

SINGAPORE HEALTH  
**INSPIRATIONAL  
PATIENT &  
CAREGIVER**  
AWARDS 2022



# About The Awards

Since 2010, the annual Singapore Health Inspirational Patient and Caregiver Awards honour individuals for their strength, courage and resilience in the face of health challenges, as well as outstanding patient support groups that have provided invaluable support to patients and caregivers.

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

This year, we recognise 37 winners who, amid the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, continue to motivate healthcare professionals to deliver better care and inspire many others with their zest for life.

## PARTNER-IN-CARE AWARD

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

Organised by



Participating Organisations



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# Inspirational Patients

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# Inspirational Patients



## PARTNER-IN-CARE AWARD

Ms Carol Lim

Ms Nooridah Binte Mohd Noor

Mr Jason Foo Siang Jam

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Mr Elfie Bin Subto

Mr Eugene Chia

Ms Leona Heng

Mr Ho Poh Hee

Mrs Katherine Seet

Mdm Ng Siang Yang

Mdm Chin Kwee Hiong

Mdm Deepa Maurya

Mdm Lim Yew Gek

Mdm Chan Yin Ha

Ms Chuan Yew Eng

Mr Tan Ann Seng







**“My perspective on life has changed completely. Now, I am a lot more empathetic and understanding towards others, and I want to do all I can to help women feel supported as they battle breast cancer.”**

**I** used to think that a cancer diagnosis would be like a scene in a TV show, where you receive a call from the hospital informing you of the bad news. It was nothing like that for me. Instead, I was alone in the doctor’s consultation room, expecting that everything would be alright, when I was told that I had breast cancer.

When I received the news, I was in complete shock. I immediately started thinking how would I tell my parents of this diagnosis which would sound like a death sentence to them? What would happen to my daughter who was only four years old?

Because of the way the cancer had spread throughout my left breast, I was advised to undergo a mastectomy as soon as possible. The doctors explained that this was my best shot at nipping the cancer in the bud. But I was filled with anxiety and fear at the prospect of losing my breast and femininity.

Thankfully, I was fortunate to receive immense support from everyone around me. My husband was with me every single day of my recovery; so was my wonderful care team at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH).

After I got better, I decided to volunteer my time and journey alongside other breast cancer patients – specifically, women like me who faced the prospect of a breast reconstruction following a mastectomy. I did not want them to feel lost, alone and afraid.

At the KK Alpine Blossoms Breast Cancer Support Group, I share my journey with fellow patients. To me, there is nothing to hide, and I know that sharing every aspect of the process and my experiences will go a long way in helping them ease their anxiety.

**Ms Carol Lim**  
*Secretary*

I am also active in the Breast Reconstruction Awareness Singapore (BRAS) community, a platform that provides information and resources about

undergoing a breast reconstruction procedure after a mastectomy.

As part of paying it forward for the wonderful care I received from the hospital and staff, I also joined the SingHealth Patient Advocacy Network (SPAN), where I work with other patients and caregivers to improve patients’ experience by giving extensive feedback on initiatives and testing new procedures and apps from a patient’s perspective.

Life before I had breast cancer was vastly different. I was a go-getter; always on the ball with work and had exacting standards. Strange as it sounds, cancer gave me a new lease of life.

My perspective on life has changed completely. Now, I am a lot more empathetic and understanding towards others and I want to do all I can to help women feel supported as they battle breast cancer.

“

**Carol’s motivation and determination in facing her cancer diagnosis is commendable. Also, her ever-readiness and empathy in rendering assistance to newly-diagnosed cancer patients make her an inspiration and a source of encouragement to them in their road to recovery.”**

**Teresa Ng Rucy Pyng**  
Assistant Director of Nursing  
KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital





**“I could never have navigated my cancer journey and pregnancy so successfully without my family and the healthcare team behind me. They were there when I needed them.”**

**I** was breastfeeding my first child in 2018 when I noticed a lump on my left breast. The doctor diagnosed me with mastitis, a common breast inflammation among breastfeeding women.

## **Ms Nooridah Binte Mohd Noor**

*Home-based business owner*

Though born premature, he was healthy. He has truly gone through a lot with me during my cancer journey, but has emerged strong and well.

Having delivered my son, I decided to go ahead with

Two years later, I started experiencing a tingling sensation in the same area. Even though we have no history of breast cancer in the family, my mother persuaded me to have it checked. Finding the lump suspicious, the breast surgeon I consulted sent me for a biopsy.

The doctor broke the bad news to me two weeks later. I had triple negative breast cancer, a particularly aggressive form of breast cancer. My world stopped, and I could not process what the doctor said after that. After the consultation, I found a quiet corner and bawled my heart out.

As I wanted to have more children in the future, I was referred to a gynaecologist to freeze my eggs before I underwent cancer treatment. A few days after I started on hormone injections for egg harvesting, I received a call from my gynaecologist asking me to stop all the injections immediately as tests revealed that I was pregnant.

I started chemotherapy in my second trimester, two months after my diagnosis. My body responded well and the breast lump reduced in size, so much so that I barely felt it in the later stages of my pregnancy.

During this ordeal, I had underestimated the impact of my illness on my son, who had turned two by then. I remember a particularly heart-wrenching incident when my husband was shaving my hair. My son saw the process, burst into tears and asked his father to “put Mama’s hair back”. Deep down, my heart broke for him.

When I entered my 29th week of pregnancy, life took another sudden twist. I went into early labour.

my lumpectomy to remove the tumour. I had my surgery three weeks later, followed by eight rounds of radiotherapy.

Today, I am in remission from my cancer. My miracle baby is thriving and meeting his developmental milestones. My elder son also looks visibly happier and relieved now that I am visiting the hospital less often.

Because of my unique situation, I was featured in a couple of news stories. Sharing my story in public has enabled other women to reach out to me. Some of them are in the same predicament as I was — a few found out that they had cancer midway through their pregnancies. Through my Instagram account (@idahchialixin), I got to know and talk to many mothers around the world.

I could never have navigated my cancer journey and pregnancy so successfully without my family and the healthcare team behind me. The best thing I can do for myself and my loved ones is to stay healthy, strong and happy.

“

*Idah has shown exemplary determination, positivity and strength throughout her difficult therapeutic and personal journey. By sharing her experience with candid honesty, she has helped new cancer patients through their own journeys.”*

**Asst Prof Sabrina Ngaserin**

Head and Consultant Breast Surgeon  
Department of Surgery, Sengkang General Hospital  
Service Chief, Breast Surgery, SingHealth Duke-NUS  
Breast Centre





**“I realised that to help myself, I need to learn to accept help from others.”**

**I**n 2008, I was doing well in my career in car sales when I first noticed that something felt ‘off’ with my body. I brushed it off as exercise-related issues because I was active in sports. However, I soon developed visible symptoms which were so obvious that even my colleagues took notice. I would drag my foot uncontrollably while walking, and I could not coordinate my hand movements. It was so bad that I had difficulty reaching for my wallet in my rear pocket. It took over a year of doctor visits before I received a conclusive diagnosis from a neurologist at the Singapore General Hospital after an MRI scan.

I have Parkinson Disease, a degenerative medical condition with no cure. My wife and I wept upon receiving the news. I was only 45. We deliberated over how to break the news to our two sons. In the end, we decided to wait till they had completed their PSLE and ‘N’ Level exams respectively before telling them.

Living with Parkinson Disease can be hard on one’s pride. I became increasingly dependent on the people around me. I was laid off in 2010 as my condition worsened. As my condition progressed, I had difficulties bathing and dressing myself. My wife sustained repetitive stress injury to her wrists because she had to constantly lift and pull me up. I felt like a burden to her.

I took a few years to learn to accept my condition. What changed my mind was seeing other Parkinson patients adjusting to and coping with the disease. They were able to stay active and live a near-normal life. I realised that to help myself, I needed to learn to accept help from others and to face my fears.

I started volunteering at the Parkinson’s Society Singapore (PSS), helping out at their physiotherapy classes and counselling other newly-diagnosed patients. Through the Society, secondary schools and hospitals requested PSS members to help doctors and nurses to understand the disease better. I started

**Mr Jason Foo  
Siang Jam**  
*Retiree*

an informal weekly gathering where Parkinson patients can get together to exercise and provide social support for one another. I even wrote a song about the disease which resonated deeply with fellow patients.

My condition took a turn for the worse about two years ago. I was unable to sit up or get out of bed on my own. In March 2021, I decided to go for Deep Brain Stimulation Surgery, where electrodes that transmit electrical stimulation were implanted in my brain. The surgery made a huge difference to my quality of life. It reversed many of my symptoms and restored my independence.

With regained mobility, I am able to pursue my exercise programme at the next level which was what the doctor recommended. I also do Yoga and Taichi, which help to improve my flexibility and balance. I now fly radio-controlled airplanes with fellow enthusiasts two or three times each week.

My sons presented me a small bottle of coffee beans shortly after my diagnosis. They told me that they hoped I could be like the beans, which release their true aroma and flavour after being brewed in hot water. They wanted me to get stronger and better under the heat of adversity and hardship. I still think about this analogy a lot to this day and it has kept me strong throughout this challenging journey.

“

**Mr Foo’s positivity and empathetic sharing of his own journey with Parkinson Disease has given other Parkinson patients and caregivers the hope and strength to move forward in their lives.”**

**Dr Tan Siok Bee**  
Deputy Director of Nursing (APN)  
Singapore General Hospital



“Because I had been completely helpless before, I wanted to motivate the other patients in my ward towards their recovery. I encouraged them to listen to the advice given by the care team and not to give up.”



I had always been an active person who enjoyed various sports such as cycling and surfing. When I felt pins and needles in my limbs in July 2021, and my General Practitioner referred me to Changi General Hospital (CGH)’s Emergency Department for further checks, I was not worried. I assumed it was just for the doctors there to run some tests and check if everything was alright with me.

However, before the test results were out, my condition deteriorated rapidly as I waited at CGH. I became paralysed and had to have a tube inserted into my windpipe through my mouth to help me breathe. When my left lung collapsed, my medical team had to make a hole in my neck for a tracheostomy tube to be inserted into my windpipe so that I could breathe with the help of a ventilator.

It turned out that I have a condition called Acute Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy, commonly known as Guillain-Barré syndrome. This is a rare disorder where the body’s immune system attacks its nerves, causing muscle weakness. I was very shocked at the diagnosis.

I ended up staying in the Medical Intensive Care Unit and the High Dependency Ward for three months. I had medicines given to me through an intravenous (IV) drip. During this time, I could neither breathe nor swallow on my own. I was entirely dependent on my care team and the use of medical equipment like a nasogastric tube – a special tube that carries food and medicine to the stomach through the nose. For someone who had never been seriously ill before, it was devastating.

After nearly four months of tube-feeding, my nasogastric tube was removed. I could finally eat on

**Mr Elfie Bin Subto**  
*Grab Driver*

my own! The next high point for me was having my tracheostomy tube removed, such that I could speak again. I immediately called my mother to speak with her, as my family could not visit me at the hospital due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout my hospital stay, I pushed myself to work my muscles despite the pain and discomfort. I felt encouraged when I made slow progress and could sit up without help. I then started setting higher therapy targets for myself. For example, after managing to walk about 100 steps, I aimed to walk 500 steps the next day.

Because I had been completely helpless before, I wanted to motivate the other patients in my ward towards their recovery. I encouraged them to listen to the advice given by the care team and not to give up.

Although I was discharged in late January 2022, my fingers are still weak and I get tired easily. But I am not giving up. I hope to eventually recover and be strong enough again to go back to work.

“

Elfie faced the challenges he encountered with great courage and a positive attitude. He constantly pushed himself to work with the healthcare team. Watching his progress towards recovery has been inspiring and rewarding.”

**Charise R Pua**

Senior Enrolled Nurse, Ward 64  
Changi General Hospital





“My heartfelt wish for cancer patients is to always stay positive. Having cancer is challenging and our journeys may be filled with plenty of unknowns. Do not lose heart, but continue to face them while looking to better days ahead.”

## Mr Eugene Chia

*Freelancer Entertainer*

In 2021, I started experiencing symptoms that resembled a stroke. My head felt extremely heavy and my limbs felt numb. There

was an episode where it got so bad that I could not move for a while. In January 2021, I went to get myself checked and was diagnosed with Sigmoid Adenocarcinoma, a type of colorectal cancer that starts in the cells that form glands producing mucus in the colon and rectum.

