cared, so I knit hats for other patients as a way of encouraging and cheering them up. Knowing that someone may feel some comfort and warmth when she receives a knitted hat makes me very happy.

My advice to fellow cancer patients is, “You’re not alone on this journey so don’t be afraid to reach out for help and support.”

I always encourage them to talk to others instead of keeping their fears to themselves. I want them to know that they can be survivors too.

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**“It amazes me that although Ms Lim is battling with her illness, she is committed to giving her time to help others, much more than what we had asked for. At NCCS, she is always greeting patients brightly and assuring them that she’s there to look out for them. She is an inspiration to all of us!”**

**Adeline Teo**  
Volunteer & Project Management Lead  
Division of Community Outreach & Philanthropy  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



“It is not easy to live with dementia. Thankfully my wife’s memory is much better than mine. I can always count on her when I forget things.”

**MR ALOYSIUS PETER DE ROZARIO, 88**  
**MRS PHYLLIS DE ROZARIO, 81**

My wife, Phyllis and I celebrated our 58<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in February 2018. It was a simple dinner celebration at home with family and friends. If my wife hadn’t reminded me, I would not have known we marked this special milestone. I rely on Phyllis to remember these special days as my memory has become poor since I got ill.

In 2015, I was hospitalised for high fever and subsequently diagnosed with mild dementia. Phyllis takes great care of me and I also try to help out by doing simple chores like washing and ironing my own clothes. As much as I try to help, my condition does keep Phyllis on her toes. There are times when I have left the iron on or misplaced belongings especially my walking stick!

Thankfully, she is very understanding and patient with me. We live with our only daughter and her family who all pitch in to look after me.

Once, I woke up in the middle of the night, got dressed and left the house to wait for the bus to go to church. As I was waiting at the bus stop, I saw my granddaughter running worriedly towards me with my wife close behind. It was only then that I realised that it was not 6am but only 3am! Since that incident, Phyllis has been keeping a closer watch on me to make sure I don’t go wandering out of the house at night.

During one of my regular check-ups at the Memory Clinic at Changi General Hospital, my doctor told us about a clinical trial at the National Dental Centre Singapore (NDCS) that was looking at how to improve the oral health of patients with dementia. The clinical trial required a partner volunteer and Phyllis was more than happy to take part with me.

During the trial, I was taught how to use an electric toothbrush, which was difficult at first because I am so used to using a manual one. My wife also learnt some useful communication techniques to encourage me to brush my teeth correctly, such as positive reinforcements and giving compliments. Each time we went back to NDCS, we had to complete a questionnaire and I would have an oral examination to see how well I had followed the oral care steps.

The clinical trial ended last year, but we continue to follow the oral health care steps that we learnt. It has been very beneficial because it can be difficult for people with dementia to maintain good dental hygiene. I hope that with the help of supportive caregivers, more patients will benefit from this initiative.

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“Mr Rozario and his wife have been very supportive of our research. With his wife’s strong support, he has been able to overcome various changes caused by his memory impairment. Their relationship shows the importance of caregiver support in managing a condition like dementia.”

**Dr Yang Jingrong**  
Associate Consultant  
Department of Restorative Dentistry  
National Dental Centre Singapore



“The road to recovery is tough, but cancer is not a death sentence. There is always hope beyond what we can see.”

## MS LAU NENG DUAN, 37 Specialist Associate

I was 22 years old when I was diagnosed with cancer of the left lacrimal gland (the gland that produces tears). I was lucky that the tumour had not spread to my brain, but my doctor at the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) advised that the best way forward was to remove the tumour and my left eye.

The thought of losing one of my eyes was really frightening. I became depressed and started having suicidal thoughts. It was my parents' unconditional love that helped me put things in perspective. I told myself that the least I could do for them is to go for the treatment and try to get well.

I mentally prepared myself for the eye surgery which lasted more than 18 hours. After surgery, I was hospitalised for three weeks and had to undergo 38 sessions of radiation therapy subsequently. I was referred to the National Dental Centre Singapore (NDCS) for an orbital prosthesis, to restore the appearance of my left eye that was removed. Initially, I used glue to stick the prosthesis on the skin, but that didn't work very well, so I eventually switched to a magnet-retained prosthesis, which was easier to wear and kept in place longer.

Wearing the prosthesis helped me regain my self-confidence and feel more normal when I went back to school. In 2006, I graduated as a valedictorian from the School of InfoComm Technology at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

My parents and I thought the worst was over but in 2008, doctors at NCCS found a growth in my pancreas. Thankfully it was a benign tumour which could be surgically removed. Less than a week after the surgery, I suffered from severe jaundice due to a blocked bile duct and had to undergo an emergency procedure. Two years later, in 2010, I was diagnosed with gallstones and had to undergo an endoscopic procedure to remove them.

NCCS and NDCS started to feel like my second home. The staff became friends and were great support to my mum and me when I was admitted. I am also very thankful to the medical team from NDCS for their care and encouragement throughout my prosthetic journey.

In 2012, my doctors from NDCS noticed that my prosthesis was shrinking and recommended for a new one to be fabricated for me. As the medical treatments were amounting to a heavy financial burden, I was touched when they helped me to apply for financial assistance to subsidise the cost of the prosthesis.

This year marks my 15<sup>th</sup> year as a cancer survivor.

I now work at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore. After my dad retired, I became the sole breadwinner and have managed to put my two younger siblings through university. I am currently studying part time for an Honours Degree in Business and IT.

The road to recovery is tough, but cancer is not a death sentence. I have no idea what's in store tomorrow, so I have learnt to live each day to the fullest with no regrets. I hope to share with other patients battling with cancer, that there is always hope beyond what we can see.

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“The number of major surgeries she has been through is significant for a person her age. Yet, Neng Duan never fails to find the courage to accept reality and move forward, one day at a time. She is a survivor who inspires!”

**Assoc Prof Teoh Khim Hean**  
Head and Senior Consultant  
Department of Restorative Dentistry  
National Dental Centre Singapore

**Assoc Prof Goh Bee Tin**  
Senior Consultant  
Department of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery  
National Dental Centre Singapore



Ms Diana Tan (right) and Ms Clarice Ng

“After overcoming so many hurdles, I have learnt to live my life one day at a time.”

## MS DIANA TAN LI LI, 50

My life has been full of ups and downs. Growing up, I felt quite neglected as my mother seemed to dote more on my four siblings. When I was 18, my parents arranged marriage for me without my consent. It was not a happy union and eventually I got a divorce. A few years later, I remarried but sadly that ended in divorce too.

In 2000, I was diagnosed with heart failure and my doctor at National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS) recommended left ventricular assist device (LVAD) implant surgery. I chose not to go for the operation because I didn't want to trouble my eldest son, who I am closest to, to take care of me. He's got his own family to take care of and I didn't want to be a burden.

Over time, my heart grew weaker and I had to be hospitalised for three months in 2015. I was sad to hear that my heart was only functioning at 18 per cent. I felt breathless and weak and was confined to bed. I became depressed and even contemplated suicide, hoping to put an end to all my problems. It was my boyfriend who took great care of me and helped me to overcome this difficult period.

I am also thankful to my doctors and nurses at NHCS for not giving up on me. With their care and encouragement, I made an effort to get better. Whenever I felt troubled or needed help, the nurses were always there with a listening ear or a helping hand. Today, my heart function has improved to 54 per cent, thanks to a new medication that I started taking in 2015.

Just when I thought the worst of my health problems was over, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to undergo a mastectomy in 2016. A year later, I started

losing my vision due to diabetes and now need a white stick to guide me when I move around.

After overcoming so many hurdles, I have learnt to live my life one day at a time. Worrying will not change the outcome so I try to focus on the positives and live life to the fullest. I love spending time with my lovely granddaughters, organising karaoke sessions with my friends and cooking.

I now visit NHCS and National Cancer Centre Singapore every other month for follow-up appointments. Whenever I see patients looking troubled at the clinics or in the ward, I chat with them and share my own experiences to try to encourage them to stay positive. Living with so many illnesses is not easy but it has helped me to feel gratitude. Thanks to my family and friends, I know that I am not alone in this journey.

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**“Ms Tan has stayed positive and resilient despite the hardships that she has gone through. She is an advocate for advance care planning and takes the initiative to encourage and comfort fellow patients.”**

**Clarice Ng**  
Senior Medical Social Worker  
National Heart Centre Singapore



“As the wait for a heart transplant is filled with uncertainty, I try to encourage other patients by sharing what I have personally been through so that they won’t lose hope.”

## MR KEVIN WONG HUI SIANG, 28 Engineer

As a teenager, I loved playing basketball with my friends every week. I was in my third year in polytechnic when I had to stop playing as I would get very short on breath and feel tired easily.

In 2012, at the age of 22, checks at the National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS) revealed that I had heart failure. The diagnosis was a shock because we had no family history of heart disease. I never thought that such a thing could happen to me.

I had to put my studies in Electrical and Electronic Engineering on hold as my condition worsened. I was implanted with HeartMate II, a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) to stabilise my heart until a heart transplant became available.

It was frustrating having to carry the pump around with me everywhere. I felt really restricted as it weighed about two kilograms and had to be kept dry at all times. I often felt tired and could no longer meet my friends for basketball or go travelling with my family. Thankfully, my friends took the time and effort to visit me regularly at home. Having their company really helped cheer me up during that difficult period.

I told myself not to let an illness slow me down and gradually got used to living with the heart pump. I resumed my studies, did my final year project again with a new batch of classmates and managed to graduate in 2014!

I faced my greatest struggle between 2015 and 2016, when I underwent about eight surgeries after I was implanted with the heart pump. I was hospitalised so often that NHCS started to feel like a second home. I

also suffered from an unexpected blood clot in my brain, which has left me with speech problems till today. I have been attending weekly speech therapy at Singapore General Hospital to help with my slurred speech and I am happy to have made big improvements.

In 2016, I was fortunate to receive a donor heart and undergo a successful transplant. With my new lease of life, I have been dedicating time to help other patients with heart failure, as a member of the LVAD Patient Support Group. I regularly visit them in hospital to provide moral and emotional support, as well as teach them how to handle the heart pump. As the wait for a heart transplant is filled with uncertainty, I try to encourage other patients by sharing what I have personally been through so that they won’t lose hope.

Since I graduated from polytechnic, I have been working for Transmedic, a medical technology company that distributes HeartMate devices in Southeast Asia. I am happy to be working in this company because the heart device kept me alive while I waited for a transplant. I want to continue to help more patients lead a full life despite their heart problems.

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“It was inspiring to witness how Kevin defied the odds through his sheer determination and positivity.”

**Lepardo Rezah Genterola**  
Senior Staff Nurse  
National Heart Centre Singapore



“By sharing my journey, I want to encourage patients to accept their condition and see that it is possible to live a fulfilling life even though we have Parkinson’s disease.”

**MR MICHAEL TAN TIAN SENG, 62**  
Retiree

I was working as a taxi driver in 2006 when I started getting severe headaches that felt like my head was being squashed in a tight helmet. I thought that the headaches were due to stress, little did I know that they were actually early symptoms of Parkinson’s disease (PD).

I decided to see a doctor at National Neuroscience Institute (NNI) when I started becoming more forgetful. I would ask my passengers for their destinations over and over again and it got to the point where some of them would scold me.

I had always been healthy so I was surprised to be diagnosed with PD. I was given medication to keep the condition in check. Over time, I developed other symptoms like tremors in my hands and legs, poor sense of balance and freezing episodes, which lasted for up to a few minutes.

In 2010, I had to stop working because of my condition and my wife became the sole breadwinner. She has been working as a hairdresser to support me and our two children. Finances are tight and we manage to get by, but I initially felt depressed that I could not support the family.

As my condition worsened, the amount of medication I had to take increased from 13 to 33 tablets a day. Due to the difficulty in maintaining my balance, I started using a motorised scooter to move around to prevent any chance of falling.

Despite the increased medication, my condition continued to worsen. That was when my doctor recommended Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) surgery where tiny electrodes would be placed in parts of my brain to help regulate brain signals.

At first, I was scared to undergo the surgery and worried about the high cost. I am very grateful to the doctors and nurses at NNI for taking the time to assure me and helping me to apply for subsidy. My motivation was to get better and take care of myself and not be a burden to my family. I went for the surgery in August 2015 and my symptoms gradually became more manageable so that I only had to take 13 tablets every day.

When the nurses asked if I wanted to volunteer as a DBS resource person, I readily agreed as I wanted to share my experience so that more PD patients can benefit from the surgery too. I also joined the Parkinson Society Singapore where I volunteer to talk to other patients. By sharing my journey, I want to encourage more patients to accept their condition and see that it is possible to live a fulfilling life even though we have Parkinson’s disease.

Today, I still use my motorised scooter as I just had knee replacement surgery in February 2018. Twice a week, I take the bus and train from my home at Marsiling to Yishun for physiotherapy sessions at St Luke’s Eldercare Centre. I also visit the ‘Wellness Kampung’ Centre in Yishun three times a week for group activities like exercises and handicrafts with other elderly. When I’m there, I also help to repair things like home electrical appliances, bicycles and wheelchairs with residents around the neighbourhood. There are five of us and we call ourselves the ‘Repair Kaki Club’. It gives us a great sense of satisfaction when we help someone fix something they need!

I am honoured to be appointed a PD ambassador for Singapore by the World Parkinson Coalition. In 2016, I was sponsored to attend the World Parkinson Congress in Portland, Oregon. It was an eye-opener! I am looking forward to attending the next Congress in Kyoto, Japan in 2019 to learn more and share my knowledge with other PD warriors.

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“Mr Tan doesn’t let PD limit him. His cheerful personality and positive outlook has helped other PD warriors better understand Deep Brain Stimulation and give them the courage to go through the surgery.”

**Ng Hwee Lan**  
Nurse Clinician  
Department of Neurology  
National Neuroscience Institute



Mr Muhammad Nazri and his mother Mdm Salimah

“I know that the odds are stacked against me, but my mind is strong and I am determined to fight till the end.”

## MR MUHAMMAD NAZRI BIN MOHD ABDUL WAHAB, 29

I have Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, or ALS, which is a motor-neuron disease that affects nerve cells that control voluntary muscle movement. I was diagnosed in May 2017, and my condition deteriorated quickly within a year. Today, I can no longer move without help and I am on a ventilator 24/7 as I cannot breathe on my own.

I used to work as a computer analyst with Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore (CPAS), loved going out with my friends to eat or watch movies, and enjoyed outdoor activities like fishing and jogging. I never imagined that I would suffer such a rare condition and be bed-bound one day.

That changed in 2016, when I began to experience breathlessness while sleeping, difficulty in swallowing and had rapid weight loss. At first, the doctors were not able to diagnose what was causing these symptoms. I had to take medical leave and no pay leave from work frequently. Finally, I had no choice but to quit my job at the end of the year.

One day in February 2017, I collapsed at home and my mother sent me to Singapore General Hospital (SGH) where I stayed for three months due to respiratory failure. After undergoing further tests, I was eventually diagnosed with ALS and had a tracheostomy done to help me breathe and a feeding tube placed into my stomach as I could no longer swallow.

My family was devastated to learn that there is currently no cure for ALS and my condition would only get worse over time. I kept thinking ‘Why me? What is going to happen to me?’ I was so sad and scared. Our family life changed totally. We were unable to go out and furniture had to be disposed to make space for my medical equipment. But I knew I had to be strong not just for myself, but for the sake of my mother and sister.

I was discharged and returned home in May 2017. I live with my mother who takes care of me and my younger sister, who is now the family’s sole breadwinner. It hurts

to think about all the sacrifices that my family has had to make for me. I try to put up a strong front, but I sometimes break down when I see my mother tirelessly taking care of my daily needs - from feeding, bathing to handling my ventilator. We encourage each other to stay positive and talk about the things we could do if I got better one day.

I am grateful for the SGH healthcare team, especially my respiratory therapist Ivan. He always offers me a listening ear and I feel comfortable sharing my worries with him. I am also thankful to my supervisor at CPAS who encourages me and told me that they will keep my job for me. Their support and encouragement motivates me to get well so that I can help others with ALS.

When I was discharged in May 2017, I could still move about on my own, go out with my motorised wheelchair and use my handphone to contact my friends. At the end of last year, I lost my ability to speak and no longer have muscle control in my arms and fingers. I keep my mind engaged by listening to BBC news programmes. I am now learning how to use the Tobii Eye-Tracker, which will allow me to use my eyes to control a mouse on a screen or operate a keyboard. I know that the odds are stacked against me, but my mind is strong and I am determined to fight till the end.

**Nazri’s story as recounted by his mother, Mdm Salimah Binte Hallel.**

“Despite his condition, Nazri still keeps his spirits up and always flashes me his signature grin and thumbs-up to tell me that everything is fine. I can’t think of another nominee more deserving of this award.”

**Ivan Gerald Lee**  
Senior Respiratory Therapist  
Singapore General Hospital



“No matter how tough life has been for the past 17 years, I have not given up. I will continue to press on for my wife and son.”

## MR TAN KENG HENG, 48 Taxi Driver

I was diagnosed with Stage 3 Nasopharyngeal Carcinoma (NPC) or nose cancer in 2001. It came as a shock because I didn't show any symptoms at all. I was 32 years old, didn't smoke or drink and thought I was quite fit and healthy, having just passed my annual Individual Physical Proficiency Test (IPPT).

My treatment regime at the National Cancer Centre Singapore started with 40 sessions of radiation therapy. My cancer went into remission but the radiation therapy left me with long-term side effects which affect my speech and swallowing ability till today.

Over time, the muscles in my mouth and throat became stiff and less sensitive and I had great difficulty swallowing, a condition known as dysphagia. I was eventually given a nasogastric feeding tube, which was inserted through my nose to allow nutrition to be supplied directly into my stomach. The tube affected my work as a taxi driver as some passengers would stare and might have felt uncomfortable, so in 2012, I switched to another feeding tube that is inserted through a small incision in my abdomen and is not so visible.

My speech also became slurred. It was frustrating because I had a hard time communicating with passengers who took my taxi. It would have been easy to wallow in self-pity but my wife's encouragement kept me going. I didn't give up and continued to go for my speech therapy sessions every two weeks.

In 2016, I felt feverish and unwell after a dental check-up at a polyclinic. Two days later, my wife found me unconscious and had to rush me to the A&E at Singapore General Hospital (SGH).

I was diagnosed with severe aspiration pneumonia and had to stay in the Intensive Care Unit for 25 days. The doctors explained that the pneumonia was caused by excess fluids in my oral cavity that had entered my lungs during the dental check-up.

Even though the community dentist took precautions during the procedure, he was unable to determine how severe my dysphagia was.

This incident prompted the speech therapy team at SGH to work with the National Dental Centre Singapore to create a pocket-sized Dysphagia Information Card, which patients can easily carry with them. The card contains all the essential information about dysphagia and the special precautions that need to be taken during dental treatment.

Last year, I was invited by SGH to share my experience for a patient education video which they were producing. I was happy to be part of this meaningful initiative which can help improve patient safety.

I do feel frustrated that I am unable to speak or eat normally. No matter how tough life has been for the past 17 years, I have not given up. I will continue to press on for my wife and son. When I see my son, I am reminded that it is indeed a gift to have survived cancer and be able to watch him grow up.

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**“Mr Tan always puts in more than 100 per cent effort during therapy. Despite the struggles he has had with side effects of radiation therapy, he maintains a positive attitude and is – always thankful, smiling, and never complains.”**

**Lee Yan Shan  
Denise Fam  
Kristen Kiong**

Speech Therapists  
Singapore General Hospital



“I believe that everything happens for a reason and am confident that what I went through will make me a better doctor in the future.”

## MS MEGAN LOY SI YI, 21 Medical Student

I first toyed with the idea of studying medicine when I was 16, because I was interested in science and wanted a career that allowed me to interact with people. After I completed my International Baccalaureate® (IB) studies, I spent some time shadowing doctors in a hospital in Tanzania. The humbling experience strengthened my resolve to pursue medicine as a career.

In 2015, my life took a detour when I had a brush with death during my graduation trip with friends to Taipei. We were at the Colour Play Asia Festival when a sudden explosion occurred at the venue. It sent us running for our lives and I lost my friends in the midst of the chaos.

I didn't feel much pain initially, which I later discovered was because of how rapidly and severely my skin, including my nerve endings had been burned. I remember being extremely disorientated at the time and fearing that I would never see my parents again.

Thankfully, they heard the news from a fellow parent and managed to locate me in the intensive care unit at the Taipei Medical University Shuang-Ho Hospital. I was flown back to Singapore for treatment at the Burns Centre in Singapore General Hospital (SGH). I found out later that I had suffered third to fourth-degree burns on over 80 per cent of my body.

The road to recovery was long and painful. For the next four months, I stayed in the hospital and underwent nine skin grafts. I remember the excruciating pain every time the nurses cleaned and debrided my wounds. When I could finally take a shower on my own, it took me a few hours because it would hurt every time my raw and hypersensitive skin came in contact with water.

It took time for my skin to heal and during the process, the tightening of my scars restricted my movement, particularly over my fingers, elbows, and knees. It took several scar release surgeries and months of physiotherapy before I regained a fraction of my mobility.

My family and friends were my strength. They took turns keeping me company, keeping my spirits up, and never treated me any differently. Their support helped me

tremendously, and I did not feel like I needed to shy away or hide because of my scars.

Words cannot express how grateful I am for the care and support of the SGH Burns medical team. Associate Professor Tan Bien Keem and Dr Chew Khong Yik took the initiative to reach out to my parents when they first heard news about the incident to see how they could help. They didn't know my family then and yet, they went above and beyond to arrange for me to be flown back to Singapore via International SOS, so I could receive treatment quickly at SGH.