It was a big blow to me. I was worried about whether I could afford surgery for the cancer, as I was also paying for my asthma, diabetes and anaemia treatments. I reached out to the nurses at Changi General Hospital, who introduced me to a medical social worker to help me with managing my medical expenses. I underwent a laparoscopic high anterior resection surgery in March, which created an incision to remove the cancerous sigmoid colon from my body.

Just when I thought the worst was over, I suffered from complications from the surgery. I had recurring fever and diarrhoea. It turned out that I had an anastomotic leak after the surgery and contents from my bowel had leaked from the surgical connection. Within a week, doctors had to perform another surgery.

The doctors fixed the leak by creating a stoma in my belly. A stoma is an opening created through surgery that allows waste like faeces and urine to be channelled out of my body into a bag.

During my one-month hospital stay after this surgery, two patient ambassadors from the Ostomy Association of Singapore visited me daily to show me how to clean my stoma bag and care for the stoma. They were very patient and I learnt a lot from them.

A month after I was discharged, I had to go through eight cycles of oral chemotherapy for my cancer. I was extremely fatigued and sometimes felt nauseous. It

was one of the most challenging times in my life. My stoma also leaked a few times, so I had to go through another two surgical procedures to correct the leaks.

During those times, I chose to focus on things that brought me joy, and thought about how I could light up the lives of others in spite of my own challenges.

I have been a freelance entertainer for the past 15 years, and I often performed at events before the COVID-19 pandemic. I like making people happy, and would volunteer at charity events to perform magic shows, balloon sculpting and clown skits to make people laugh.

Since I cannot perform at live events due to the pandemic, I decided to bring my shows online through Facebook Live and continue to bring cheer to others.

It has been more than a year since I was diagnosed with cancer. I have stayed in touch with the volunteers from the Ostomy Association of Singapore and have also shared my experiences with other patients, so they know that they have a community that cares for them.

My heartfelt wish for cancer patients is to always stay positive. Having cancer is challenging and our journeys may be filled with plenty of unknowns. Do not lose heart, but continue to face them while looking to better days ahead.

“

Despite his cancer diagnosis, Eugene decided to put his time to good use and bring happiness to others around him.”

**Nur Madalinah Tan**

Assistant Nurse Clinician  
Specialty Nursing, Colorectal Service  
Changi General Hospital





Each morning, I wake up thankful for a new day and I always remind myself that I am not defined by society's definition of wholeness, because beauty can also be found in brokenness."

**D**uring a review mammogram in March 2019, I found out I had high grade cancer in my left breast, and was given only two weeks to decide on the course of treatment — either lumpectomy with daily radiation for six weeks, or a mastectomy.

**Ms Leona Heng**  
*Financial Planner*

I only had one thought: I wanted to live.

Not wanting to put my family through any undue stress, I chose to undergo a mastectomy in May 2019. Recovery would be the fastest and least inconvenient. In two short but nerve-racking months from the initial diagnosis, my breast was removed. To my immense relief, the cancer was still contained within the milk duct and had not spread. I have been cancer-free since then.

Initially, I thought that I would eventually undergo breast reconstruction, as others did. However, a series of events put a stop to my plans.

For insurance coverage reasons, I was given one year to get my reconstruction surgery done, and I had managed to book a surgery date. However, a few days before my surgery, my surgeon called to ask if I could give up my slot to another lady, who required an emergency operation to save her life.

How could I say no to saving someone's life?

Thankfully, I managed to secure an extension and I was looking forward to the surgery again. Unfortunately, my father was due to undergo an operation just a few days after this surgery. Knowing my surgery would impede my ability to take care of him at this crucial

time, I decided to cancel my reconstruction surgery for good.

I would be lying if I say it does not bother me at times. Small things may unexpectedly trigger that sense of loss, like buying a sports bra without inserts where I can place the prosthesis, or when people look at me and I feel self-conscious.

However, I choose to focus on the blessings in my life. My cancer was detected early and I am thankful for this second lease of life. I know of friends and family who have breast cancer and I am able to walk alongside them on their journeys as only a fellow breast cancer survivor can. In addition, I also shared my story with others through a speech delivered at the Toastmasters Club for an audience of mothers.

Each morning, I wake up thankful for a new day and I always remind myself that I am not defined by society's definition of wholeness, because beauty can also be found in brokenness.

“  
**Leona's ability to consider others even when she was diagnosed and undergoing treatment, and her willingness to share her experience and lend courage to other women is truly remarkable and inspiring!**”  
**Assoc Prof Veronique Tan Kiak Mien**  
Head, SingHealth Duke-NUS Breast Centre;  
Head & Senior Consultant,  
Department of Breast Surgery,  
Division of Surgery and Surgical Oncology,  
Singapore General Hospital and  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



**I try to support other patients I meet in whatever small ways that I can. I also advise them to cherish their health and not take it for granted like I did.”**



**A**fter I had my first heart attack about 10 years ago, I recovered fairly quickly and was discharged from the hospital with medications to take. I took my health for granted back then, and did not bother to keep up with my follow-up medical appointments.

In April 2020, I had another heart attack. This time, I became seriously ill. I had a life-threatening condition – cardiogenic shock, also known as heart failure. This meant that my heart suddenly could not pump enough blood to meet my body’s needs. I was temporarily supported on Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO), a life support machine to take over the functions of my heart and lungs. A left ventricular assist device (LVAD) was also implanted in my heart as a long-term solution for my heart failure.

Unfortunately, my health continued to decline. I had acute kidney injury and had to be put on dialysis. As my lungs were also affected by my heart condition, I was placed on a mechanical ventilator and a tracheostomy tube was inserted into my windpipe. Then, I suffered a stroke that led to the loss of the use of my legs.

My health issues cascaded one after another. As I had to lie in bed for many months, I sustained massive pressure injury to my back. To protect my pressure wound from being contaminated by urine and faeces, I had to use a urinary catheter to help me pass urine, and a colostomy bag to collect my stool through a surgically-created opening in my abdomen. It was all very inconvenient and uncomfortable.

I was finally discharged after six long months at the National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS)

**Mr Ho Poh Hee**  
*Former Coffee-stall Owner*

cardiothoracic ward. Adjusting to being in a wheelchair and living with the LVAD has not been easy. To make matters worse, after my first pressure wound

healed, I developed another. Hence, I still have to depend on the catheter and colostomy bag for my bodily functions.

I must admit that, at times, I feel discouraged about having to rely on others for my daily living. My best friend, who used to be my business partner, is my main caregiver. He is assisted by my domestic helper, who was engaged by my sister, to take care of me, including caring for my wounds. I am very grateful for their help.

I know that I have reached end-stage heart failure and do not have long to live. I am just living one day at a time and trying to stay positive. This is why I try to support other patients I meet in whatever small ways that I can. I also advise them to cherish their health and not take it for granted like I did.

“

Although Poh Hee had many health issues, he showed care and concern for the other patients in his ward. One such patient was an elderly man who often had temper tantrums and refused treatment. Poh Hee would encourage him to comply with the instructions given by the healthcare workers, and share his snacks with the elderly man.”

**Siti Fidawati Binte Jasman**  
Nurse Clinician  
National Heart Centre Singapore





**When I share my experiences with other dementia patients, it gives them more confidence to manage their conditions, and that makes me really happy.”**

## **Mrs Katherine Seet** *Homemaker*

**I** will be 90 this year, but I lead an active life doing the things I love such as painting, playing games, knitting and doing volunteer work. To some, it is hard to believe that I have Alzheimer’s Disease.

About 10 years ago, I lost my way driving home from an old folks’ home where I volunteered as a befriender. This, coupled with other symptoms such as blacking out, led to my diagnosis of Alzheimer’s Disease.

Although I was anxious and frightened at first, I was blessed to receive lots of love and support from my family. I often tell myself, “Que sera sera”, which means “what will be, will be”, which helps me to accept my condition and make the most of it.

Nowadays, activities such as getting dressed can be difficult, but thankfully, I have two daughters living with me who take wonderful care of me. Babara and Belinda patiently guide me when I perform my daily activities and never make me feel lonely or helpless.

Babara and Belinda also make sure that I keep my mind active and my hands busy. When they were young, playtime was an important part of our family’s activities. They made sure this tradition continued till now. We do puzzles and play card and Lego games together, which help to stimulate and sharpen my mind. I am open to trying new types of games too and I learnt to play puzzle games on the iPad, such as ‘Buttons and Scissors’, which my medical care team recommends as it helps me to remain cognitively alert and fosters a sense of self-worth.

My other two children and their families visit us on weekends. I get to spend time with my grandchildren and play mahjong with the adults. My close-knit family truly keeps me mentally stimulated!

I did not give up my passion for volunteering even with Alzheimer’s Disease. I now volunteer with Babara and Belinda at Dementia Singapore every Saturday.

At our weekly meetings, Babara and Belinda help to counsel and support the caregivers of people living with dementia, and share tips on caring for them. I am also

happy to share my experiences with other patients, with Belinda helping me to organise and present my points.

My mother taught me knitting when I was very young and, in turn, I teach the patients and caregivers at Dementia Singapore to knit. Our knitting circle has even knitted little T-shirts for teddy bears to raise funds.

I have made many good friends at Dementia Singapore. When I share my experiences with other dementia patients, it gives them more confidence to manage their conditions, and that makes me really happy.

Recently, I spoke at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) about my dementia journey. Belinda used to be a lecturer and she encouraged me to share my experiences with healthcare professionals attending SIT courses. I am glad to be able to offer insights into what it is like for those of us living with dementia.

I think it is important for patients with dementia and their caregivers to love and understand one another. I advise caregivers to let their family members with dementia be free to be themselves. In that way, they will not be frightened of their condition, just like me.

“

*It is always a pleasure to see how Mrs Seet lives each day with gratitude and gusto. She not only contributes actively to advocacy work at Dementia Singapore, but she also shares her experiences through public speaking for us to gain a better understanding of persons with dementia.”*

**Esther Vanessa Chua Ai Ling**  
Nurse Clinician  
National Neuroscience Institute





*Mr Kenneth Tan, son of the late Mdm Ng Siang Yang, with a photo of Mdm Ng*

**As Mum had been a housewife all her life, family was very important to her. She always believed in the importance of sticking through thick and thin as a strong family unit.”**

Mr Kenneth Tan

## **Mdm Ng Siang Yang** (1959 – 2021)

**I**n 1995, when I was only six, my mother was diagnosed with nasopharyngeal cancer. The doctors said she had just six years to live. Mum

was in her 30s then and the news hit her hard. Our lives felt like they were turned upside down. But the thought that she might not be around to raise us spurred Mum to fight the cancer head on.

I am the youngest of three siblings, and I remember Mum being very brave and independent despite her illness. She would turn up promptly for her medical appointments. There were also times when she took me along.

Mum went through 35 sessions of radiotherapy, and suffered serious side effects. But the radiotherapy helped, and Mum was declared cancer-free.

However, 12 years later in 2007, the long-term side effects of radiotherapy finally took its toll on Mum’s body. She developed bulbar palsy, a condition where her cranial nerves were damaged. Sometimes, food particles would enter her windpipe and into her lungs, causing infection. Thus, she had recurring pneumonia and would develop a fever often. She was frequently in and out of the hospital. Doctors told her that it was not possible for her to eat regularly anymore. Her risk of pulmonary infections was just too high because the food she ate kept travelling to her windpipe. She had to be tube-fed.

That was a terrible blow to her. She had been cooking for us almost every day and to know that she herself could no longer eat was inconceivable. That was a low point for Mum. She chose to have the feeding tube inserted into her stomach instead of through her nose, as she hoped to continue appearing as normal as possible. When we went out, she would deal with the milk bags in the bathroom. For years, she was embarrassed to be seen in public with the feeding tube.

It took her two to three years to accept that she had to rely on being tube-fed for the rest of her life.

Sometimes, I remember feeling guilty at meal times because she could not eat with us. During that difficult time, Mum turned to beading as a hobby to take her

mind off her condition. It was good to see her at the community club socialising with friends and enjoying her hobby. She eventually even conducted beading classes for others. This was in addition to volunteering work at community events and at her temple.

Being hooked to a feeding tube, there were things that Mum had to be mindful about. For example, she could not carry anything too heavy. When we travelled overseas, say for a week, we would have a luggage full of her milk packets. She consumed about three to four packs a day.

In November 2021, Mum passed away unexpectedly in her sleep. A few weeks prior, she had difficulties urinating, felt giddier than usual and was feverish. Even then, I had not expected her sudden passing.

As Mum had been a housewife all her life, family was very important to her. She always believed in the importance of sticking through thick and thin as a strong family unit. Before she passed, she reminded us to look after and support our father when she is no longer around. I will always fondly remember her efforts towards her family as well as the community.