The team has been closely monitoring my condition ever since, and I have no doubt that their unwavering compassion and care played a pivotal role in getting me to where I am today. They continue to inspire me to this day, and are my role models in my own journey to becoming a doctor.

The day that I received my acceptance letter from the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine was one of the best days of my life. Being a patient has helped me gain new perspectives on medicine and patient care. I believe that everything happens for a reason and am confident that what I went through will help me become a better doctor in the future.

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“Megan did not let her injuries define her but focused on getting well. She took charge of her recovery and worked closely with the medical, nursing and allied health teams to achieve her recovery goals. Her tenacity has inspired many other burns victims and motivated them not to give up.”

**Dr Chew Khong Yik**  
Consultant  
Department of Plastic, Reconstructive and  
Aesthetic Surgery  
Singapore General Hospital



“By sharing my experiences with other patients, I hope to help them overcome their fears and motivate them to focus on the positives. There is always something to look forward to.”

## MS SERENE TAN TAH CHNG, 67 Retiree

When I first found out that I had colorectal cancer in March 2009, it didn't come as a shock as I was mentally prepared.

The first signs appeared in late 2008 when I found blood stains on my underwear. I went to see a General Practitioner, thinking it was haemorrhoids, but the bleeding didn't stop after months of medication.

I was so busy running my retail business that I delayed seeing a specialist to further investigate the problem. It was only after reading an article on colorectal cancer that I had a wake-up call when I realised that I was having similar symptoms. I quickly got an appointment to see a specialist at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) and the diagnosis of colorectal cancer was confirmed after some tests. I had surgery just two weeks after the diagnosis.

I was determined to recover and get my life back on track. Having cancer scared me, but I found comfort that my cancer was detected early. I was very relieved when my doctor told me that I didn't need to undergo radiation therapy after surgery.

For the first three months, I was fitted with a temporary stoma bag which helped with the removal of waste from my body while my bowel healed after surgery. I had to get used to wearing it and gave it a nickname as my own fun way of coping with it. As I was living on my own, I engaged a former nurse to help me change the stoma bag every four days. After five weeks, the doctors had to close my stoma as my intestines were retracting due to past surgeries I had for appendicitis and hysterectomy. Thankfully, by that time, the wound had already healed.

I was so happy when the stoma was closed. I even wanted to celebrate thinking that I had fully recovered, but I was wrong. My appetite started to worsen and I lost more than 14kg in two months. I found myself in bed most of the time as I felt weak and tired. Even after consulting a dietitian who advised me what to eat to

improve my nutrition, my appetite still didn't improve. I grew so scrawny and gaunt that I was getting stares from neighbours when I left the house.

I was fortunate that I could turn to my niece for help during this difficult period. She not only helped manage my business but also spent time researching alternative therapies for me and suggested that I try out naturopathic treatment. I followed the diet plan for a month and my appetite improved gradually. I even managed to gain back some weight. I went back to work for a few years but decided to retire in November 2017.

I have been volunteering as a patient ambassador at SGH since 2013. I visit colorectal cancer patients in the wards at least once a week. By sharing my experiences with other patients, I hope to help them overcome their fears and motivate them to focus on the positives. There is always something to look forward to.

I once led a very fast-paced life with work as my top priority. My brush with cancer has taught me to slow down and embrace life. I learnt to focus on what I have and to live life to the fullest.

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**“Ms Tan's dedication as a patient ambassador has inspired more colorectal cancer survivors to come forward to provide support to other patients. She is an excellent role model!”**

**Dr Carol Loi**  
Genetic Counsellor  
Department of Colorectal Surgery  
Singapore General Hospital

**Tan Pei Yi**  
Senior Medical Social Worker  
Singapore General Hospital



Javier and his mother Mdm Sharon Ng

“Mummy taught me to look on the bright side and only think positive thoughts, so that’s what I did!”

## MR JAVIER LIM JUN HUI, 10 Student

Just before my sixth birthday, mummy took me to the hospital to have my eyes checked. She thought I had a lazy eye because I was squinting all the time. The doctors did a scan and discovered that I actually had two brain tumours.

At that time, I did not really understand what was going on, but I could tell that mummy was very worried. She explained that I had two small balls in my head and the doctors would help to take them out by operating on me.

I did not feel afraid before going into the operation theatre, but I remember crying a lot after surgery. I was in so much pain that I needed morphine to help me sleep. Mummy was at the hospital with me every day. She would stay up all night to watch over me. That made me feel safe.

Over the next five years, the doctors found and removed five more tumours in my brain. Those operations weren’t as bad as the first one because I already knew what to expect. Mummy would always remind me that whining never helps. She taught me to look on the bright side and to only think positive thoughts, so that’s what I did!

I had to go for many sessions of physiotherapy and speech therapy at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital after the operations and I made sure to complete them all with a smile on my face. The nurses are like my big sisters, they are always friendly. They would crack jokes with me or take me on “dates” to the food court to make me feel better about being in the hospital.

One day, I reacted very badly to an antibiotic injection which I was given to fight an infection. My skin felt very itchy and the nurses had to find a new vein each time they gave me the injection. After a week or two, I had to stop because of the allergic reaction. The experience was a bit scary but I just tried my best to stay positive.

When I went back to school, my classmates asked me what happened. They wanted to see my scars and the shunt that runs from my brain to my bladder. If they asked nicely, I would tell them about my operations and explain that the shunt helps to drain excess fluid from my brain. Some kids were rude or made fun of my scars but I would ignore them.

My favourite subject in school is PE and I love to play basketball. When I grow up, I want to be a professional basketballer! I cannot do certain activities and mummy tells me to be careful because I have already broken two shunts by being too active. For my 11<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, I hope I get a BMX bike!

I started shaving my head for Hair for Hope from the age of five, even before I found out I had brain tumours. In 2017, I even did it twice! I hope to keep doing it because it is important to raise awareness of childhood cancer. I want to let other kids who are sick know that they are not alone and to always stay positive.

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**“Despite his young age and medical condition, Javier has an amazing attitude towards life. His positivity is infectious and has helped him through the tough times.”**

**Assoc Prof Jod Mehta**  
Head & Senior Consultant  
Corneal & External Eye Disease Department  
Singapore National Eye Centre



“I am lucky to have my family by my side all these years. Whatever I need, they are more than happy to provide.”

**MR TAN POO KOON, 70**  
Retiree

I have two passions in life, - spending time with my family and travelling. Since 2000, I have been living with diabetes and partial blindness, but that does not stop me from enjoying the things that I love with my family and friends.

When I was first diagnosed with diabetes in 1984, it was a wake-up call for me. My work as a deliveryman didn't allow me to have regular meals. I did not eat healthily and had absolutely no knowledge of diabetes.

The diagnosis changed that - I started watching my diet, exercising more and went for regular check-ups. In 1997, I started insulin injections, and made sure I took them regularly, even when I was travelling. Over time, my condition stabilised. My doctor was happy with my progress and encouraged me to keep going.

However, three years later, I was diagnosed with diabetic proliferative retinopathy. The diabetes had damaged my retina and I lost sight in my left eye so I had to stop work.

It was a scary experience because I felt I was close to becoming completely blind. I kept an even tighter watch on my diet and read up as much as I could to learn what more I could do to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Unfortunately, retinopathy can still affect people who have tried really hard to control their diabetes. In 2007, my left eye was so severely affected that doctors at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) had to remove it completely. The good thing was that I was fitted with a prosthetic eye which looks just like the real thing.

I have been a patient of SNEC for 18 years. The doctors and nurses take very good care of me and I get along well with them, especially the nurses, Ms June Tan and Ms Aw

Ai Tee. Whenever I am at SNEC for follow up, I make sure to look for them to have a chat and find out how they are doing.

I am lucky to have my family by my side all these years. Whatever I need, they are more than happy to provide. They take turns to accompany me when I leave the house and keep the house clear of clutter so that I can get around safely.

I get to see my three-year-old granddaughter every week and she really brightens up my day. As a family, we go on holidays and staycations every year. My favourite destination so far is Kota Kinabalu. My daughter always reminds me to take care of my health and keep my condition under control so that I can continue to travel with them.

I would like to encourage others who are living with diabetes to take medication and go for check-ups regularly. You can still enjoy life if you keep your condition under control.

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**“Mr Tan is one of the most resilient patients I have encountered. It is admirable how he continues to fight against all odds after each setback.”**

**Aw Ai Tee**  
Deputy Director of Nursing  
Day Ward  
Singapore National Eye Centre



Mr Royston Tan and his wife Mdm Flora Tay

“While doctors and medicine play their part, every individual must take responsibility for their health.”

## MR ROYSTON TAN, 70 Retiree

I have always been a take-charge kind of person. Self-discipline is very important to me. I often describe myself as a perfectionist, because I firmly believe that I am responsible for my life and happiness.

When it came to health, I was just as disciplined. I was quite cautious about what I ate. I went for regular check-ups and enjoyed physical sports like table tennis and badminton. I always assumed that only overweight or very unhealthy people would get diabetes. Imagine my surprise when I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in 2006!

I sprang into action to take charge of my diabetes. I was determined to control the disease and not let it control me. I attended health talks to better understand the condition. I stopped drinking sweet beverages and started eating healthier meals, which my wife cooks with less oil, salt and sugar. I also made sure to take my medication and insulin injections twice a day.

That is not to say that the journey has been easy. There are times when it can be very tough to follow a restrictive diet. As someone who enjoys hawker food, it was difficult to switch to eating brown rice and oatmeal at first. My family helps me by avoiding buffets when we go out for meals so that I will not be tempted to stray from my diet!

Initially, I felt disheartened when I didn't see an improvement in my condition despite all my efforts. Fortunately, my doctor at Bukit Merah Polyclinic was there for me. He encouraged and pushed me to keep up the healthy lifestyle. I am grateful for his support.

I strongly believe that every person must take charge of their health. When I speak to fellow patients, I always

highlight that while doctors and medicine play their part, every individual must take responsibility for their health.

For the past few years, my wife and I have been volunteers with the NTUC Befrienders programme. Every Thursday, we visit the households of four elderly residents in Telok Blangah. These seniors are usually living alone, so we provide companionship and a listening ear. We listen to their stories and share our own experiences. I enjoy volunteering because it allows me to help others and give back to the community.

With my daughter having her third child this year, I plan to spend more time with my family, and help to take care of the grandchildren. I strive to be a good influence for them; in fact, my grandchildren have joined me in eating oats!

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**“Mr Tan serves as a shining example. In spite of his illness, he continues to make the most of life, and is determined to be as self-sufficient as possible, and not to depend on others.”**

**Dr Hwang Siew Wai**  
Clinic Director  
SingHealth Polyclinics – Bukit Merah

# Inspirational Caregivers



Mdm Rohaya Binte Jantan

Mr Peter Ong

Mr Teo Peng Ho

Mdm Jasmine Lee Jin Zuan

Mdm Rae Wong

Ms Safiah Binte Saidi

Mdm Cynthia Tay Seow Fang

Mdm Sonia Tan

Mr Suppiah Challa Rajoo

Mr Willis Lim

Mr William Goh Eng Wah

Mrs Cecilia Kong Kim Heok

Ms Ng Lui Teen

Mdm Hasnah Binte Mohamed Maideen

Ms Helen Chee Chin Keat

Mdm Lim Kwee Choon





“I think of the good times we had together and cry sometimes. She will always be in my heart.”