*Recounted by Mr Kenneth Tan, son of the late Mdm Ng Siang Yang*

“

**Despite her constant health issues and the adversities she faced over the years, Mdm Ng never once gave up on herself and lived a fruitful life as much as she could.”**

**Dr Jade Soh**

Consultant  
General Medicine – Infectious Diseases  
Sengkang General Hospital



“Having breast cancer is tough and the pain can be unbearable. But I am fortunate to be supported by so many people as I walk this journey.”



I was diagnosed and treated for breast cancer in 2005. After I recovered, I thought the days of cancer were behind me for good, but it unexpectedly returned with a vengeance in 2019. This time, it had spread to my bones and I had to undergo 10 cycles of radiation therapy.

Even with the treatment, I was not getting better. Finally, my doctor said that they had exhausted all treatment options for me. It was then that I understood and accepted that my illness is terminal. I signed up for a home hospice care programme with the Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) to better manage the pain as a result of the disease.

I live with my husband and we have no children. In this difficult time, I am grateful to be surrounded by many kind people who help us. People from Lions Befrienders; Blossom Seeds, an organisation that supports senior heartlanders in integrating with the society; SCS and other agencies, would drop by regularly to help with whatever I need. For example, there is someone who takes me for my medical appointments. There is also a psychologist who has been visiting me every week for the last four years to check in on my mental wellness.

I did not have formal education, so I cannot read or write. However, even with my illness, I want to be as independent as much as possible. I memorise telephone numbers and match them to business cards and faces. I remember medical appointments by marking out dates on the calendar. My husband does the grocery shopping and I make simple meals like soup and rice. As long as I can continue to cook, I do not want to stay idle.

In 2020, the Ambulance Wish Singapore and SCS made my dream come true. They threw a party for my 69th birthday. It was the first birthday celebration I ever had in my life. They gave me a special cake with a plastic strip in the middle. I pulled the strip out slowly and was amazed to see that it was a string of \$2 notes. And the strip kept getting longer as I pulled! I had never seen anything like

**Mdm Chin  
Kwee Hiong**  
*Retiree*

that in my life. I was so touched that I burst into tears. Even my husband was crying that day.

For my birthday last year, my family planned a small get-together for me. I was not feeling well prior

to that, but I insisted on going for my own party. My leg was swollen and I was feeling breathless, but my niece, Phoebe, remembers my great enthusiasm for the celebration that day.

At this stage of my illness, I am sometimes overwhelmed with so much pain that I cannot help my tears. Breast cancer is tough and the pain can be unbearable. But I am fortunate to be supported by so many people who help me walk this journey.

In 2021, my husband had a toe amputated due to diabetes. I took care of him and made sure he did his rehabilitation properly at home, took his medicine on time and attended his medical appointments without fail. I am glad he could walk on his own again within six months.

I sometimes worry about my husband and who would help take care of him when I am gone, as we are both not working due to our health conditions. But as long as I am around, I will do my best to make sure that all his needs are cared for. When the time comes, I will let Jesus take me home.

“

Mdm Chin’s strengths seem to come from her love for her husband and her religion. She has the will and a spirit to ‘fight back’, and has built for herself and her husband a network of support. She has since become a “long stayer” with Singapore Cancer Society Home Hospice and has outlived her prognosis. She is an inspiration to us, her ‘relay’ team.”

**Florina Wong**  
Social Worker  
Psychosocial Service Department  
Singapore Cancer Society





I have been blessed to meet the right people in my time of need. I hope I can be that right person for someone else too.”

I have never smoked and have no family history of cancer, so it came as a shock when I was diagnosed with lung cancer.

**Mdm Deepa  
Maurya**  
*IT Professional*

my neighbourhood community centre, where I participate in grassroots activities and am part of the Community Emergency and Engagement (C2E) Committee and the Community Emergency Response Team. In the team, I

It started out as a Stage 1 diagnosis in September 2016, and within six months of the treatment, it developed to Stage 4 cancer that had metastasized to multiple parts of my body, including my spine, brain, uterus, shoulder and bone. My cancer has relapsed five times in total. My doctors were not optimistic and advised me to be prepared for the worst.

Despite such discouraging news, I never gave up. Each time my cancer spread to another part of my body, I trusted my doctors and went for the proposed treatments. Chemotherapy, targeted therapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, surgery – I have experienced them all.

Through it all, I have never stopped working. I am very fortunate to have supportive bosses, who know my desire to keep working even as I fight cancer. They allow me to work from home and are understanding when I have to take medical leave to receive treatments or recuperate. On my part, I ensure that I fulfill my work responsibilities to the best of my abilities. I go for treatments when required and continue to work after the treatment.

People often ask how I stay so strong and positive throughout my entire cancer ordeal. To me, work has a twofold benefit of paying for my hospital bills and keeping me busy to retain a sense of normalcy in my life.

Volunteering has also become a way for me to stay active and help others. I started volunteering at

assist with national and community volunteer services like first aid, citizens on patrol and dengue prevention.

I also openly share my experience on continuing to work while having cancer in support groups such as the women’s cancer support group Bishana and the Lung Cancer Education and Advocacy Programme (LEAP). This is something close to my heart; I want to motivate fellow cancer patients by telling them not to lose hope or give up everything when they have cancer.

If there is anything my cancer journey has taught me, it is that everything happens for a reason, and that I am still alive today because I have a purpose to fulfill. Having cancer can be a very demoralising and depressing journey, but I have been blessed to meet the right people in my time of need. I hope I can be that right person for someone else too.

“

Deepa has demonstrated resilience in fighting cancer. Despite her relapse and metastasis, she continues to maintain her cheerfulness and engagement with work and life.”

**Ann Kuo**  
Principal Occupational Therapist  
Singapore Cancer Society





**“We should not let fear get in the way of living our lives. No matter what we can or cannot do, we should learn to put aside negative thoughts and live positively.”**

## **Mdm Lim Yew Gek** *Receptionist*

**G**rowing up, I had a normal childhood. I did not realise that I was starting to lose my sight until I entered primary school and had trouble seeing what teachers wrote on the blackboard. When my vision gradually worsened over the next few months, I was enrolled in the School for the Blind, where I completed my primary school education. At the time, doctors did not know what was the cause of the deteriorating vision.

The school trained me with skills of daily living to lead an independent life. It had a residential programme at that time, so I stayed in the ‘cottage’ and only went home once a month. I learnt to take care of myself and move around with minimal help.

As I was able to function fairly independently, I progressed to a mainstream secondary school after my Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE). This was part of our educational programme to integrate us with sighted students in some schools. However, when I was in Secondary Four, I suddenly suffered a sharp pain in my right eye. That was when I learnt of the root cause of my eye condition all along – I had glaucoma. I underwent surgery to have my right eyeball removed, and had a prosthetic, or artificial eye, made. I remember sitting for my ‘O’ Level examinations in the hospital as my procedure to get the prosthetic fitted took place during that time. In time, I became completely blind.

I was fortunate to find work right after my ‘O’ Levels, which is the same company I have been in for 40 years now. My colleagues are warm and friendly and I have an understanding boss. The little things they do show me that they care. For example, our company bus makes a small detour from its usual route to fetch me from my house bus-stop to work in the morning. I am greatly appreciative to them for this act of care.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I am still blessed to be employed up to this day.

I met my husband, who also has visual impairment, in my late 20s.

We got to know each other through social activities and outings with our visually impaired friends. We are both fond of hiking. He is a caring man and I feel comfortable and cared for with him.

Life after marriage was not always easy. There were a lot of changes to adapt to, such as living together in a new home. When I found out I was pregnant, I was very worried about bringing up a child as a visually handicapped parent.

Fortunately, my son, who is now 27, was born healthy. He learnt to be independent from a fairly young age. Where I once was the one taking him to school, he quickly learnt to lead me instead. He would hold on to me obediently and not run off like other children did, because he knew I would have difficulties searching for him if we got separated.

I draw strength from my faith and the power of positive thinking. We should not let fear get in the way of living our lives. No matter what we can and cannot do, we should learn to put aside negative thoughts and live positively. This is how I overcome difficulties – one step at a time, one day at a time.

“

**Yew Gek’s story shows us that visual disability does not mean disability for life. All it takes is a positive attitude and constant striving to do our best in whatever we choose to do, that will make the greatest difference in our lives.”**

**Aw Ai Tee**

Deputy Director of Nursing (Clinics and Research)  
Singapore National Eye Centre

*Mdm Lim’s husband, Mr Tan Wee Liam, is a winner of the Inspirational Patient & Caregiver Awards 2022 – Caregiver Category. His story is on page 77.*



Mum felt that she could leave with no regrets as her life was complete — we had our own families, and everything was in place.”

- Ms Dionne Low and Ms Tammi Low



Our mother was someone who lived her life for others, especially her loved ones.

## Mdm Chan Yin Ha (1956 – 2021)

health for a whole year and we had time to make many treasured memories together.

In October 2021, Mother’s condition worsened and she had

The eldest of seven children, Mother spent her youth looking after her siblings. She cooked and cleaned for them as a mother would, and so they grew up with much respect for her. After Mother got married and had us, she stayed home to care for us full-time. She was always present for us. When our father had a stroke in 2015, he had to stop work and she became his sole caregiver.

to be warded. Although she was feeling unwell, she was always considerate and thoughtful towards the healthcare staff and other patients in her ward. She was always grateful and would make sure to thank the nurses and doctors every time for their help. They had a good rapport — Mother’s oncology doctor from the National Cancer Centre Singapore visited her with flowers even after she was moved to the palliative care ward at Outram Community Hospital (OCH).

Even when we became mothers ourselves, she continued to care for us. She would buy the best cuts of meat and fish to cook everyone’s favourite dishes whenever we visited. When the weather was erratic, she would prepare cooling herbal teas for us; when we were tired from work, she would make nourishing soups.

When she was at OCH, Mother took the initiative to plan her own funeral with us, with the help of social worker Sandy who guided us in the right directions. Mother believed that this would take the burden of planning and decision-making off our shoulders. She told us it was a blessing that she could leave the world with no regrets and no burdens as she felt that her life was fulfilled and whole — her children have their own families, and everything was in place. She was confident that she could leave our father in our good hands.

Mother derived great joy from spending time with the family. Our simple outings such as shopping and eating together were highlights of the week for Mother. She doted on the grandchildren and could not bear to discipline them like how she used to discipline us. Our kids love their Ah Ma as well.

After Mother passed away, we looked through our family photos together. What struck us the most was how happy she looked in them, surrounded by her family whom she loved with her whole heart.

Mother was enjoying her golden years when in June 2020, she had difficulty in her bowel movements. She was immediately diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer. She took the news calmly. A very private person, Mother did not tell her siblings and friends about her condition as she did not want to worry and trouble them. At one point, the doctor told us that she had about a year to live. Even then, she took it in her stride and continued to live her life as normally as she could, taking care of our father, doing her usual marketing and shopping, and spending as much time as she could with us. She was never a big outdoors person, but after her diagnosis she enjoyed exploring parks with our families and kite-flying with the grandchildren. Fortunately, she stayed in good

Recounted by Ms Dionne Low and Ms Tammi Low, daughters of the late Mdm Chan Yin Ha.

“

Beneath her quiet and gentle demeanour, Mdm Chan was a person of great courage and resilience. Despite her discomfort from post-operative complications, she never grumbled about her situation and remained gracious towards the healthcare staff.”

**Sandy Koh**

Medical Social Worker  
Outram Community Hospital





**“My motto is not to look back at unpleasant things that have happened because we cannot undo them. I prefer to look ahead, move on and do as much as I can.”**

**I** have never been one to listen to people who tell me, “You can’t do it”. I believe I will not know if I can or cannot do something until I try. I am stubborn that way.

## **Ms Chuan Yew Eng** *Artist*

previously known as Very Special Arts (VSA) Singapore. I am proud to see my oil and acrylic paintings featured at ART:DIS exhibitions. I try to give back to the community

by donating the proceeds from the sale of my paintings and handmade jewellery to ART:DIS.

It is because of this obstinate streak that I have managed to learn painting, cooking and sewing, and even travel to Hong Kong and New Zealand on my own – despite being a paraplegic.

I had a fall in January 2021 and had to be hospitalised, first at the Singapore General Hospital, and then at St Luke’s Hospital for rehabilitation. After discharge, St Luke’s Hospital’s home care team continues to visit me regularly for nursing care, enabling me to remain independent at home.