**MDM ROHAYA BINTE JANTAN, 59**  
Healthcare Attendant

My late mother Mdm Rapeah lived to the ripe old age of 90, but was wheelchair-bound and subsequently bedridden for the last ten years of her life after suffering a stroke.

As her main caregiver, I would give her a shower and dress her before I left for work. I am a part-time healthcare attendant at Changi General Hospital and there were times when my mother would call me when I was at work to tell me she had soiled her diapers. I would then rush home to change her before rushing back to work.

Working in healthcare, I have seen how painful it can be for elderly patients who suffer from bedsores. Unfortunately it happened to my mother once and took about a month to heal. Ever since that episode, I took extra care of her skin to make sure it never happened again.

Every day, I would prepare lunch and dinner for my mother before going to work. It was challenging to juggle both work and caregiver duties but I was willing to shoulder the responsibility to care for my mother. Every night when I got back from work, no matter how tired I felt, I would be by her side until she fell asleep.

In her last few months, she was diagnosed with leukaemia. We decided not to put her through chemotherapy, as she was already physically weak.

In early December last year, as I could no longer cope with her increasing care needs at home, we had to put her under the care of Bright Vision Hospital (BVH). After 10 years of caring for her myself, it was a really tough decision to make. My mother was upset even after I explained that

we did it for her own good. She wanted to stay at home and it broke my heart that I was unable to fulfil that wish.

The nurses at BVH told me that my mother would always ask when I was coming, so I tried to visit often with her favourite food. We would spend hours chatting, watching TV and praying together. I was with her, holding her hand when she passed away peacefully on 29 December 2017. I feel comforted that she passed on with someone who loves her by her side.

It's been strange readjusting to life without my mother. Through my life's struggles, she was always there for me. I think of the good times we had together and cry sometimes. She will always be in my heart.

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**“Mdm Rohaya’s story of perseverance in caring for her mother resonates with other caregivers in our hospital. Her willingness to reach out for help so that her mother’s wellbeing was not compromised is very admirable.”**

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



Mr Peter Ong and his father Mr Ong Hock Tay

“As a caregiver, I try to give my parents undivided love and attention and make an effort to understand their needs.”

## MR PETER ONG, 51

Health is a constant worry in my family. My 85-year-old father is battling Parkinson's disease, dementia and multiple chronic diseases while my mother has suffered from stroke three times. My health is not trouble-free either, I was born with Addison's disease and need to rely on steroids long-term. Every other month, our medical follow-ups take us to Changi General Hospital, Singapore General Hospital, National Dental Centre Singapore, Singapore National Eye Centre and Pasir Ris Polyclinic.

My role as the primary caregiver for my parents began in 2013, when my father had a fall and lost his mobility. His condition deteriorated sharply, and I decided to quit my job as a production supervisor to take care of my parents full-time. It wasn't an easy decision, but my six siblings have been supporting us financially and I'm very thankful to them.

My father is wheelchair-bound and needs help eating, bathing, dressing and going to the toilet. I attended caregiver courses to learn how to transfer him from the bed to the wheelchair, change his wound dressings and monitor his urinary catheter to make sure he doesn't suffer any infection. My mother is more independent, I just need to make sure she takes her medication and gets enough rest as she is getting more frail.

It hasn't been easy seeing my parents decline over the years. There were times when I felt like giving up, but as their son I knew I had to press on. When I was young, I was often in hospital because of my condition and my parents would take turns to look after me. It is now my turn to do what they have done for me.

I share a bedroom with my father. It's easier for me to watch over him and attend to his needs during the night.

Sometimes he wakes up and asks for something to eat in the middle of the night. I usually make him a cup of Milo or give him some biscuits.

The first two years caring for my parents were the most challenging and stressful. Now, I am used to their needs and even understand the gestures they make when they need something. The one thing I've learned is to ask for help and take some time out when needed so that I don't feel burnt out.

In 2016, I arranged for my father to go to a senior day-care centre for a few hours during the week. This gives me time to finish the household chores, run errands, spend some time looking after my mother and get some rest.

As a caregiver, I try to give my parents undivided love and attention and make an effort to understand their needs. As long as I can care for them, I will. One day, I hope to put my caregiving skills to good use and work for a transport company that helps those who are wheelchair-bound.

**“Mr Ong suffers from Addison's Disease. Despite his own medical condition, he still does his best to take care of his elderly parents. His positive outlook and devotion to his parents is very admirable and inspirational. He's a true hero in the eyes of those who know him.”**

**Michelle Tan**  
Community Coordinator  
Community Care Department  
Changi General Hospital



Mr Teo Peng Ho (middle) with his friend Mr Ong Chin Tat (right) and Mr Quek Keng Tian (left)

“Chin Tat may not be related to us by blood but my wife and I consider him a part of our family.”

## MR TEO PENG HO, 70 Driver

I have been taking care of my close friend, Chin Tat, for the past 10 years. Chin Tat is 52 this year and suffers from kidney failure and diabetes.

I first met Chin Tat in 2007 when I was looking to hire and a friend introduced him to work at my coffee shop. We got on really well and became good friends. When I found out that he was estranged from his wife and two daughters, I took him in to stay with my family. He has been staying with us since 2008.

The past ten years have not been easy for Chin Tat. He struggled with drug addiction and was jailed twice for drug offences. After his second jail term in 2015, he promised to not touch drugs again. As his friend, I had faith in him and stood by him.

Due to complications from diabetes, Chin Tat's big toe had to be amputated in 2015. He often gets breathless and is unable to walk long distances on his own. I bought him a wheelchair so that it is easier and safer for him to get around.

He was diagnosed with kidney failure in 2016 and has been going for dialysis at the National Kidney Foundation Dialysis Centre at Upper Boon Keng, three times a week. He also needs to go for regular follow ups at Changi General Hospital. Whenever I can, I accompany him for his dialysis and medical appointments. If I cannot go, I call him a taxi to make sure he gets to his medical appointments and returns home safely.

My coffee shop business folded a few years ago and finances have been tight. I started driving a private hire car to make ends meet. Thankfully, Chin Tat receives financial aid, which helps to cover most of his medical bills.

My wife, son and I live in a two-room flat. Since we don't have a spare room, Chin Tat sleeps on a foldable bed in the living room. Through all this, I am very thankful to my wife and son who are supportive of me taking care of Chin Tat. My wife helps by reminding him to take his medication on time and even helps prepare his daily insulin injections. The community care team from CGH also visits Chin Tat every month to check on his health and wellbeing.

Some people find it hard to understand why I would go to such lengths for a friend, but I don't find it a big deal. Initially, even Chin Tat's sister couldn't believe that I would take care of him when his own family was unable to. But I am happy to be his pillar of support.

Chin Tat may not be related to us by blood, but my wife and I consider him a part of our family. We don't expect anything in return for taking care of him.

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“Mr Teo is a gem! His kindness and generosity of heart is exceptional. He has been taking such good care of Mr Ong despite his own financial difficulties.”

**Quek Keng Tian**  
Community Assistant  
Community Care Department  
Changi General Hospital



Mdm Jasmine Lee and her daughter Sarah

“It is important to seek support from every available avenue and know that you are not alone in this journey.”

## MDM JASMINE LEE JIN ZUAN, 33

When I gave birth to my second child, Sarah in 2012, I expected her to be a healthy baby like my first child since I had a normal pregnancy. Just a day after she was born, the doctor at the private hospital told us that something was amiss and she had to be transferred to KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH) for further tests. The doctors at KKH diagnosed that Sarah may have Moebius syndrome, which is an extremely rare congenital neurological disorder that affects her face and throat muscles.

Due to the condition, Sarah is unable to move half of her face and cannot swallow or breathe normally. When Sarah was just a month old, she had to undergo a tracheostomy procedure to open a hole in her throat to help her breathe properly. Sarah also requires tube-feeding and is fed through a Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy or PEG tube, which is inserted directly into her stomach.

Sarah is now six years old. She is still infant-like due to severe global developmental delay. She attends the Thye Hua Kwan Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (THK EIPIC) Centre, a few times a week. The programme helps children with special needs improve their motor, communication and cognitive skills. Although Sarah is not able to speak or walk yet, we are content to see the progress she has made, such as being able to push and hold herself up for longer periods of time and having better neck control.

Looking back, it took me a while to accept Sarah’s condition when she was first diagnosed. There were times I questioned whether I had done something wrong during the pregnancy and if this could have somehow been prevented. I felt helpless and fearful, but told myself that I needed to be strong for Sarah. I quit my job as an Accounts executive to be her full-time caregiver soon after she was born.

Thankfully, I have a very strong network of supportive family and friends, including my husband who has been my pillar of strength. He sees Sarah as a normal child and

his positivity really helps lift my spirits when I feel stressed or burnt out. My elder son, who is in Primary 1 this year, is quite independent and understands that I need to spend more time taking care of Sarah. I am also grateful to the KKH nurses who have journeyed with me from the start. With their help, I am now able to manage the tracheostomy and PEG tube confidently on my own.

It is important to seek support from every available avenue and know that you are not alone in this journey. I keep in close contact with a group of fellow caregivers and parents of special needs children. We have a group chat where we can reach out for help and advice. Since 2015, I have been volunteering at the Rare Disorders Society Singapore as a programme manager. Together with a group of five mothers, we started Special Seeds Singapore, which is a digital parenting resource to link up the special needs community in Singapore. I feel blessed to be able to give back and help others.

Although my daughter is unable to speak, we believe that she can understand what we are saying. My hope for Sarah is that one day she will be able to communicate and lead a fulfilling and independent life.

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“Jasmine was able to turn her disappointment and fears into a positive motivational force to help other parents with special needs children. By reaching out to them early, she hopes that they will be able to handle their children’s needs with confidence.”

**Maryani Binte Abdul Wahab**  
Nurse Clinician  
Division of Nursing - Nursing Specialist Services  
KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital



Mdm Rae Wong with her husband Mr Adrian Chew and daughter Zoe

“My hope is for Zoe to grow up with confidence so that she can pursue her dreams.”

## MDM RAE WONG, 40 Teacher

I was 20 weeks pregnant when a routine scan showed our baby had a bilateral cleft lip and palate. It was heart-breaking.

I broke down and confined myself to my bedroom for days, refusing to see anyone. Those were dark times and I was overwhelmed with grief, guilt and uncertainty. Initially, the internet made it much worse, as we came across the most severe cases of cleft combined with serious birth defects. We doubted our ability to provide the level of care our baby would need and feared the financial strain would be unbearable. Having finally conceived after five years of marriage, we even contemplated abortion as the worst possible scenarios flooded our minds. Looking back, our reaction was irrational but that was the state of our emotions at that time.