Due to a bad fall I had when I was 16, my spine was badly damaged and I was unable to move my lower body and legs. Since then, I have been relying on a wheelchair to get around.

I was happy to be featured by St Luke’s Hospital in their fundraising book, *Being Silver*, to spread the word on positive ageing. The book is part of the hospital’s fundraising campaign in 2021, which will benefit many patients.

Right after my accident, I had to spend a few months at the hospital. It was a lot to deal with for a teenager. I felt depressed and even had suicidal thoughts over my loss of mobility. Fortunately, a doctor at the hospital brought me to church. My newfound faith and church friends helped pull me out of depression.

I have now recovered and am back to my usual routine. I hope that I can attend ART:DIS classes again when they resume.

I learnt how to be independent and take care of myself. I have always enjoyed cooking, so I learnt to prepare dishes on my own. I am now quite a decent cook and I like to put my own creative spin on dishes. People are surprised that I can cook in my wheelchair and do household chores like washing and cleaning.

My motto is to not look back at unpleasant things that have happened because we cannot undo them. I prefer to look ahead, move on and do as much as I can.

I also put my mind to mastering the sewing skills that I picked up from a very young age from my mother. I make all my own clothes and bags – I am a bit of a perfectionist – and take pains to ensure fine handiwork. I also sew clothes for family and friends, and have even sewn the robes for my church choir!

As I enjoyed doing art and craft as a child, I tried my hand at painting in various media, moulding clay and making jewellery, with the support of ART:DIS –

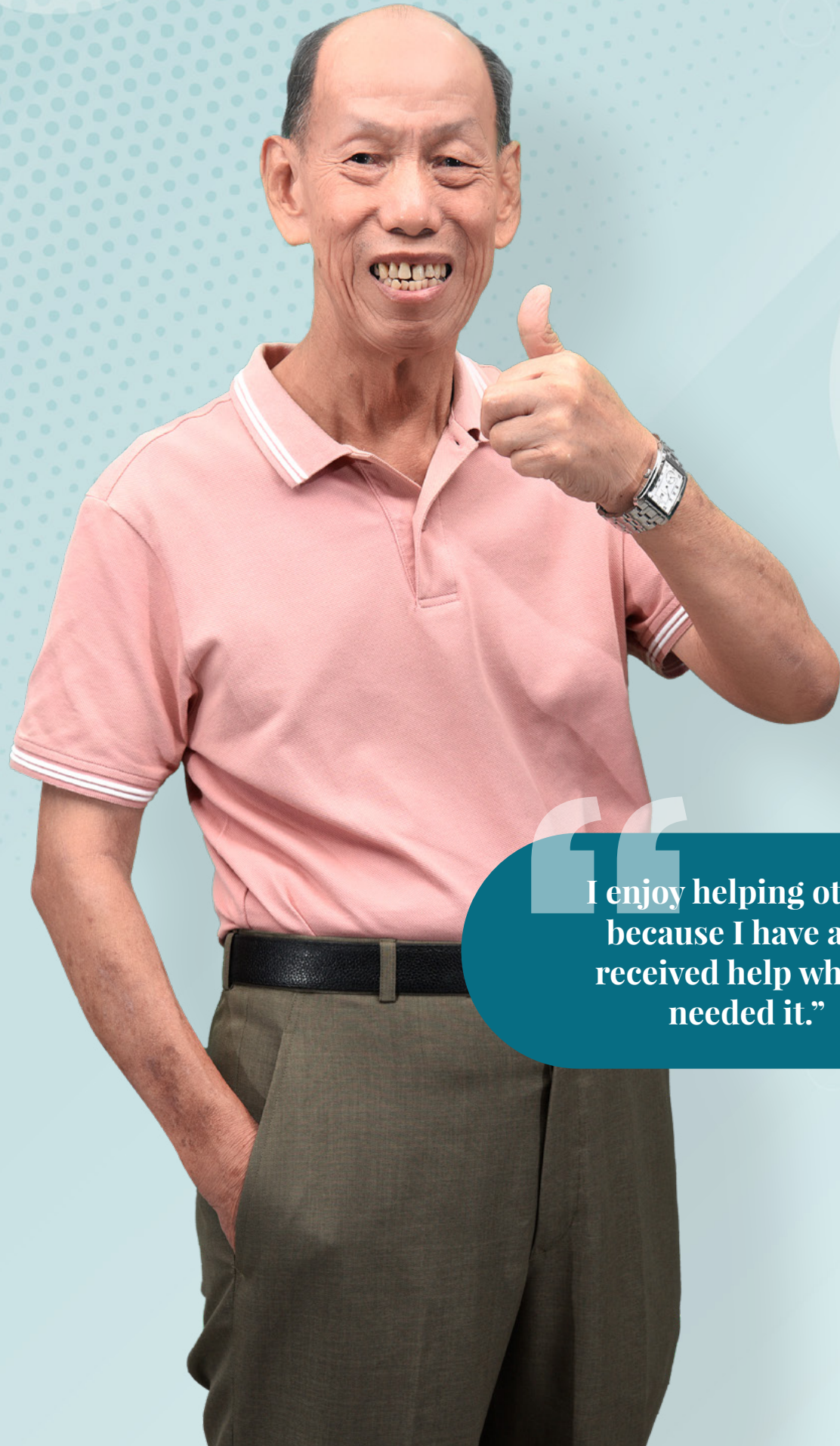
“

**Yew Eng’s can-do attitude has encouraged many. She has shown that it is possible to live a fulfilling and purposeful life despite the odds.”**

**Sarah Lim**

Senior Executive, Corporate Communications and Partnerships  
St Luke’s Hospital





**I enjoy helping others because I have also received help when I needed it.”**

**Mr Tan Ann Seng**  
*Service Ambassador*

**I**n my younger days, I travelled extensively for work. I worked in several fields, including the shipping industry which brought me all over the world. Now that I am 73 years old, my heydays are behind me, but I still enjoy working and staying active.

I started out as a volunteer with St Luke’s Hospital before joining full-time as a Service Ambassador in 2014. I joined the therapists on the hospital’s “Back On Your Feet” programme, where we accompany patients on group outings via public transport to build their confidence in navigating their environment independently. I built a good rapport with staff and patients over the years, but some of them may not know that I am a stroke and cancer survivor.

More than 10 years ago, I recovered from a stroke and thought that the worst was behind me. However, in 2019, I was diagnosed with lung cancer and had to undergo chemotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy. I suffered a long list of side effects from the treatment, and it was only with strong family support that I was able to tide through that low period and survive the cancer.

Having been a patient myself, I know what it feels like to be one – so I work hard to motivate patients to keep their spirits up. I am usually the first person that patients meet when they come to the hospital, and I will take the chance to share my experience and advise them on how best to work with their care team.

I also encourage them to not give up on their physiotherapy sessions even when results may be slow. For example, I tell them about how I was paralysed on the right side of my body after my stroke, but

persisting with physiotherapy allowed me to regain about 90 per cent of my function. It takes a lot of determination and hard work to make progress, but I would assure them that it is important not to give up, and that results will come in time.

Some of the patients’ family members have told me that although they gave their loved ones the same advice, the patients were more inclined to listen to me, as I had gone through a similar experience.

Beyond work, I like to keep busy with meaningful activities. Last year, I helped with St Luke’s Hospital’s fundraising event by participating in their documentary featuring patients who are ageing well. At home, I help my wife with household chores and enjoy spending time with my three daughters and eight grandchildren.

Recently, a widowed neighbour asked me for advice on painting her 4-room flat. I told her that she only had to buy the paint and I would do the rest. I painted the whole flat, including the walls and ceilings, which took me four days. I enjoy helping others because I have also received help when I needed it.

**“**  
*Ann Seng frequently shares his experience with other patients and caregivers, motivating them to partner their doctors and therapists to take ownership of their health and not give up. When presented with the opportunity to spread the word and help a wider audience, he is always ready to say yes.”*  
**Chua Hwee Leng**  
Manager, Corporate Communications and Partnership  
St Luke’s Hospital





# Inspirational Caregivers

## PARTNER-IN-CARE AWARD

Ms Rebecca Sit | Ms Meenachi Devaki | Mr Benjamin Tiong

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Mdm Junaidah Binte Kassim

Mdm Linda Chan

Mdm Latifah Bte Jantan

Mr Minhat Bin Ismail

Mdm Lee Kim Lian

Mdm Mardiah Binte Pardi

Mdm Sabiah Bevi d/o  
Pakker Mohamad

Mr Woo Fook Mun

Ms Chan Sook Ling

Ms Emily Lim-Leh

Ms Jaslin Koh

Mdm Rosmawati Bte Rusli

Mr Tan Wee Liam

Mr Edward Poa

Mr William Toh Keng Chye

Mdm Judy Low

Mr Tan Hock Soon

Ms Priscilla Tan

# Inspirational Patient Support Group

Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology Support Group





“At the beginning, the world may seem like it’s crumbling around you. But as a caregiver, you will somehow find the strength from within to press on day after day.”

**M**y son, Damien, was 23 months old when he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. Six months before that, I had quit my job to spend more time with him due to his recurring bouts of low-grade fever. Never in my wildest dreams, though, did I expect him to have cancer.

It all started when he tripped on the leg of a dining chair. He said he could not get back up to walk. The doctor thought it was a fracture on the foot and put a cast that extended from his right calf to the foot for a few weeks. However, after the cast was removed, he still could not walk. He also complained that his elbows hurt.

Subsequently, we noticed red spots on his back that came and went. He also developed oral thrush, a type of infection in the mouth. His paediatrician was worried about his symptoms and did a blood test, which showed he was anaemic. That was when we took Damien to KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital for further tests, which confirmed that he had leukaemia. His prognosis was good as he had responded well to the first phase of chemotherapy, and so Damien started on chemotherapy shortly after.

A port was surgically inserted into his chest to enable chemotherapy. I was his primary caregiver and we spent a lot of time in the hospital over the next two years. I spoke openly to Damien about what was happening as much as possible so that he could understand and not be averse to the treatments.

Because he was so young, there were times when we struggled to feed him medication. For example, there was an oral chemotherapy pill that we had to crush and dissolve in water. Damien hated it so much that it sometimes took us up to an hour to get him to take it.

**Ms Rebecca Sit**  
*Public Relations & Corporate Communications Professional*

He suffered side effects like diarrhoea, occasional headaches, weight loss and hair loss. His sense of taste and smell took a beating as well, which led to poor appetite.

Being a cancer patient with low immunity, he seldom played with other children. Later, we sent him to Arc Children’s Centre, which is a daycare centre for children with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses. Arc provided a safe space for him to play with other children and make friends.

Damien completed his cancer treatment in 2020, two years after his diagnosis. He took his last dose of antibiotics in July 2020 and said something that took me by surprise. As a four-year-old, he told me that he wanted to tell other children with cancer not to give up and to keep taking their medicine to get better. Today, he is six years old and his cancer is in remission.

We continue to keep in touch with the friends he made during his cancer journey and their families. I still help out at Arc Children’s Centre with its social media campaigns, and also volunteer in the Children’s Cancer Foundation (CCF) Parent Buddy Programme. I hope to reach out to caregivers of newly diagnosed children and raise awareness for childhood cancer and continue to give back to this community.

“

Despite the overwhelming information and emotions through Damien’s initial treatment journey, Rebecca was able to find strength and continue to maintain her positive attitude to overcome the various challenges she met along the way.”

**Lim Yan Yin**  
Nurse Clinician  
KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital





“When we are busy, it is easy to forget just how much of a toll caregiving can take on us.”

**M**y older sister, Divya, was first diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer which had spread to her liver in 2015 when she was living in the United States.

I quit my full-time job as a preschool teacher and flew over to care for her for 6 months while she underwent treatment.

One year after we moved back to Singapore, she found out that the cancer had spread to her bones, and later, to her brain. Throughout her illness, I was her main caregiver, going through the ups and downs of her cancer progression. She has been on palliative support since 2020 to manage her pain.

In the last few years, I did freelance teaching to make ends meet as I could not return to full-time work given Divya’s caregiving needs. During that period, I was also taking a part-time degree course in Early Childhood Education at the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

It was very challenging juggling studies and caregiving duties. Divya was prone to falls and there was a period when she was critically ill. I had to tend to her needs throughout the night and could not sleep well. Sometimes, I only had two or three hours of sleep each night. I began to feel depressed and exhausted. I also felt guilty for pursuing my studies instead of caring for my sister full-time, and was anxious all the time. I did not know it then, but I was experiencing caregiver burnout.