Knowing what I was going through, my Principal and colleagues at the school I work at were very understanding and supportive. Returning to work to prepare my students for their Primary School Leaving Examination kept me occupied.

The medical team at the Cleft and Craniofacial Centre (CCRC) at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH) were a beacon of light. They gave us a lot of support and advice, which eased our worries. The more we learnt and understood, the less fearful we felt.

With my husband’s support, I gave birth to Zoe in December 2014.

Our first month as new parents was trying as expected. For instance, Zoe had to be fed with a special milk bottle and inserting the Nasoalveolar Molding Device (NAM), an orthodontic device for cleft children, into her mouth on a daily basis was sometimes challenging. However, we were able to cope well because of the wonderful nurses at the CCRC who guided us and often went the extra mile for us.

To date, Zoe has had three major surgeries at four months, nine months, and three years of age. Further surgeries will be needed as her body continues to develop. It breaks my heart every time I tend her wounds post-surgery because she often cries from the pain. In spite of this, Zoe

has shown great resilience and spirit, and bounces back quickly every time. She is now a sprightly and fun-loving 3 year old who loves to sing and dance.

It is most reassuring to know that the CCRC will continue to provide the multidisciplinary care that Zoe requires as she matures. At the same time, our searches on the internet connected us with parents of cleft children from around the world and we appreciate the emotional and practical support people in the same boat can provide. Realising that an active parent support group was lacking in Singapore, I set up one in 2014 with my friend Delia, who was born with a cleft palate and has a child with the same condition.

With “Our Cleft Angels” blog and Singapore Cleft Parents Support Facebook group, we reach out to parents of cleft children based in Singapore to share experiences and resources in a local context. The Facebook group, which currently has 190 members, has become a useful platform for parents to seek or give advice. Whether it is on Facebook or at one of our gatherings, it warms my heart to see everyone banding together to provide mutual support.

Zoe’s dream is to be a doctor when she grows up so she can help people. I do worry about her future, but my hope is for Zoe to grow up with confidence so she can pursue her dreams.

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**“With her positive attitude, confident personality and great family support, Rae was able to overcome the difficult journey when Zoe had to undergo major surgeries before she was even a year old. She has compassion and has helped to comfort and support many new parents facing similar challenges, by sharing her experience.”**

**Nurazlin M Azman**  
Senior Staff Nurse  
Department of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery  
KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital



Ms Safiah and her step grandson Syafiq

“There are times when I feel like giving up, but Syafiq keeps me going. I will always love him like my own.”

## MS SAFIAH BINTE SAIDI, 59

When my step-daughter gave birth to Syafiq in 2004, she couldn't take care of him due to her own intellectual disabilities. I decided to take Syafiq in and raise him as my own.

My life has been full of challenges. I have gone through much hardship, from domestic violence and infidelity to becoming homeless after my divorce. Syafiq and I live with my sister and to make ends meet, I work as a cleaner seven days a week. As far as possible, I try to be financially independent and care for Syafiq.

At a young age, Syafiq was diagnosed with severe obstructive sleep apnoea, which makes it difficult for him to breathe when he sleeps. I was very worried at first, but thanks to the doctors and nurses at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, his condition improved after he was put on the Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) therapy at home.

Ms Winnie Lim, who is our medical social worker, helped to get funding for the CPAP machine which Syafiq uses at home. The machine delivers pressurised air through the nose or mouth to help him breathe normally when he sleeps. Every night, I help him put on the CPAP mask and check that the machine is working before going to bed.

Syafiq currently weighs almost 140kg. It is worrying because the doctors have told me that obesity is often a risk and possible cause of sleep apnoea. I try to cook healthy meals with more vegetables for him, but he really loves to eat rice and fast food. To encourage him to exercise, I sometimes take him swimming or to the beach for walks. At school, he participates in silat (a traditional Malay martial art) to stay active.

I did not know that Syafiq had mild intellectual disability until he was in Primary 3, when his teachers noticed he was struggling to cope with his studies. With their help, he was transferred to APSN (Association for Persons with Special Needs) Tanglin School which has a curriculum suited to his learning needs.

He is 14 years old this year and I worry about his future. He can be quite rebellious, so I constantly need to remind him to study hard. I hope he can learn as much as he can and pick up skills that will enable him to lead an independent life when he is older.

I am growing old and will not be able to take care of him forever. There are times I feel like giving up but my love for Syafiq keeps me going. I will always love him like my own.

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**“Ms Safiah's love for Syafiq is unconditional. She works very hard as a cleaner, not resting even on weekends, so that she can earn enough to support herself and Syafiq.”**

**Serene Hong**  
Senior Medical Social Worker  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital



“I was determined to look forward and fight this battle alongside my beloved husband.”

**MDM CYNTHIA TAY SEOW FANG, 45**  
Homemaker

My late husband, Jesse Peh, was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 2010. I remember feeling very lost and helpless when we first heard the news.

He was a very healthy, fit 38-year-old man who loved sports and outdoor activities. He worked as an RSAF pilot and his favourite pastimes were golfing and taking part in Ironman triathlons and marathons.

At that time, we did not know anyone else who had cancer. The news of his cancer felt like a death sentence. I felt broken emotionally, but I knew I had to be the pillar of strength for my family. My faith soon brought me back to my feet. I allowed myself to cry on the first day and from the second day, I was determined to look forward and fight this battle alongside my beloved husband.

Jesse went through a surgery and for the next four years, he had to undergo chemotherapy and regular check-ups. His health gradually improved and we thought the worst was behind us. Jesse was so happy and picked up fishing as a hobby.

In 2015, his cancer had relapsed. It was devastating news because Jesse was so close to the five-year mark when he could be declared cancer-free.

By God's grace, we learned to appreciate and treasure our remaining time together as a family. We went for many more fishing trips with our family and friends and were blessed with many great memories.

As his condition progressed, Jesse had a few more surgeries and required many different treatment procedures that only the nurses knew how to perform. As he longed to come home after months of hospitalisation, I asked the doctors and nurses to teach me the treatment procedures so I could attend to his needs at home.

It wasn't easy. Thankfully, the medical teams at the Singapore General Hospital and National Cancer Centre

Singapore were patient in guiding me until I could confidently take care of Jesse at home. One major task was managing his central catheter, which provided total parenteral nutrition as he was unable to eat. Sometimes, I felt overwhelmed, but I just reminded myself: if the nurses can do it for him passionately, why can't I. I feel so blessed to have been supported by such a great healthcare team.

I would not have been able to focus on taking care of Jesse if not for the great support from our families. The entire kampung chipped in to help us in every way they could. While Jesse was in hospital, my children would play the guitar and we would sing together every day. There was hardly a dull moment in the ward.

We are thankful that Jesse outlived the prognosis by more than a year and passed on peacefully in 2017. Till today, the children and I miss him dearly. I am writing a book to share our family's journey, which I hope can inspire others facing similar challenges.

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**“Words cannot describe how much Cynthia has impacted us. Her selflessness, courage, positivity and patience in caring for her husband inspired us deeply.”**

**Dr Shirlyn Neo**  
Associate Consultant

**Dr Lee Sze Yi**  
Associate Consultant

**Tan Yung Ying**  
Nurse Clinician

Division of Palliative Medicine  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



When there is love ♡  
Naturally there is empathy ♡  
patience to do your very best  
for your love ones ♡

“It surprises me when people say that I am sacrificing a lot for my family. I am just doing my part as a wife who loves her husband.”

**MDM SONIA TAN, 47**  
Property Agent

In 2002, my husband Kheng Keong was diagnosed with scleroderma, a rare autoimmune rheumatic disease which causes his skin to thicken and tighten abnormally.

Over time, the disease resulted in inflammation of his lungs, a chronic cough and severe pulmonary arterial hypertension. Combined, these conditions made it hard for him to breathe and he described it as being like trying to breathe under water.

In July 2017, Kheng Keong suffered a lung infection and was hospitalised in the Intensive Care Unit at Singapore General Hospital for five days. To increase his chances of survival, doctors placed him on an intravenous VELETRI (epoprostenol) therapy.

At that time, he was the second patient in Southeast Asia to undergo this novel therapy. A catheter was inserted into his heart and connected to a small, portable battery-operated pump that delivers the medication. Nurse Aidila taught me how to prepare, store the medication and operate the pump.

I needed to administer the infusion every evening at 6pm and check the area around the catheter to ensure there is no infection. I have to carefully monitor the pump rate because sudden changes in dosage could result in very low blood pressure which would be fatal for Kheng Keong. The steps were quite complex and I sometimes worry that the pump is not working. Thankfully, Nurse Aidila is there for us and with her support, I was able to overcome my fears and gain confidence in caring for my husband.

Things have not been easy for Kheng Keong. Last December, he was diagnosed with Stage 3 rectal cancer and had to undergo radiation therapy. It is yet another obstacle but I choose not to dwell on the negative and focus on doing my best for him.

Between juggling caregiving needs and my job as a property agent, my days are full. Our only son who turns 17 this year, has always been our source of strength and comfort. I am thankful that he is mature and independent so I never have to worry about him.

It surprises me when people say that I have sacrificed a lot for my family. I am just doing my part as a wife who loves her husband. Kheng Keong is a fighter and I know he will not give up.

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**“Sonia inspires us with her selflessness, tenacity and positivity. Under her care, her husband is able to have quality of life despite his illnesses. She is his pillar of strength.”**

**Aidila Binte Ismail**  
Assistant Nurse Clinician  
Nursing Specialty Care Unit  
National Heart Centre Singapore



“We were blessed with five good years and every day was a gift.”

## MR SUPPIAH CHALLA RAJOO, 62

My late wife Cindy and I had been married for over 40 years and blessed with two daughters and a grandchild when she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour in 2012. She was only 53 years old.

Cindy had always been in good health except for occasional headaches. Over time, her headaches became more frequent and severe and she started to become confused. We took her to the doctor and were devastated when he told us she had a very aggressive form of brain tumour. Her condition was so serious that she was quickly scheduled for surgery at the National Neuroscience Institute to remove the tumour.

While the surgery was a success, her doctor mentally prepared us that the condition could recur anytime. That was when I decided to quit my job as an office executive to spend as much time as possible with my wife. Our two daughters who had stable jobs were supportive of my decision and helped to support the family.

After the operation, Cindy underwent radiation therapy and chemotherapy for about six months. During that period, I took up healthy cooking classes so I could prepare her meals. Although I could only cook her simple dishes like brown rice, fish and vegetables, she would say she loved it. During this time, I also read up extensively on how to be a caregiver.

After some time, Cindy was well enough to go back to work as an office executive. I also returned to work but opted for a part-time job so I could devote time to take care of her. As Cindy had some difficulties with her balance, I would accompany her to work in the morning and pick her up every evening. Thinking back, the chit chats we had on the bus trips to her office and back were precious moments we had before her condition took a turn for the worse.

All was well until October 2015, when her doctors discovered another tumour in her brain. She had surgery to remove it but unlike the first operation, her body didn't respond as well this time and her condition deteriorated quickly. In less than a year, her cancer relapsed and she suffered a stroke which left her wheelchair-bound. My daughters and I were by her side when she passed away peacefully in her sleep in November 2017.

Some people have asked me if it was challenging to take care of my wife. Despite the adjustments we had to make as a family, I never felt that it was difficult because she was my wife and nothing mattered more to me than her wellbeing.

What was more challenging was overcoming the fear that I may lose her. I didn't know how much more time I had with her and it broke my heart to see her grow weaker as the days went by. But I tried to focus on the positive to encourage and support her. We were blessed with five good years and every day was a gift.

We will always remember Cindy dearly as a strong fighter, and a wonderful wife and mother.

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“Mr Suppiah was always by his wife's side. His presence gave her the courage to press on with her treatment.”

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



“If the situation was reversed and one of us fell ill, we have no doubt that our father would do the same — he would spare no effort to take care of us.”

## MR WILLIS LIM, 42 Civil Servant

My father, Lim Yok Tiong, was diagnosed with a large brain aneurysm (a weakening of the artery wall that causes a bulge), in early 2016 when he was in his mid-70s. The aneurysm was pressing on his optical vein, which caused loss of sight in his left eye. An operation to seal off the aneurysm would have helped to prevent a fatal rupture, but this was considered high risk due to my father’s age and the complexity of the operation. The other option was to leave the aneurysm alone and hope it did not rupture, which was unlikely due to its size.

My siblings and I couldn’t decide as both options were so risky. By April 2016, vision in my father’s right eye had also deteriorated due to the growing aneurysm. That was when we decided that we could not hold off the operation any longer.

The surgery did not go as well as we had hoped. The aneurysm was clipped but my father suffered a heart attack and massive stroke during the procedure. He was in a coma after the surgery and we were told to expect the worst. We kept vigil by his bedside and were overjoyed when he regained consciousness four days later. However, he was perpetually drowsy, unresponsive, and paralysed on the right side of his body.

During the five months that my father was in hospital, we took turns to visit him every day. To stimulate his memory, we would tell him stories of the past. I would also bring his favourite food like Bak Kut Teh, play his favourite songs and video messages from his good friends and grandchildren. It was gratifying when he started responding. He would move his fingers, shake or nod his head when he heard familiar voices. We celebrated every of his accomplishments as small victories.

In the ward, I spoke with other caregivers whose loved ones were in a similar condition as my father. We would share our experiences and the conversations helped to ease uncertainties. I felt encouraged knowing that I was not alone on this journey.

After my father’s discharge from Tan Tock Seng Hospital,

he was transferred to a community hospital for intensive rehabilitation. He stayed there for two months, and was finally able to come home in November 2016.

Initially, it was challenging to juggle work with my duties as a father and a son. My father is bed-bound and needs tube-feeding and a tracheostomy tube to help him breathe. At the same time, my twin baby boys also needed a lot of attention. The situation improved after we hired a live-in nurse to help take care of my father. It is more costly but we want to give him the best care possible.

During the night and at weekends, my brother and I take over and help to bathe, dress and change my father. We also take turns to bring him for his monthly physiotherapy appointments and to places he used to frequent such as the park and his former office.

We are unsure whether our father understands us as he cannot express himself like he used to. It is heart-breaking to see him in this state. If the situation was reversed and one of us fell ill, we have no doubt that our father would do the same – he would spare no effort to take care of us. It is perhaps cliché to say ‘treasure every moment with your loved ones’, but when an event of this magnitude happens to someone you love so dearly, you will learn how true the saying is.

“While caring for his father, Willis reached out to provide emotional support to other patients and their families in the ward. He has touched their lives in a very special way. His selflessness inspires us to always go the extra mile to listen and care for our patients and their families.”

**Lee Kah Keow**  
Senior Nurse Clinician  
Department of Neurosurgery  
National Neuroscience Institute



Mr William Goh and his wife Mdm Rose Lee

“I will always be by her side every step of the way.”

## MR WILLIAM GOH ENG WAH, 74 Retiree

Rose and I have been married for 35 wonderful years. Despite our occasional quibbles, we love each other very much and I would not want to spend even one day apart from her.

Rose was diagnosed with a non-healing leg ulcer on her left leg in 2016 due to a vascular condition. It was a small ulcer which quickly grew until it almost covered the lower half of her leg. Her right leg soon became affected too and she was hospitalised at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) ten times in two years for surgery to improve the condition.

The experience was very distressing for Rose. She wasn't able to walk on her own and had to be carried from the bed to the wheelchair. Whenever the nurses changed her wound dressings, she cried because of the pain. I could not bear to see my wife suffer so much and many times, I broke down and cried too. I wished it had happened to me instead.

When Rose was recovering at home, she had to wear compression stockings daily to help the wounds heal faster. The doctors and nurses taught me how to change the wound dressing and put the compression stockings on for her. I would take up to half an hour each time to help her with the compression stockings and there were times she refused to wear them because of the discomfort. It wasn't easy but I knew I had to keep her spirits up by constantly encouraging her and staying by her side.

While taking care of Rose, I started to experience back pains when carrying her from the bed or sofa to the wheelchair. I was worried that I had some spinal problem and was so relieved when the doctor told me that my

condition was not serious. If I needed surgery, I was concerned that there would be nobody to take care of my wife.

After one and a half years of treatment, Rose's ulcers have healed. Her legs are still quite weak and she requires a walking stick to move around but she is in good spirits. She has also gone back to her part-time job, which she enjoys.

Rose is determined to get better and I will always be by her side every step of the way. Nothing matters more than my wife's health and happiness.

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“Relationships are often tested and can crumble when someone in the family suffers from a debilitating illness, but Mr Goh stood strong and fully committed himself as a loving husband who cared for his wife.”

**Sivagame Maniya**  
Advanced Practice Nurse and  
Senior Nurse Clinician  
Specialty Nursing  
Singapore General Hospital



Mrs Cecilia Kong and her husband Mr Fidelis Kong

“My priority was to look after my husband and support him through the difficult period with a positive attitude.”

## MRS CECILIA KONG KIM HEOK, 70 Educator

My husband Fidelis and I have been married for 47 years. We have a son, Ernest who lives in Switzerland with his wife and two young kids. It is our family tradition to visit them every year.

Fidelis and I were enjoying an active life together after retirement when he was diagnosed with liver cancer in 2015 at the age of 73. During a routine check-up, he told the doctor he was losing a lot of weight and was sent for an ultrasound and CT scan. That was when they discovered a large tumour in his liver. We were very shocked because he had done a blood test the previous year but the results were normal.

We were advised that due to the size of the tumour, surgery was not an option. We were devastated but knew we had to face reality and prepare ourselves for the worst. It was a very anxious time for the whole family, but our Christian faith kept us going.

At that time, I was working part-time and studying for a Masters in Theology. I had to manage my time because my priority was to look after my husband and support him through the difficult period with a positive attitude. On the surface, Fidelis appeared very calm and stoic but I knew he was putting on a brave front because he did not want the family to worry. The situation was really bleak as surgery was not an option and Fidelis was told to await the worst.

Fortunately, after a few rounds of radiation therapy, the tumour began to shrink. We were very relieved that he did not experience any major side effects from the radiation. In June 2016, the tumour was small enough to be surgically removed.

Not long after the surgery, his doctor at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) found a few more small lesions in the left lobe of his liver during his monthly follow-ups. It was another blow, because we thought that with the surgery, the worst was over. Thankfully, the lesions were small and

Fidelis could undergo a minimally invasive procedure to remove them in August 2017. He had to undergo the procedure again in February 2018, when another 1.5cm lesion was detected. We did not know when the ordeal would end but decided to take all the challenges in our stride and did whatever was necessary to maintain quality of life.

We are especially thankful to the SGH medical team, Assoc Prof Chan Chung Yip, Dr Farah Gillan Irani and Nurse Julianah for their care and moral support whenever Fidelis was in hospital. Nurse Julianah introduced us to the Liver Cancer Support Group where we now volunteer as patient ambassadors, sharing our journey with other patients and their caregivers. We hope that hearing Fidelis' battle with cancer will inspire and encourage them not to give up the fight.

Last December, we made a special trip to celebrate Christmas with our son Ernest, his wife, Noeline and our two grandchildren, Ethan and Shayna in Switzerland. The fight against cancer is a daily battle for us. We live from day to day, from one review to the next, albeit with a hope that one day, Fidelis would be completely cancer-free. No matter what challenges lie ahead, I know we will muster the courage to overcome them as a family.

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**“Mrs Kong is more than a caregiver to her husband - she is his confidante, mentor and guardian angel. She’s a role model who has inspired many other caregivers in the liver cancer support group.”**

**Julianah Bee D/O Abdul Latiff**  
Nurse Clinician  
Specialty Nursing  
Singapore General Hospital



“I worry about my siblings because I don’t know what will happen to them when I am no longer around. For now, I will just do my best to keep them healthy and happy.”

**MS NG LUI TEEN, 48**  
Administrative Assistant

My three elder sisters Wee Eng, 62, Hwee Beng, 61, and Hwee Imm, 58, have Down Syndrome. I have been taking care of them for almost 20 years, ever since our parents passed away. Wee Eng is now in a nursing home and largely bed-bound due to a fall she had in 2015. I live with my two other sisters and our elder brother Hian Teck, 64, who is retired. We have another two elder siblings who live with their own families.

During the week, Hwee Beng attends the SUN-DAC Centre for the Disabled where she participates in activities like handicraft. Hwee Imm goes to the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) Idea Employment Development Centre where she does simple jobs like tying and securing wires for electronic products. I’m thankful that the centres take good care of them and keep me updated if they observe anything amiss. In fact, it was the centre that alerted me that Hwee Imm had poor vision and advised me to take her to see an eye specialist.

I take my sisters for their regular medical appointments at the Singapore National Eye Centre, Singapore General Hospital, Changi General Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Sometimes, all three of us will go together as I’m worried to let either of my sisters stay alone at home. I also try to visit Wee Eng in the nursing home and bring her favourite food like ice-cream and fruits.

Previously, I worked during the day as an administrative assistant and would return home after work to help my sisters shower while my brother prepared dinner. But to make ends meet, I recently took on an extra job as a live-in nanny and am only able to go home every weekend. When I can, I take my sisters out to the market for breakfast or go shopping with them.

Finances are tight as I’m the only one in the household who works, but thankfully we receive financial assistance from the Agency for Integrated Care. They even assisted with a grant application, so that we could hire a domestic

helper to take care of my sisters, and do household chores while I am at work. I’m also thankful that my employer is very understanding of my family situation and allows me leave work early when I need to bring my sisters for their medical appointments.