Fortunately, a doctor I consulted for a routine check-up noticed that I was not my usual self. After he found out what I was going through, he referred me to a psychiatrist who prescribed medication

**Ms Meenachi Devaki**  
*Early Childhood Educator*

for depression and anxiety and taught me self-care skills. I was very grateful for the help I received before my mental health deteriorated further.

From then on, I made sure to set aside time for self-care. A good friend would often ask me out for long walks with her at MacRitchie Reservoir Park. I am so glad she insists on getting me out for exercise and to spend some time in nature!

I learnt from my experience how important it is for caregivers to ask for help when they need it. When we are busy, it is easy to forget just how much of a toll caregiving can take on us. This is why I am happy to share my experience with other caregivers whenever I can. I always remind them that their mental health is crucial and that they should let their loved ones or doctors know if they are feeling overwhelmed.

In January 2022, I went back to full-time work. My extended family is now helping with Divya’s medical appointments. I try to spend time with Divya watching our favourite Korean dramas. We also visit my niece and her dog, Valentino, whom Divya adores.

“Having gone through caregiver burnout, Meenachi has been open to sharing her experiences with other caregivers. She understands how important it is to raise awareness of mental health issues so that those who need help can get the support they need.”

**Tay Beng Choo**  
Senior Nurse Clinician  
Division of Supportive and Palliative Care  
National Cancer Centre Singapore





“Both Jonathan and I do not believe in darkening whatever days he has left by having a perpetual gloom over our heads. Every single day that we wake up to, with him in our lives, is a blessing.”

**M**y son, Jonathan, has never learnt to crawl, let alone stand or walk. Jonathan was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type II when he was a baby. It is an incurable degenerative condition that causes the muscles throughout the body to weaken because signals from the brain do not reach the muscles.

Despite his condition, Jonathan has accomplished so much in his 24 years of life. I am immensely proud of the person he has become.

I left my job as the president of an IT group when he was nine years old to care for him full-time. I wanted to help him live a normal life as much as possible. All at once, my world narrowed from busy days of interactions with clients to just Jonathan and myself.

My role as a caregiver has changed over the years. I have been a nanny, driver, cook, logistics manager, recce scout, protector, as well as a listening ear at different stages of his life. What has never changed is the warm relationship we share. We talk about anything and everything under the sun.

I have always reminded him never to use his disability as a crutch or excuse for not doing anything, and he has truly lived that out.

Jonathan went to mainstream school and excelled in his studies throughout the years. Last year, he graduated as valedictorian from the National University of Singapore (NUS) with first-class Honours in Communications and New Media. Now, Jonathan is working as a communications specialist and he is glad that he can give back to society with the education he received.

Beyond his academic achievements, what has made me just as proud is his commitment to advocate for the

**Mr Benjamin Tiong**  
*Full-time Caregiver*

disabled community. He started a livestream channel where he plays games online to raise funds for organisations that support the disabled. He is also serving as a SingHealth Patient Advocacy Network (SPAN) member in KK

Women’s and Children’s Hospital, where he spent many of his childhood days.

His condition has been deteriorating in recent years. He has lost his ability to swallow, and it was his idea to get a tube inserted into his body to help with feeding. He is also suffering from worsening scoliosis and kyphosis and had to have a metal rod inserted into his back for support in 2008. I have to be extra careful in how I carry Jonathan now so that I do not put unnecessary pressure on his back. Balancing is also harder for him now so placing him into his chair has to be done very carefully so that he can stay upright.

Whenever I hear of the demise of other children or young adults with SMA, it reminds me that our time together is limited too. However, both Jonathan and I do not believe in darkening whatever days he has left by having a perpetual gloom over our heads. Every single day that we wake up to, with him in our lives, is a blessing.

“

Benjamin is not only a role model caregiver, but also a role model parent. He not only excels in the acts of physical caregiving — he also manages to impart positive values, which have shaped Jonathan to be the man he is today.”

**Dr Ang Kexin**

Senior Consultant, Neurology  
National Neuroscience Institute





“When my loved ones are in good health and feeling comfortable and happy, that’s when I am the happiest.”

I come from a family of ten siblings. My elder brother, Saleh, who passed away in February 2022, and his wife were deaf and mute. They have a beautiful daughter, Natasha, who was born with heart, hearing and eye issues. I helped look after her since she was a baby, so we are very close.

My late husband and I helped Saleh and his family whenever they needed. When Saleh was retrenched in the 1990s, we helped him and his wife find another job. His wife still works in the same factory today.

When Natasha was a toddler, I accompanied her to playgroup classes at the School for the Deaf. That was also where I picked up formal sign language. Before that, I communicated with Saleh and his family through a simple signing system that we came up with on our own.

My husband and I helped to care for Natasha till she completed primary school, ferrying her to and from school every day. It was only when my husband fell ill that we had to stop. My husband underwent a heart bypass surgery and suffered from diabetes and other chronic medical problems. In 2005, I lost him to liver cancer.

Saleh was diagnosed with colon cancer about a year ago. During his hospital stay, I visited him daily and helped to communicate with his care team about his treatment and operations. After his discharge, I would accompany him to all his medical appointments. As

## Mdm Junaidah Binte Kassim

Housewife

I was not very fluent in English, I would also get one of my children to come along. We would write down the doctors’ instructions and teach Natasha so that she could help care for her father at home. I am proud that everyone

in the family played our part to ensure that Saleh’s treatment journey was as smooth as possible.

As part of his treatment, Saleh needed to receive injections every day for three months. During that period, I would go to his place every morning to administer his injections. His wife would take over in the evenings after work.

Now that Saleh has passed away, I continue to extend the same care and dedication to his wife and Natasha.

Taking care of my family comes naturally to me. When my loved ones are in good health and feeling comfortable and happy, that’s when I am the happiest as well.

“

Mdm Junaidah’s positive attitude and determination have inspired us greatly. She taught us that regardless of how difficult a situation may be, we should always stay positive and find the strength to press on.”

### Farhanah Fawzi

Community Assistant  
Community Care  
Changi General Hospital





**I know that many caregivers try to be superheroes, taking it upon themselves to care for their family members and meet all their needs. However, it is important to reach out and seek help when needed.”**

**“**I am such a burden to you.” These heart-wrenching words from my 86-year-old dementia-stricken mother moved me to tears. They came during her rare moments of lucidity, and was comforting yet bittersweet sign that my Mum is still aware of what is happening around her. However, I never considered her a burden — she is my mother after all.

Before Mum was diagnosed with dementia, I would visit her at my sister’s place at least twice a week to bring her food and accompany her to medical appointments.

I started noticing that things were amiss about three years ago. She had bouts of forgetfulness and occasions when she would wander off and disappear from the flat. By early 2019, it was clear to me that she needed full-time care and attention. I decided to bring her home to live with me.

Looking after a dementia patient can be extremely challenging. My Mum requires round-the-clock care. She would insist on going to the toilet every ten minutes or ask to go out again right after we reach home. She would toss tissue paper and leftover food out of the flat and dirty the house with her soiled diapers. I spend a lot of time cleaning up after her.

Back then, I was looking after my granddaughter as well. We had no choice but to put her in infant care while I focused on caring for my Mum. It broke my heart to do so. Unfortunately, things did not get easier. Mum would wake me up at all hours of the night. The medications she was on gave her hallucinations and resulted in uncontrollable agitation.

I was pushed to the limits of my endurance numerous times. On one occasion, I was so sleep-deprived and frustrated that I broke down. I remember locking her in the flat while I stood outside the gate sobbing. Unable to cope, I brought her to the emergency

**Mdm Latifah  
Bte Jantan  
Full-time Caregiver**

department where she was admitted into the hospital for ten days. It gave me the time I needed to rest and recuperate.

These days, I have learnt to manage Mum’s condition better.

She goes to St. Andrew’s Senior Care for seniors three times a week where she enjoys the art therapy sessions immensely. I’m amazed at how good some of her artwork are! More importantly, the few hours she spends there give me the respite I need.

Even though looking after my mother is exhausting and difficult, I have never considered placing her in a nursing home. Mum has dedicated her life to caring for her family, tirelessly bringing up seven children and many more grandchildren, and nurturing them to become mature, responsible adults. I am very thankful for her sacrifice.

As a caregiver, I know that many caregivers try to be superheroes, taking it upon themselves to care for their family members and meet all their needs. However, it is important to reach out and seek help when needed. There are many people in the community who are willing and able to help — doctors specialising in geriatric care and medical social workers who can guide us in our caregiving journey. We should work with them and find options for ourselves. We are not alone.

**“**Despite her frustrations, it has never occurred to Mdm Latifah to give up caring for her mother. It is a personal sacrifice that she willingly takes on to give her mother the best care possible.”

**G. Poongkothai**  
Senior Community Assistant  
Community Care Department  
Changi General Hospital





“To other caregivers like me, I would say: You only have one lifetime to spend with your loved ones, so have patience with them, even during difficult times.”

**M**y Mum has always led a hard life. She sacrificed a lot to bring up my three siblings and I. We grew

**Mdm Lee Kim Lian**  
*Full-time Caregiver*

up poor in a village on Pulau Tekong, before the government claimed the island for military purposes. As my father, who was a fisherman, had limited and irregular income, Mum had to grow vegetables and rear chickens to support the family.

When we were between 10 to 13 years old, she found live-in housekeeping jobs on mainland Singapore. She would return home twice a month to make sure that we were doing well.

By the time we moved to the mainland, my siblings and I were teenagers. We did not continue with our studies and went to work instead. As I was underage at that time, I was only able to find a job riveting buttons in a small clothing shop. After I turned 16, I went to work at an electronics factory, and subsequently became a food stall assistant.

A few years ago, Mum had a series of falls because her legs were getting weak. The most serious fall happened in 2020 when she needed stitches to her head. Then, in late 2020, she suffered a stroke. It left her bedridden and uncommunicative, and she had to be fed through a tube. It pained me and my siblings greatly to see her like this.

As my father had passed away, I stopped work to be Mum's main caregiver. I felt that it was my duty to look

after her, just as she had looked after us. As a stroke patient, she needed constant care and attention, which got very tiring. Fortunately, we were able to hire

a helper, who was able to help share the load.

My siblings would help financially whenever they could, but they did not earn much and had their own families to take care of. They would call me regularly to check in on my Mum and to see if I needed anything. We were very filial to her because we knew how hard it was for her to bring us up.

Mum passed away in March 2022. In my next life, I hope we can be mother and daughter again.

To other caregivers like me, I would say: You only have one lifetime to spend with your loved ones, so have patience with them, even during difficult times.

“

Mdm Lee's devotion and care towards her mother touched our hearts. She saw it as her filial duty to repay her mother's past sacrifices, and she did her utmost best to ensure both her mother's emotional and medical needs were met.”

**Cruse Queck Poh Li**  
Senior Community Assistant  
Community Care Department  
Changi General Hospital



I really hope to stay healthy for as long as I can so that I can continue to sayang my granddaughter.”

Mdm Sabiah Bevi d/o Pakker Mohamad (left) with Nyla



**M**y granddaughter, Aneesha Nyla Binte Mohamad Nashrudin, is very dear to me. I have cared for her since she was born.

Nyla has severe spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, a form of cerebral palsy caused by damage in the brain. She cannot move her limbs and is not able to sit up even with support. Due to her high nursing needs, Nyla lives with me and my oldest daughter. Her parents work full-time, so I am her main caregiver.

Nyla also has other conditions such as epilepsy and severe gastroesophageal reflux disease, a digestive disorder that causes stomach acid to flow back into her oesophagus that connects her mouth and stomach.

As she cannot eat on her own, she relies on a tube feeding pump for milk and medication to be delivered directly into her stomach. Nyla has undergone multiple surgical procedures to create the openings for her continuous tube feeding. Hence, she requires frequent medical check-ups and follow-up appointments to ensure that she is doing well.

Nyla has also had multiple infections requiring prolonged hospital stays. Although the care team at KK Women's and Children's Hospital takes good care of her, I prefer to care for her on my own at home. To do this, I had to learn to manage her condition and understand her complex medical needs, and attend training sessions on the use of her medical equipment such as the suction machine and feeding pump at home. As I am not fluent in English, my daughter helps me to translate some of the instructions for these procedures and I practise them at home.

Nyla can neither see well nor talk. But I can tell from the sounds she makes and from her cries in the hospital that she is happier at home as it is a familiar environment. At home, she can play with

**Mdm Sabiah  
Bevi d/o Pakker  
Mohamad  
Homemaker**

the musical toys she likes, or watch TV. I also sing to her and she enjoys it very much.

Sadly, she usually does not sleep well despite medication. We share a room so when she cannot sleep, I too, am unable to sleep. I would try to talk to her and calm her down until she goes back to sleep.

Although Nyla has been diagnosed as severely developmentally delayed, I feel that she has made some progress. While she could not make any sound before, she can now scream, and would even turn her head to look at people when they approach her. She also understands when I am lightly reprimanding her and would become upset. It is my fondest hope that my beloved Nyla can eventually learn to walk and talk, and be able to do some things independently.

With Nyla getting bigger and heavier, I can no longer carry her as much. As I am getting old, I feel sad thinking about what will happen to her when I am no longer around. I really hope to stay healthy for as long as I can so that I can continue to sayang my granddaughter.

“

Mdm Sabiah is one of the most persevering caregivers I have ever trained. She makes every effort to learn the procedures and manage the medical devices which I find remarkable despite her age. I am truly inspired by her sheer determination and love for Nyla. Mdm Sabiah's good nursing care has allowed Nyla to enjoy a good quality of life in the community. Her devotion and dedication is exemplary.”

**Maryani Abdul Wahab**

Nurse Clinician, Division of Nursing  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital





I went through one year of cancer treatment, then saw my parents through their cancer treatments, one after another. Every patient's experience and story is different. But having been a patient and then caregiver, I've seen the importance of the emotional support of loved ones in getting through the treatment journey."

**A**fter my father, Lim Poh Quee, found two small lumps on his right cheek, I brought him for several medical

examinations. He was subsequently diagnosed with lymphoma in March 2021. He did not take the news well. My mother had passed away from Stage 4 pancreatic cancer in 2019, so his cancer diagnosis brought back sad memories. However, his doctor at the National Cancer Centre Singapore was very helpful and reassuring. He told us that Dad's prognosis for recovery was good as he had been diagnosed early.

As a cancer survivor myself and having taken care of Mum's medical treatments when she was ill, I have some familiarity with what is involved in cancer treatment. Even then, Dad's cancer journey was still difficult.

Since Mum's passing, Dad has gone from one health issue to another. He went through pacemaker surgery, followed by a severe bout of eczema for many months. To ensure that I could manage all his conditions and follow-up, I take notes at every consultation with the doctors. For his first chemotherapy session, I created an Excel spreadsheet checklist to keep track of all his medications. I also administered his steroid injections at home. The support of family and friends uplifted him through challenging stretches. He is in remission today.

As for me, I draw strength from my Christian faith. I am also very fortunate to have a loving husband who journeyed with me through my own health issues, from spasmodic dysphonia (a rare voice disorder)

**Ms Emily Lim-Leh**  
*Author*

to breast cancer, as well as my family's health challenges. My young son is my happy pill and a constant source of joy.

Recently, illustrator Josef Lee and I created two children's picture e-books, packed with the latest health protocols and reassuring words, for Covid-positive children and their families. We produced *I Can Recover at Home!* in collaboration with Dr Darryl Lim, who helmed a volunteer paediatric team for Covid-positive children. For *What do I do if I'm Covid Positive?*, we collaborated with Ministry of Health. It's been meaningful to be able to collaborate with healthcare folks in these Covid times.

This is especially since I deeply appreciate the amazing healthcare support that my family has received through the years and Senior Staff Nurse Alex Huang who has been such a blessing to us through Dad's treatment.

“

Emily was meticulous in taking down notes during clinical consultations and coordinating care for her father. It was reassuring to have someone like Emily care for Mr Lim as we knew we could count on her to ensure everything went smoothly.”

**Alex Huang**  
Senior Staff Nurse  
Nurse Clinician Department  
National Cancer Centre Singapore





“We choose to be positive and look at what our children can do, instead of what they cannot do. I focus on helping them learn skills and nurturing them to become good and caring individuals.”

I am a mother of three. My youngest daughter, 21-year-old Hazimah, was diagnosed with Global Developmental Delay (GDD) when she was five. I was very sad at her diagnosis as my two older children also have GDD and delayed development in speech, cognitive and motor skills.

Both my husband and I have no known family history of this condition, so we could not understand why our children have it. But we choose to be positive and look at what our children can do, instead of what they cannot do.

Because of my children’s speech and cognitive impediments, they are unable to speak clearly and are often not understood by others. As a result, they can have low self-confidence and may get anxious when they cannot understand instructions.

I do not believe in being overly protective of them, so I made sure they were exposed to different activities including sports since they were young to raise their self-esteem and help inculcate social skills.

I am proud to say that my kids have a flair for different sports activities. For Hazimah, it is long-distance running. She started training for the Special Olympics Singapore in 2013, where she clocked up an impressive timing of 1 hour and 19 minutes in the under-10 kilometre race at just 12 years old! Hazimah was also invited to join in the sprint category at the Para Athletics Singapore in February 2022.

Hazimah is happiest when she gets to run and I always support her passion in every way. I even made sure she got braces as her protruding upper front teeth posed a risk of injury when running.

**Mdm Rosmawati  
Bte Rusli**  
*Homemaker*

I also teach my children life skills such as doing household chores so that they can be independent. Today, they can clean and iron, and when I am not home, they help look after my mother who has dementia.

I believe in the value of peer support in my parenting journey for other parents like me. I am the Chairperson of the Parent Support Group at Hazimah’s school, APSN Delta Senior School. I help to prepare students for their school assessments, and guide and monitor them as they use the school gym facilities.

In addition, I volunteer with the Singapore Disability Sports Council as a pin spotter at bowling training for the visually impaired. My two older children are both competitive bowlers, so I am glad to be able to lend a hand.

I encourage my children to be volunteers to motivate others who have special needs so that, they too, can make a difference.

“

Mdm Rosmawati is truly inspirational as a dedicated mother to her three children, all of whom have special needs. She believes in the importance of keeping her kids active and independent as part of their overall well-being.”

**Clinical Associate Professor  
Poon Choy Yoke**

Director, National Dental Centre Singapore (NDCS)  
Senior Consultant, Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, NDCS





During those tough times, we both clung on to the strong anchor of our marriage, hoping that healthier days would come soon. I encouraged her to endure for just another day, that tomorrow would be a better and brighter day.”

**M**y wife, Carolyn, and I got married in 2019. We enjoyed life as a blissful couple – travelling and seeing the world together.

**Mr Edward Poa**  
*Investment Analyst*

The thought of returning to our baby was a strong driving force for Carolyn to recover quickly. I made sure to keep Carolyn updated of our baby’s milestones

Carolyn was diagnosed with leukaemia when she was one-and-a-half years old. The rigorous chemotherapy that she had to undergo caused her to have heart failure, which had to be managed.

and developments to encourage her to press on. Carolyn had to be fitted with a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) in May 2021 as medication could only be administered intravenously. With the LVAD, Carolyn could be discharged and adjust to normal life.

The possibility that her heart condition would worsen someday was always there. But we always assumed that it was under control, and that starting a family would not affect her too greatly.

When Carolyn was first discharged from the hospital, my mother-in-law and I took care of her round the clock until she could regain her strength and health. Today, I still help her with her LVAD dressing, and managing the device, which she is slowly learning to do on her own.

Nothing prepared us for how badly and quickly she would deteriorate during the pregnancy. By the 22nd week of her pregnancy, Carolyn had to be hospitalised as she felt very breathless, was coughing due to water retention and had many sleepless nights.

I know that we are not completely out of the woods yet, as she still faces the daunting possibility of a heart transplant and other challenges. But I also know that we will get through everything together, and I look forward to having many more quality years together as a family, with Carolyn and our daughter.

Everything happened in a blur after our baby was delivered and Carolyn’s condition took a turn for the worse. I had no time to process what had happened. I could only focus on making the best decisions for her and our baby, who had to be delivered early to save Carolyn’s life.

After delivery, she endured nine procedures and surgeries and was drifting in and out of consciousness. It was hard for me to see her in such pain, discomfort and despair.

“

Edward is a pillar of strength for Carolyn and this has kept her going as she faces her health challenges. The care and devotion that Edward has shown towards Carolyn is very encouraging, and has certainly played an important part in the road of recovery for Carolyn.”

**Yeoh Lee Shien**  
Senior Nurse Manager  
National Heart Centre Singapore

During those tough times, we both clung on to the strong anchor of our marriage and our faith, hoping that healthier days would come soon. I visited her at the hospital every day and encouraged her to endure for just another day, that tomorrow would be a better and brighter day.

*Carolyn’s mother, Mdm Judy Low, is also a winner of the Inspirational Patient & Caregiver Awards 2022 – Caregiver Category. Her story is on page 61.*





“I’m so proud of my brave daughter, who’s already been through so much in her life. I just want her to live her best life every day.”

**M**y 31-year-old daughter, Carolyn, has been in and out of hospitals since she was a toddler. She was

diagnosed with leukemia when she was only one-and-a-half years old, and underwent rigorous chemotherapy. However, even though it saved her life, it resulted in her developing cardiomyopathy, and she had to rely on medications to manage the condition since.

Despite this, Carolyn grew up to be an independent and confident woman. In 2019, she married the love of her life and one-and-a-half years later, they were expecting their little bundle of joy.

As her pregnancy progressed, she began experiencing increasing breathlessness amongst other symptoms. None of her doctors had anticipated that it would get so bad. She had to be warded from the fifth month of her pregnancy, and had to deliver her baby at 28 weeks. Thankfully, her baby did very well in the neonatal intensive care unit, but Carolyn had to continue being hospitalised as her heart had deteriorated to an extent that medication alone was insufficient. She also had to fight infections and a few major complications before the implantation of a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) could be done.

Seeing my daughter in so much pain and discomfort and being unable to help really broke my heart. She even had to be restrained to limit her movements in order to keep all the tubes and wires in place. I could only pray to God for her and take turns with my son-in-law to spend as much time with her as possible every day.

**Mdm Judy Low**  
*Part-time Consultant*

The healthcare teams at the National University Hospital and the National Heart Centre Singapore, and the team of coordinators for LVAD were

very proactive in reaching out to us, listening to our concerns and answering our queries.

It is really tough and emotionally stressful to be a caregiver to a loved one in the intensive care unit. So when I saw fellow caregivers at the waiting lounge, I would sometimes offer them mineral water and words of encouragement. I have also benefited from encouragements and prayers from them, which were a source of real comfort in my times of need.

Carolyn was finally discharged in July last year after six months. My husband and I visited her at home almost every day to help change her LVAD dressing, manage her medications and support her in her daily activities on the weekdays when my son-in-law worked.

She has made so much progress and I am so proud of my brave daughter, who has been through so much in her life. I just want her to live her best life every day.

“

Judy’s commitment and devotion towards Carolyn is really remarkable. Her love and devotion are very encouraging and certainly has made the road of recovery for Carolyn a meaningful one.”

**Yeoh Lee Shien**  
Senior Nurse Manager  
National Heart Centre Singapore

Carolyn’s husband, Mr Edward Poo, is also a winner of the Inspirational Patient & Caregiver Awards 2022 – Caregiver Category. His story is on page 59.



I hope that caregivers of dementia patients can proactively seek opportunities to integrate their loved ones into the community, and never feel ashamed that their loved ones have dementia.”



Ms Priscilla Tan (left)  
with her father

**M**y father is very special to me. My mother died of breast cancer when I was two, so I grew up under his care. As a child, I would even follow him to work as childcare provisions were not easy to find back then.

My Dad has frontal lobe Alzheimer’s, along with a host of other conditions such as liver cirrhosis and diabetes. He is also a stroke and heart attack survivor. It is my turn to take care of him and I am more than happy to repay the love he has showered me with.

I remember in 2015 when I noticed his behaviour changing. He became obsessed with cleaning the bathroom every time he showered. He would use the hose to spray the shower door with so much force that it would flood the kitchen. There were also times when he mistook me for a man, and asked if I was going to the army when he saw me leave for work with a backpack.

My stepmother and I also noticed how disinhibited he became. He would openly poke fun at plump people, and would tease my stepmother for being fat. In 2016, he was diagnosed with frontal lobe Alzheimer’s. Even then, he didn’t think he was sick and went about his life as per normal.

Nowadays, after his morning routine of breakfast and reading the papers, he would head to the coffee shop. I do not stop him from going out on his own, as I believe outdoor activities and socialisation are important for him. Instead, I discreetly enlist the help of shopkeepers and neighbours at the coffee shop to look out for him

**Ms Priscilla Tan**  
Nurse

and ensure that he is safe. I also encourage him to do crossword puzzles occasionally to keep his brain active.