It has not been easy looking after my sisters. Due to their condition, they can sometimes be quite stubborn and refuse to listen to me. Despite this, I am happy and willing to take care of them because they are my family and we have been close since young. There are times when I do feel tired, but as their sister, I want to do my part to look after them.

Even though my sisters can only manage to say a few words and don’t really know how to express themselves, they sometimes give me a tap as their way of thanking me. And I’m always greeted with big smiles when I reach home after work.

I worry about my siblings because I don’t know what will happen to them when I am no longer around. For now, I will just do my best to keep them healthy and happy.

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**“Lui Teen selflessly dedicates her time to take care of her intellectually challenged siblings. She is always cheerful and patient even when the clinics are very busy.”**

**Dr Livia Teo**  
Consultant  
Oculoplastic Department  
Singapore National Eye Centre



Mdm Hasnah (left) and her sister Mdm Fatimah

“Stay positive and allow yourself to take a break whenever you’re feeling overwhelmed.”

## MDM HASNAH BINTE MOHAMED MAIDEEN, 55

My sister Fatimah and I grew up in a large family with 16 other siblings. Even though she is 17 years older, we’ve always had a special connection and I’ve been close to her from a young age.

In 2012, when she was 66 years old, Fatimah was diagnosed with dementia. She first showed signs of dementia when she forgot to turn up at our sister’s place to take care of our late mother. When she returned home that night, she could not remember where she had been during the day.

Over time, her condition worsened. In 2013, it was clear that she could no longer manage living alone. I took her in and quit my job as a food stall helper so that I could take care of her.

Fatimah now needs help with routine activities including eating, bathing, dressing and toileting. During mealtimes, I have to watch over her as she tends to eat very quickly and sometimes chokes or vomits. She needs constant supervision, and as her closest sibling, it is natural that I should be the one to care for her even though our daily expenses and medical bills are sometimes a worry.

I miss the old times when Fatimah was well and we used to catch up over meals or go shopping together. She was a doting aunt who would buy treats and toys for my children when they were young. There are many happy memories of the good times we shared.

Things have changed a lot now that her condition has deteriorated. As her sole caregiver, there are times when I feel very stressed out and frustrated. Fatimah often has mood swings, especially when she sees me chatting with my neighbours. When this happens, I always remind myself to be more sensitive and patient

because I know she cannot control her temper. I de-stress by speaking to my grown children and playing with my three young grandchildren.

I will be turning 56 years old this year. Age is catching up and I wonder how long more I can continue as the sole caregiver for my sister. I have a heart condition, and may also have to undergo surgery to remove a lump on my neck later this year. I will have to arrange for Fatimah to stay in a nursing home when I am hospitalised. It will be the first time that we would be apart and is not ideal but I have no choice as there is no one else who can take care of her.

To other caregivers taking care of patients with dementia, my advice is to stay positive and allow yourselves to take a break whenever you are feeling overwhelmed. It is so important to find ways to manage the stress and stay mentally strong.

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“Mdm Hasnah is the sole caregiver for her sister. She shoulders this responsibility despite her own medical conditions. Her dedication in caring for her sister is selfless and admirable.”

**Dr Meykkumar S/O Meyappan**  
Family Physician  
SingHealth Polyclinics - Pasir Ris



“Looking back, it has been a blessing for me to be able to take care of my mother and I am thankful for all the memories.”

## MS HELEN CHEE CHIN KEAT, 58

For the past 11 years, I took care of my mother, Mdm Chung Swee Heng, until she passed away last year at the ripe old age of 101. She was the bright light in my life, and I remember her fondly every day.

My mother was a strong and independent person. She took care of herself and cooked meals for the family till she was in her 80s. But after a fall in 2007, she gradually became frailer and needed a walking frame to move around. She was also put on long-term warfarin as she had deep vein thrombosis.

My elder sister and I lived with our mother. As both of us were working, we hired a domestic helper to take care of her. Within a week, my mother complained that the helper had been ill-treating her and she asked if I could take care of her instead.

It wasn't an easy decision to make, but I eventually quit my job as a kindergarten teacher to stay home to take care of our mother. I did it out of love for my mother and because I knew that she really wanted my company. My siblings were also supportive and agreed to chip in with financial support.

Although my mother became weaker after the fall, she was generally healthy otherwise. Her memory was good and she had perfect eyesight. As far as possible, I tried to let her manage her own daily activities to keep her physically and mentally active. Diet-wise, I had to make sure she didn't take food with vitamin K such as green leafy vegetables as that would interfere with her warfarin medication.

For the past 11 years, we never spent a day apart. Our days were spent chatting, joking and eating together. Although my mother never received any formal education, she had

a love for drawing. I bought her a whiteboard and marker and she would enjoy drawing things that she saw like birds, flowers and food.

In October 2017, my mother was hospitalised with a urinary tract infection and lung infection which subsequently progressed to pneumonia. After staying in the hospital for a month, she insisted on going home despite the doctor's advice that she should stay hospitalised. During her last month at home, she was bed-bound and gradually grew weaker each day till she passed away on Christmas Eve last year.

From the time she was hospitalised in October till her passing, I was so worried and busy taking care of her that I fell sick and lost more than 10kg. Till today, I still miss her so much and it has been hard to come to terms that she is no longer around. Memories of my mother would sometimes overwhelm me when I am in the room that I used to share with her.

Looking back, it has been a blessing for me to be able to take care of my mother and I am thankful for all the memories. I hope to find a job at the elderly day care centre near my place as I want to help other elderly people.

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**“Mdm Chee is a very dedicated caregiver. She did not mind making sacrifices for her mother and served as her caregiver since 2007.”**

**Lim Jock Hong**  
Senior Nurse Manager  
St. Andrew's Community Hospital



Mdm Lim Kwee Choon and her mother Mdm Chee Sock Lian

“We know that her condition will continue to worsen over time, but for now, we are thankful that she still remembers who we are.”

## MDM LIM KWEE CHOON, 69 Retiree

My mother, Chee Sock Lian, 92, suffered a stroke in 2010 which affected her heart and brain. She needed a pacemaker to regulate her heartbeat and was subsequently diagnosed with vascular dementia in 2015.

As the eldest of five siblings, I decided to quit my job to look after my mother. I was actually just six months away from retirement but decided not to wait as her condition was deteriorating. Her behaviour was erratic and she would sometimes call me at work up to 20 times a day.

It was really difficult adjusting to the role as caregiver to my mother as I didn't expect the personality changes I observed. Her sudden mood swings would test my patience and I often got frustrated. She would constantly complain that nobody cared about her and that she was useless and better off dead.

No matter how hard I tried to pacify her, she would keep repeating those words. She would also get very upset when I am not around. It was so stressful that it made my blood pressure go up.

I knew I needed help so I went for counselling and started reading up on dementia. I also spoke to other caregivers whose family members had dementia to understand their experience. With a better understanding of the condition, I was able to manage my mother's mood swings and my own temper. I also de-stress by participating in lawn bowling twice a week.

Last year, my mother started going to the Enhanced Dementia Day Care at St Andrew's Senior Care Centre twice a week, where she does group activities and exercises. I have become a volunteer at the Centre and

help out where I can, such as preparing snacks during the festive celebrations.

When my mother is not at day care, I try to keep her occupied by playing cards with her or taking her out for meals. We know that she feels insecure about her current state, because she used to be very active and independent until she was in her 80s, so my siblings and I try our best to keep her busy with different activities.

We know that her condition will continue to worsen over time, but for now, we are thankful that she still remembers who we are.

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“We are touched by Mdm Lim's devotion to her mother. She has done well to balance her mother's needs with her own well-being. This is important because caregivers need to take good care of themselves before they can care for their loved ones.”

**Namrata Sadarangani**  
Assistant Director  
Community Therapy Services  
St. Andrew's Community Hospital

# Inspirational Patient Support Groups



## **National Cancer Centre Singapore**

Sinar Harapan (Ray of Hope)

The Revival Connection

## **National Heart Centre Singapore**

LVAD Support Group

## **Singapore General Hospital**

Blossoms Support Group

Thalassaemia Support Group





## SINAR HARAPAN (RAY OF HOPE) National Cancer Centre Singapore

“We have members who struggle with cancer relapses but they still make the effort to join our activities. It goes to show how important the support network is for them.”

— Ms Ratna Binte Mohammed Said,  
Volunteer Programme Leader

When asked what differentiates the Sinar Harapan (Ray of Hope) from other support groups, Ms Ernalisah Binte Mohamed Subhi, Medical Social Worker with National Cancer Centre Singapore, says that it's the strong kampung spirit that connects the members.

Each letter in Sinar represents a key pillar of the group: **S**upport for our Malay patients, **I**nspiration to new patients and caregivers, **N**urturing motivation and hope, **A**rray of activities and **R**evel in joyfulness.

Since the support group started in 2006, the members have benefitted from the activities specially targeted at Malay cancer patients. The group aims to serve as a safe space where members can seek the knowledge, solace and support they need to help them cope with their condition.

“There are many misconceptions about cancer, which may prevent patients from seeking proper treatment. Through the talks we organise, we equip them with the information needed to guide them to make informed decisions about their care,” says Ernalisah.

Common myths and misconceptions include the belief that chemotherapy destroys both healthy and cancerous cells. Some patients may also have reservations about Western medicine due to preconceptions.

Sinar Harapan engages its members with monthly educational talks and workshops conducted by healthcare professionals, inspirational sharing by cancer survivors and peer counselling. The group also organises craft sessions to help new members express themselves through art therapy.

Currently, the group has more than 30 active members who meet every month. The group also organises yearly

outings to local attractions for members and their caregivers to bond with one another. “They really enjoyed outings to places like River Safari and Gardens by the Bay. Many of them are very close and also meet up on their own for activities such as going to the mosque together,” says Ms Ratna Binte Mohammed Said, Volunteer Programme Leader of the support group.

“We have members who are very inspirational in their spirit and attitude. Sometimes, our meetings can become very emotional, but they help to lighten the mood. They also encourage and motivate new members. I am very encouraged by that camaraderie,” added Ratna.

Although Ratna was declared cancer-free last year, she wants to continue to contribute to the support group. “We have members who struggle with cancer relapses but they still make the effort to join our activities. It goes to show how important the support network is to them,” says Ratna.

*For more information on Sinar Harapan Patient Support Group, please call 6436 8688 or email [patientsupport@nccs.com.sg](mailto:patientsupport@nccs.com.sg)*

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“Sinar Harapan provides members with a platform to reach out to those who share similar experiences for solace, support and friendship.”

**Ernalisah Binte Mohamed Subhi**  
Medical Social Worker  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



## THE REVIVAL CONNECTION National Cancer Centre Singapore

“Like a caterpillar that transforms into a butterfly, our support group is all about celebrating life and embracing changes.”

— Ms Lam Lai Ore, Volunteer Programme Leader

The Revival Connection (TRC) is a support group set up for patients with advanced or recurrent cancer who often have different needs and concerns from early-stage cancer patients. For example, many of them would find introductory talks on cancer and treatment options not as relevant as they are coping with different uncertainties and treatment complications. That is where TRC, which focuses on living well with cancer, comes in.