I accompany my Dad for all his medical appointments. Even though it can be a struggle sometimes with my work commitments, I believe that it is important for me to know how he is doing and how best to help him.

As part of understanding his condition better, I read a lot of self-help books on dementia and caregiving, and am part of a dementia caregivers’ support group. I also became a certified yoga instructor two years ago because I wanted to teach simple chair yoga to dementia patients and their caregivers. I believe it will help both patients and caregivers to stay mentally resilient and physically healthy.

I hope that caregivers of dementia patients can proactively seek opportunities to integrate their loved ones into the community, and never feel ashamed of their condition.

“

Priscilla is a woman of strength with a positive attitude that lets her take control of her challenging situation and get things done. She is an inspiration to other caregivers in the support group.”

**Linda Lim**

Advanced Practice Nurse  
National Neuroscience Institute





**“I learnt from my adoptive mother that being able to take care of others is a blessing, and so, I see this opportunity to care for my sister as a huge blessing.”**

**P**eople were often surprised to find out that my elder sister, Mdm Yue Sui Yong, and I were not related by blood.

**Mdm Linda Chan**  
*Homemaker*

They used to ask me why I went out of my way to care for her, even though I had other family members to look after.

I was already a full-time caregiver to my younger daughter who has autism, another elderly sister whose knee issues made it difficult for her to walk, and my mother-in-law with dementia. On top of that, I run KMS Mission, a volunteer-run, non-profit organisation that provides activities and therapy services for children with special needs.

When I was growing up, I learnt from my adoptive mother that being able to take care of others is a blessing. My mother certainly lived out this belief, as she adopted 13 children throughout her life and instilled in us values such as kindness, compassion, empathy and love for the family. So, I saw the opportunity to care for my sister as a huge blessing.

My sister was a cancer patient who had to undergo chemotherapy and radiotherapy for lymphoma. The treatments made her bones very fragile, and she suffered many falls. A final fall in 2011 resulted in irreversible brain damage and she was left completely bedridden and non-communicative.

When all this first happened, it was difficult for me to make the necessary caregiving decisions for her as I was not her legal guardian. I made a series of legal arrangements and became her legal deputy. I am glad to have done that for her since she was not able to make decisions for herself. In fact, she could

not even voice her discomfort or call for help. I was her voice, and looked out for her in everything.

As my sister was fully bedridden and had a tracheostomy, she

stayed at Ren Ci Hospital where she could receive professional care. In pre-COVID days, I visited my sister almost every day. I often took her outdoors to get some fresh air, enjoy the scenery and listen to the sound of running water together. I also played our favourite Cantonese opera songs to her while she laid in bed. It was one of the few things she would smile at.

The nurses at Ren Ci were a big part of my sister’s life until she passed away in February 2022. I see them as part of my family and always tried to encourage them in small ways, especially during the COVID-19 period which was particularly challenging for healthcare workers.

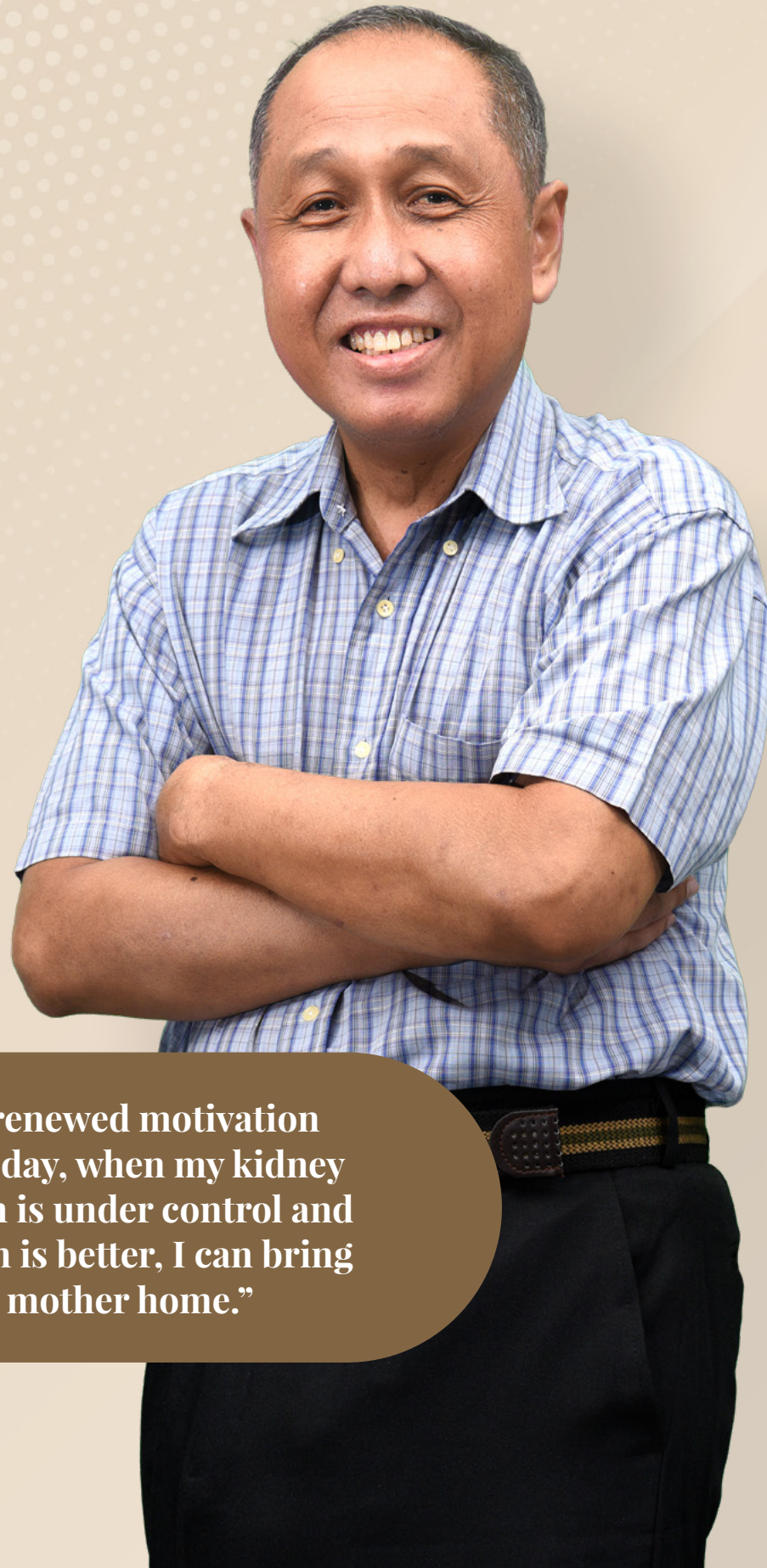
My family and friends were also extremely supportive in my care for my sister, visiting her on my behalf whenever I was overseas or busy. In reality, I have never been truly alone in my caregiving journey, and for that, I am very thankful.

“

Mdm Linda placed great importance on certain values such as love, compassion, kindness and empathy. These values motivated her to not only care for Mdm Yue, but also to treat our healthcare staff like her family members.”

**Katrina May Manansala Orcine**  
Nurse Manager  
Ren Ci Hospital





**“I have renewed motivation that one day, when my kidney condition is under control and my health is better, I can bring my mother home.”**

**M**y mother was an active, healthy person who liked to keep herself busy around the home. As she was already in her 80s, I was always afraid that she would fall and hurt herself.

My worst fear came true a few years ago. While hurrying to get the door, she slipped on a greasy patch on the floor and took a hard fall. She suffered severe injuries to her pelvic area and was warded at Ng Teng Fong Hospital. Due to her advanced age, the doctor advised against surgery. She was later transferred to Jurong Community Hospital for recuperation.

I was about to start a new job as a security supervisor at that time, but because there was no one who could look after her, I decided to switch to a part-time position instead.

When my mother was in the hospital, I would visit her twice a day. It was a difficult time for her. The loss of her mobility and independence affected her mood, she could not get used to the hospital food, and she faced problems communicating with the medical staff. When I was there, I would help to bridge their communication gap and allay her anxieties. I spent a lot of time at the ward, and quickly became friends with the other patients and caregivers there. We lent emotional support to each other and helped one another whenever we could.

During that period, I started having severe swelling in my legs. A trip to the Emergency Department uncovered that I had kidney failure and was told that I needed dialysis immediately. I was stunned. I never imagined that both my mother and I would be hospitalised at the same time.

**Mr Minhath  
Bin Ismail**  
*Security Officer*

Thankfully, some of the other caregivers and the medical staff I had befriended at my mother’s ward helped to care for her in my absence. Some even came to visit me during my two-month hospital stay.

Because of my medical condition, I took the advice of the medical social worker and the doctor to send my mother to Ren Ci Hospital for long-term care. This allowed me to go for my dialysis sessions three times a week without having to leave my mother alone at home.

When Ren Ci Hospital approached me to participate in their projects and activities, I jumped at the chance. So far, I have taken part in two — one of them was a cooking project. As my mother and I were avid cooks, I used my mother’s recipe to conduct an epok-epok (curry puffs) making session for the hospital’s staff and residents.

The other was a Virtual Home experience, where the staff and I brought my mother “home” through 360° immersive scenes of my flat via a headset. The project also gave me renewed motivation that one day, when my kidney condition is under control and my health is better, I can bring my mother home for real.

“

Mr Minhath is always open to suggestions that can help improve his mother’s quality of life, even if it means that he will have to step out of his comfort zone.”

**Han Mei Xian**  
Medical Social Worker  
Psychosocial Services  
Ren Ci Hospital





Once I regain my health, I would like to be able to pay it forward. I want to make use of the knowledge I have accumulated from caring for my loved ones to support others in similar situations.

**L**ife took a drastic turn for me three years ago. My husband suffered a bad fall and fractured his spine which left him paralysed. As a result, he was in and out of hospital over the next few years for a host of problems, from bedsores to bleeding and infection.

My mother, who was suffering from mild dementia, took a turn for the worse after his fall. My husband had been her constant companion at home, often chatting with her and keeping her company. Without him around at home, her dementia worsened. I had to quit my job as an administrator to care for both of them. Sadly, my husband passed away in May 2021.

To make matters worse, shortly after my husband passed away, I was stricken by a sudden, sharp pain in my chest. Seeing how pale and breathless I was, my son quickly sent me to the hospital's emergency department where I had to undergo some tests.

Two weeks later, the doctor diagnosed me with Stage 3 Breast Cancer. I needed to undergo surgery as well as chemotherapy. My son and I were stunned at the news, and I remember breaking down and crying that day.

I needed to find a way to take care of both myself and my Mum at the same time. After consulting with the doctor, I decided to start with chemotherapy first.

Chemotherapy is an extremely exhausting procedure. I have to go for treatment every three weeks for the first four sessions, followed by weekly treatments for the next twelve sessions. Each session lasts for three hours, leaving me feeling drained and demoralised.

**Mdm Mardiah  
Binte Pardi**  
*Full-time Caregiver and  
Breast Cancer Patient*

What comforts me is the thought that my Mum is well-cared for at the eldercare centre during my chemotherapy sessions. Leaving her at home alone would have been risky as she is prone to falls.

When I am not undergoing chemotherapy, I try to get some time to myself to relax and unwind by running errands. It can be a simple trip to the supermarket or just window shopping at the nearby mall — being out and about lifts my spirits. Occasionally, I will also go for a stroll with my Mum and my son.

I hope that my upcoming surgery will be successful and I can recover from my cancer. As a caregiver, it is important to stay positive, as it gives strength to the people you are caring for as well.

Once I regain my health, I would like to be able to pay it forward. I want to make use of the knowledge I have accumulated from caring for my loved ones to support others in similar situations.

“

I am impressed with Mdm Mardiah's resilience despite all the obstacles she has encountered. Even when she started chemotherapy and experienced a lot of side effects, she did not give up. Thanks to her dedication and meticulous care, her mother did not need any hospital admissions.”

**Siti Hajar Binte Mustafa**  
Senior Staff Nurse  
Sengkang General Hospital



I take each day as it comes, and hope I get to massage my wife for as long as I can, as a way of expressing my deep love for her.”



Mr Woo Fook Mun holding his wife's hands

**M**y wife is my best friend. Throughout our married life when she was well, we would sit on the bed and watch TV together every night. We would also chat about our day, and I would give her a massage to relieve her from the stresses of the day.

When she was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2016, I was devastated but I promised to never leave her side. Unfortunately, her condition deteriorated after she suffered a stroke two years ago which left her unable to walk and talk until today.