“What’s different about this support group is that it’s led by the patients themselves,” explains Dr Gilbert Fan, Master Medical Social Worker, who played an important role in setting up the support group. “As they understand the struggles and concerns best, members have full autonomy to develop the programmes that cater to those needs.”

Formed in 2005, the idea to start TRC was initiated by a group of ten patients who had advanced stage ovarian and breast cancers. The group met in 2004 at the annual EnReach Retreat organised by the National Cancer Centre Singapore for patients and their loved ones.

Ms Lam Lai Ore, 63, Volunteer Programme Leader and founding member of TRC, recounts, “We were already meeting quite frequently, so we thought, why not take it further and reach out to others like us?”

In addition to the bi-monthly meetings where inspirational talks and peer support sessions are held, the group also has a visitation programme where members befriend patients who are newly diagnosed with advanced cancers, in the hospital or at home. The group also organises yearly outings to local attractions for members to have fun and bond.

“During our outings, people can’t tell that we’re cancer patients because we’re always laughing and look so full of life,” says Mrs Jade Koh, who has been a TRC member since 2017.

It hasn’t been all sunshine and roses though; members deal with challenges and complications from their cancer. Caregivers also face stress and anxiety giving support, preparing specific diets and being on the receiving end of mood swings from time to time. The group has also seen members pass on due to cancer. During such difficult times, they try to remain steadfast and positive, true to TRC’s motto ‘Where There’s Life, There’s Hope’.

“My friends who founded TRC with me are no longer around. When life has more downs than ups, you have to choose to look at it positively. The more downs you have, the more thankful and appreciative you are for the ups,” says Lai Ore, who has been battling cancer since 2004.

“Like a caterpillar that transforms into a butterfly, our support group is all about celebrating life and embracing change,” she adds. Moving forward, the group hopes to help more patients to live life to the fullest in spite of future uncertainties.

*For more information on The Revival Connection, please call 6436 8688 or email [patientsupport@nccs.com.sg](mailto:patientsupport@nccs.com.sg)*

“The Revival Connection is a very unique group made up of patients with advanced cancers who choose to journey together despite uncertainties in their own lives. I am amazed by the mental and spiritual strength of the group members and their courage to live each day to the fullest.”

**Jacinta Poon**  
Principal Medical Social Worker  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



## LEFT VENTRICULAR ASSIST DEVICE (LVAD) PATIENT SUPPORT GROUP

National Heart Centre Singapore

“We hope to help more people with heart failure see that it is possible to lead an active life while living with the LVAD.”

— Ms Serene Lee, Support Group Chairperson

For patients with heart failure, the Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD) is a lifesaver. The mechanical heart pump takes over the pumping function of the heart to help maintain blood circulation. It serves patients waiting for a heart transplant and is a long term therapy for those who are not able to undergo a transplant.

While most patients on LVAD are able to resume an almost normal life, it requires them to make certain lifestyle changes as the mechanical pump is implanted in the chest and connected to external batteries and a controller via a cable that passes through an opening made at the abdomen. This means the individual has to carry the LVAD batteries and controller at all times. The LVAD Patient Support Group was started in 2013 to provide pre- and post-surgery education as well as emotional support to patients learning to cope with living with an LVAD.

Ms Salina Binte Mohamed, Vice-Chairperson of the support group, who has been living with an LVAD since 2009, says, “Learning to live with the LVAD can be quite challenging at first as there’s a lot of things we need to adjust to and be careful of.” Besides getting used to carrying the LVAD equipment everywhere, lifestyle changes include dressing the abdominal wound daily to prevent infection, avoiding water sports and vigorous exercises, as well as dietary restrictions such as avoiding foods rich in vitamin K which can interfere with warfarin medication.

Together with other support group members, Ms Serene Lee, Chairperson of the support group, visits the wards at Singapore General Hospital every week to speak with patients before and after they undergo LVAD surgery. She has led the support group since it started in 2013, after being implanted with an LVAD in 2012 and subsequently having a heart transplant in 2015. “It is important to connect with patients before they get the implant. When we share our personal experience and let them know what to expect, it eases their fears and worries,” Serene says.

Starting with just 20 members, the group has since doubled. They meet once every quarter to discuss experiences or difficulties they face living with the LVAD. They also share useful tips such as what to prepare when travelling. Doctors, nutritionists, and other experts are also invited to speak to the group on topics related to heart failure, LVAD or heart transplant.

In 2016, Serene and Salina came up with the idea to produce a customised dressing kit that contains all the essential items that LVAD patients need to clean their wounds daily. This would save them from purchasing the items such as cotton gauze, syringes and forceps, separately. “We worked with the clinical coordinators to put together the customised kit to make it more convenient. We are glad that many of our support group members find it very helpful,” said Salina.

Like Serene, some members who have undergone successful heart transplants still continue to take part in the group’s activities. She says, “Running the support group can be tiring at times, but it’s the love for each other that keeps us going. We hope to help more people with heart failure see that it is possible to lead an active life while living with the LVAD.”

“Support from family members and others with similar experiences is important for LVAD patients before and after the surgery. The support group has provided patients and caregivers with much needed practical advice and reassurance on how to manage the device.”

**Kerk Ka Lee**  
Senior Manager  
Mechanical Circulatory Support, Heart  
and Lung Transplant Unit  
National Heart Centre Singapore



## BLOSSOMS SUPPORT GROUP

### Singapore General Hospital

**“As cancer survivors, we are living proof that breast cancer can be beaten.”**

— Ms Julie Ding, Support Group Member

Senior Nurse Clinician Nagalingam Saraswathi started the Blossoms Support Group for breast cancer patients at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) more than 25 years ago. “I had just returned from a clinical attachment on breast care in the United Kingdom. The trip was an eye-opener, it made me realise that there was so much more we could do to support breast cancer patients here,” recounts Ms Nagalingam Saraswathi, who is affectionately known as Sister Sara.

The support group which started with just five patients provided counselling and emotional support for women newly diagnosed with or undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

Today, the Blossoms has over 30 active members, some of whom are long-time members who have been cancer-free but chose to stay on to provide peer support to other patients.

One of them is Ms Julie Ding, 63, who joined the support group in 1996. “As cancer survivors, we are living proof that breast cancer can be beaten. We hope our stories will give other women the confidence to go through chemo and radiation therapy and not give up,” says Julie.

Ms Rosa Chiao, 63 can still remember what Sister Sara and Julie said to her when she was first diagnosed with breast cancer thirteen years ago.

“Sister Sara showed me a photo of long-time support group members and told me, ‘You can be just like them.’ Talking to Julie also really helped allay my fears and gave me the courage to undergo treatment. She was so open with her sharing that I felt very comfortable to share my fears with her.”

In addition to organising monthly talks which cover topics on treatment, diet and exercise, the support group also participates in public outreach events to increase breast

cancer awareness and organises outings and overseas mission trips. For the past ten years, they have gone on yearly trips to Cambodia to raise awareness on breast cancer and to help the needy. Blossoms also maintains a roster of volunteers who visit post-operative patients in the hospital every week to encourage them as they recover.

Julie, one of the longest-serving members, says, “We make it a point to show newcomers that we are just a group of normal women. There is no fear, no stigma here. That slowly takes the fear away from them too.”

“We are very close like family. If one of us doesn’t feel good, we quickly spread the word through our WhatsApp group chat and visit her to show our support,” says Ms Marie Ow Yong, 63.

Not wanting to rest on their laurels, the group hopes to reach out more to younger women. “Although breast cancer is not as common among young women, we want to be there for those who are affected. Some of them may be starting their families so they have very different needs and concerns such as fertility. We can do more to increase awareness so that younger women understand the risk factors and the importance of screening,” explains Sister Sara.

**“Blossoms is one big, close-knit family and it is inspiring to see the members coming together, not just for one another, but for women in Singapore and around the region through outreach events and mission trips.”**

**Nagalingam Saraswathi**  
Senior Nurse Clinician  
Singapore General Hospital



## THALASSAEMIA SUPPORT GROUP

Singapore General Hospital

“Many of us are able to cope thanks to the dedicated medical team as well as support group members who go the extra mile for us because they genuinely care.”

— Mr Marc Wong, Support Group Member

Thalassaemia is an inherited blood disorder where the body is unable to produce normal, functioning haemoglobin in the blood, which may cause anaemia and fatigue. People with thalassaemia minor usually have mild anaemia and do not require treatment. Those with thalassaemia major or intermedia have more severe anaemia and other complications. Depending on the severity, some patients may need lifelong treatment with regular blood transfusion and iron chelation treatment (medication to remove excess iron from body).

The Singapore General Hospital (SGH) Thalassaemia Support Group was started in 2011 to provide support to patients as the care they receive transits from KK Women's and Children's Hospital to SGH, after they turn 18 years old. The aim is to help young patients manage their condition independently as they move into adulthood so that they can lead normal lives. This is crucial because if treatment is not followed closely, it can lead to severe anaemia and possible organ damage from iron overload, which can be deadly. The support group also reaches out to existing adult thalassaemia patients seen at SGH.

Assistant Nurse Clinician Zhang Xiao, who leads the support group says, “These patients require lifelong treatment which can be tedious and costly, but it is important that they comply with the treatment. Apart from supporting and empowering patients to take charge of their condition, we refer them to our medical social services team if they need financial assistance.”

There are currently about 45 members in the support group, which includes patients, caregivers and nurses from the Haematology Centre and wards. While the support group only formally meets annually to update members on the latest information and treatment for thalassaemia, the members often meet up on their own for support and advice.

For Zhang Xiao, one of the key challenges is helping patients to stay compliant to the treatment as many young adults busy with school or those just embarking on their careers find it time-consuming and troublesome.

Some require bimonthly or monthly blood transfusions at SGH that can take up to 6-8 hours each time. Those on iron chelation treatment need to inject the medication into their arms, thighs or abdomen with an infusion pump at home every day.

“We have come across many patients and caregivers who struggle emotionally and financially because of this condition. Some have even given up on the treatment as they lose hope and confidence in managing their condition,” says Zhang Xiao.

This is where the support group comes in to do home visits to teach patients and caregivers how to administer the iron chelation therapy, manage the equipment and lend a listening ear.

“The members are very passionate and willing to reach out to other caregivers or patients to provide advice and show them that it is possible to lead a normal life with thalassaemia,” says Zhang Xiao. “It is really heartening when we see patients doing well and leading fulfilling lives,” she adds.

Mr Marc Wong, who has been a support group member since 2011, says, “Many of us are able to cope thanks to the medical team as well as support group members who go the extra mile for us because they genuinely care.”

*For more information on Thalassaemia Support Group, please call 6321 3844 or 6321 3515.*

**“The best way to help thalassaemia patients cope with this lifelong condition is to teach them to take charge of their own health. The support group aims to provide care and advice so that they can lead a normal life.”**

**Zhang Xiao**  
Assistant Nurse Clinician  
Singapore General Hospital