As I wanted to maintain a sense of normalcy for her, I continued to massage her face, arms, back, legs, hands and feet every day as I cared for her, helping her stretch the muscles that she could no longer move on her own. This helps to relieve some of her pressure sores and the boredom of being stationary the whole day. I also talk to her gently as I massage her, and reassure her that I am always by her side.

While she can no longer speak, I know that she hears and understands me. Sometimes, I see a tear falling from her eye, or a slight change in her facial expression that lets me know she is feeling happy. She also sleeps well at night, and these little signs are enough to make me feel content.

When I had to undergo a heart operation last year, I was very anxious. I was worried that my wife would be uncomfortable as I would not be able to massage her like I always did. My helper took over doing the daily massages for her, and I also tried to lightly massage her with whatever strength I could muster, but I knew it wasn't the same. At the same time, the stress of her medical bills weighed on my mind as I was unable to work during that period. I told myself

**Mr Woo Fook Mun**  
*Technician*

that I needed to recover as soon as possible so that I get back on my feet again for my wife.

These days, I make it a point to exercise daily and ensure that I am in good health. I cannot afford to fall sick again, as I know my wife needs me.

I am delighted that she has outlived her initial cancer prognosis, and her doctors always tell me that she is in good shape whenever we go for her check-ups. I like to think that it is because of my care towards her and my massages.

Recently, I shared my perspective on massaging with a fellow caregiver who was struggling to care for her mother. I told her that giving a massage is a powerful way to maintain a meaningful connection with our non-communicative loved ones as we sit by their bedside every day.

I don't think too much about what the future holds for my wife and I. I take each day as it comes, and hope I get to massage my wife for as long as I can, as a way of expressing my deep love for her.

“

I have the utmost respect for Mr Woo as I witness his unwavering commitment and expertise towards his wife, and I have learned from him the value of being content for one's abilities to care for others in challenging situations.”

**Tay Shu Ying Amanda**

Senior Social Worker  
Psychosocial Services  
Singapore Cancer Society



Ms Chan Sook Ling  
(right) with her mother

My Mum sometimes worries that she is a burden to me. But she has raised and supported me throughout my life. Without her, I would not be who I am today.”

**M**y Mum was diagnosed with diabetes in her 60s, followed by hypertension and high cholesterol within the next few years. She was doing well until July 2020, when I noticed a black spot, about the size of a sesame seed, on her right toe. It turned out to be gangrene as the diabetes had blocked about 95 per cent of blood flow in her foot. As the gangrene worsened, doctors had to amputate her lower right leg, below the knee.

My Mum understood that the amputation was necessary to save her life. After all, my late Dad also had his left lower leg amputated due to complications from diabetes.

After Mum’s surgery, I picked up caregiving skills such as cleaning her stump, helping her move around, showering her and cooking healthy meals. Not long after, Mum’s kidneys started failing and she had to undergo peritoneal dialysis in May 2021.

The dialysis nurses at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) taught me how to monitor the dialysis procedures, including inserting the catheter and keeping track of her condition. I also recorded her blood pressure, blood sugar levels, weight and oxygen level readings diligently in an Excel sheet. The community nurses, who have been visiting us at home since September 2020, taught us how to manage discrepancies in the readings, if any.

Unfortunately, my Mum did not tolerate peritoneal dialysis well. Her diaphragm leaked and water seeped into her right lung after two months of peritoneal dialysis. In November, she started haemodialysis twice a week at a dialysis centre near home. On those days, I would wake up at 5 am to prepare breakfast and get her ready for her dialysis from 7 to 11 am.

While Mum is generally a good-natured person, haemodialysis was discouraging for her. Seeing the

**Ms Chan Sook Ling**  
Full-time Caregiver

needles and tubes and being hooked up to a machine for long hours overwhelmed her. I tried to cheer her up and get her to look on the bright side, but I

understand that this is not easy for any patient.

When she is undergoing dialysis, I would head home to run for about 30 minutes on the treadmill or run my errands. I make sure to exercise five times a week to stay healthy and fit so that I can look after my Mum.

I have been caring for Mum full-time since 2015. That year, I lost my job as a construction drafter and was diagnosed with anxiety disorder. The stress of caring for Mum, coupled with work issues then, may have culminated in my condition. Sudden loud noises like a clap of thunder would make me very anxious and I even contemplated suicide. With the help of my psychiatrist, I started medication and became more open to sharing about my condition and challenges with my close friends. I also sought help from the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) whenever I felt suicidal.

While my condition has improved, I have not fully recovered from the anxiety disorder. However, I tell myself to be positive and stay strong, so that I can be there for Mum, who sometimes worries that she is a burden to me. But I have never thought of her that way. After all, she raised and supported me throughout my life. Without her, I would not be who I am today.

“

Sook Ling’s commitment and devotion to the care of her mother is remarkable. No matter how tough the situation, she still finds joyful and positive moments in life that keep her going.”

**Siti Fadzilla Binte Joraimi**

Senior Staff Nurse  
Singapore General Hospital





**“I encourage caregivers in a similar situation to walk the path resolutely with your child, rest when you can and trust in the medical team.”**

**A**bout a week before Adley was born, I started to suspect something was wrong as I felt a strange sensation in my womb. My gynaecologist said my cervix was incompetent, which meant that weak cervical tissue caused my cervix to open too soon, and my water bag had broken.

I remember spending five days in hospital in what is known as the Trendelenburg position. I laid on a bed that was tilted downwards, with my back flat and legs elevated over my head. This was to prevent me from going into premature labour.

Unfortunately, that did not prevent Adley from being born extremely premature at 24 weeks. She weighed just 650 grams. The medical team at the Singapore General Hospital told me her chances of survival were 50 per cent because of her extreme prematurity. My husband and I were terrified and heartbroken.

We watched as our tiny daughter, who was a mere 30 centimetres long at birth, was rushed to the neonatal intensive care unit immediately after birth and placed in an incubator, hooked up to machines and tubes. I was not even allowed to hold her because she was too frail.

We could not rest easy, as on the second day, doctors told us they had detected bleeding in her brain. We found that she had developed hydrocephalus, a condition characterised by extra cerebrospinal fluid in and around her brain. As a result, the doctors had to insert a brain shunt to drain the fluid.

She was seven weeks old when I was finally able to hold her. I would practise kangaroo care, also known as skin-to-skin contact, by holding her close to my

**Ms Jaslin Koh**  
*Business Owner*

chest. The bonding was amazing. I would sing and talk to her and she would coo softly, as if she was responding to me.

By six months when she was finally discharged, Adley had gone through six surgeries. Apart from the surgery for her brain, three other surgeries were done to fix her eye disorder, caused by an abnormal growth of blood vessels on her retina. By 19 months old, she had undergone 11 surgeries, some of which involved revising the shunt in her brain. Today, despite being developmentally delayed, she is playful and is a bundle of joy to our family. Her core muscles are weak, and we have to take her for regular rehabilitation sessions. Tests also show that while her retina is capturing images, she does not seem to be tracking them.

Our journey as parents has been fraught with challenges and uncertainty, but we have to remain clear-headed and stay strong for Adley. I hope to be able to build a trust fund for Adley, so that her future needs can be taken care of. I encourage caregivers in a similar situation to walk the path resolutely with your child, rest when you can and trust in the medical team.

**“**Jaslin is always positive but also realistic in her expectations of Adley’s development. She is focused and has been exploring all options for Adley to achieve her full potential, while being accepting of the challenges her daughter faces.”  
**Dr Srabani Bharadwaj**  
Senior Consultant  
Singapore General Hospital





**“In life, there will always be ups and downs. I prefer not to focus on the negative. I know that I can turn to my friends and extended family for help and support when I need it, and am not afraid to ask for help in public.”**

**M**y mother was pregnant with twins. Unfortunately, I was born about eight weeks premature and my twin sister did not survive.

**Mr Tan Wee Liam**  
*Braille Transcriber*

I gave braille lessons to asked for advice with cooking, my wife was happy to help.

I take care of the other needs at home, and try to ensure that my

wife and I stay well so that we can continue to enjoy the little things in life together, such as spending time listening to audiobooks and music together at home.

It is hard for someone who is not visually handicapped to understand what we go through every day. This is why I try to share my experience with those who ask me for advice on how to stay independent despite visual impairment.

In life, there will always be ups and downs. I prefer not to focus on the negative. I know that I can turn to my friends and extended family for help and support when I need it, and am not afraid to ask for help when in public. For example, when my wife and I do grocery shopping, we usually take about an hour or two to locate the items on our own. With the assistance from helpful members of the public, we can get things done quicker.

I hope my wife and I can continue to stay independent. I also look forward to doing volunteer work after I retire, to contribute to the community in my own small ways.

After birth, I was diagnosed with Retinopathy of Prematurity, an eye disease caused by abnormal blood vessel growth in the retina – the light sensitive part of the eyes – for premature infants.

My right eye, which is smaller than my left, is totally blind. The vision in my left eye used to be better in my younger days, but with ageing, my vision has deteriorated. I can see better in bright sunlight than in artificial indoor lighting.

However, I have always been independent and getting around in familiar surroundings is not a problem for me. It is only when I am travelling to unfamiliar places that I need help to find my way around.

I work as a braille transcriber at the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped. I transcribe and reproduce books in braille, a system of writing that uses characters made up of raised dots, with the help of a computer. I also teach adult visually handicapped clients braille.

My wife, Yew Gek, has had low vision since she was a child. She lost her sight in her right eye due to glaucoma when she was a teenager. We met during a hiking trip with our mutual visually impaired friends. Despite our visual handicap, we managed to bring up our son to the best of our ability, and he now works in the civil service.

Today, although she can no longer see, my wife still works as a receptionist and gets around on her own in familiar surroundings. She also handles the cooking at home. In fact, when one of the students

“

**Despite being visually impaired, Mr Tan is as capable as any caregiver. He helps his wife who needs a new ocular prosthesis with her medical appointments as he wants her to get the best care possible. His courage and positive attitude inspire us to do more for our patients.”**

**Aw Ai Tee**

Deputy Director of Nursing (Clinics and Research)  
Singapore National Eye Centre

*Mr Tan's wife, Mdm Lim Yew Gek, is a winner of the Inspirational Patient & Caregiver Awards 2022 – Patient Category. Her story is on page 31.*





**I know he trusts me with his well-being. In return, I try to make the best decisions for his care.”**

**M**y journey as a full-time caregiver started two years ago when two of my loved ones fell ill.

My mother, Mdm Low Seok Kim, began showing signs of dementia in late 2018. Her personality changed – she was usually mild-mannered but became quarrelsome. During that period, I would get very frustrated with her behaviour. It wasn't until nine months later, at a visit to the clinic, that the doctor spotted the dementia symptoms. She was referred to the geriatric clinic at Changi General Hospital for further checks.

Around that time, my godbrother, Pappamat s/o Kanan, also faced problems with his health. As a diabetic, he did not manage his condition well. He developed abrasions on his feet caused by the boots he wore for work. The wounds did not heal, and eventually he had to have his left leg amputated below the knee. He also lost a toe on his other foot.

Pappamat's family and mine were neighbours in the same kampung before our families moved to the same housing estate. Pappamat is 13 years my senior, and he often looked out for me when I was growing up. Whenever I ran into difficulties in my schoolwork, I would turn to him for help. When Pappamat's parents passed away, my family helped to arrange the Hindu and Buddhist rites.

As my mother's and Pappamat's medical conditions require a great deal of time and attention, I gave up my work as a part-time taxi driver. Fortunately, my wife and two of my three sons are working, so I am able to devote myself fully to their care.

My time is spent between taking care of my mother's daily needs and caring for Pappamat as he lives alone. Every other day, I will either visit or call

**Mr William Toh  
Keng Chye**  
*Full-time Caregiver*

him to check if he has had his meals and taken his medicine. I will accompany him to all his medical appointments. I also hired a helper for my mother and for Pappamat, to assist with their daily needs, as well as in

household chores such as cleaning and doing laundry. This arrangement allows me to take turns caring for both of them. Knowing that Pappamat has help at home, I can take my mother out to the park or to her favourite eateries. These outings really improve her mood and ease her anxiety. Similarly, with my mother's helper by her side, I can check in on Pappamat every two or three days. Pappamat will spend Sundays at my home to chat with my family before I take him home to rest.

We have always treated Pappamat as part of our family. During Chinese New Year, he would join us for our reunion dinner. When he was hospitalised, he named me as his next-of-kin. I know he trusts me with his well-being. In return, I try to make the best decisions for his care.

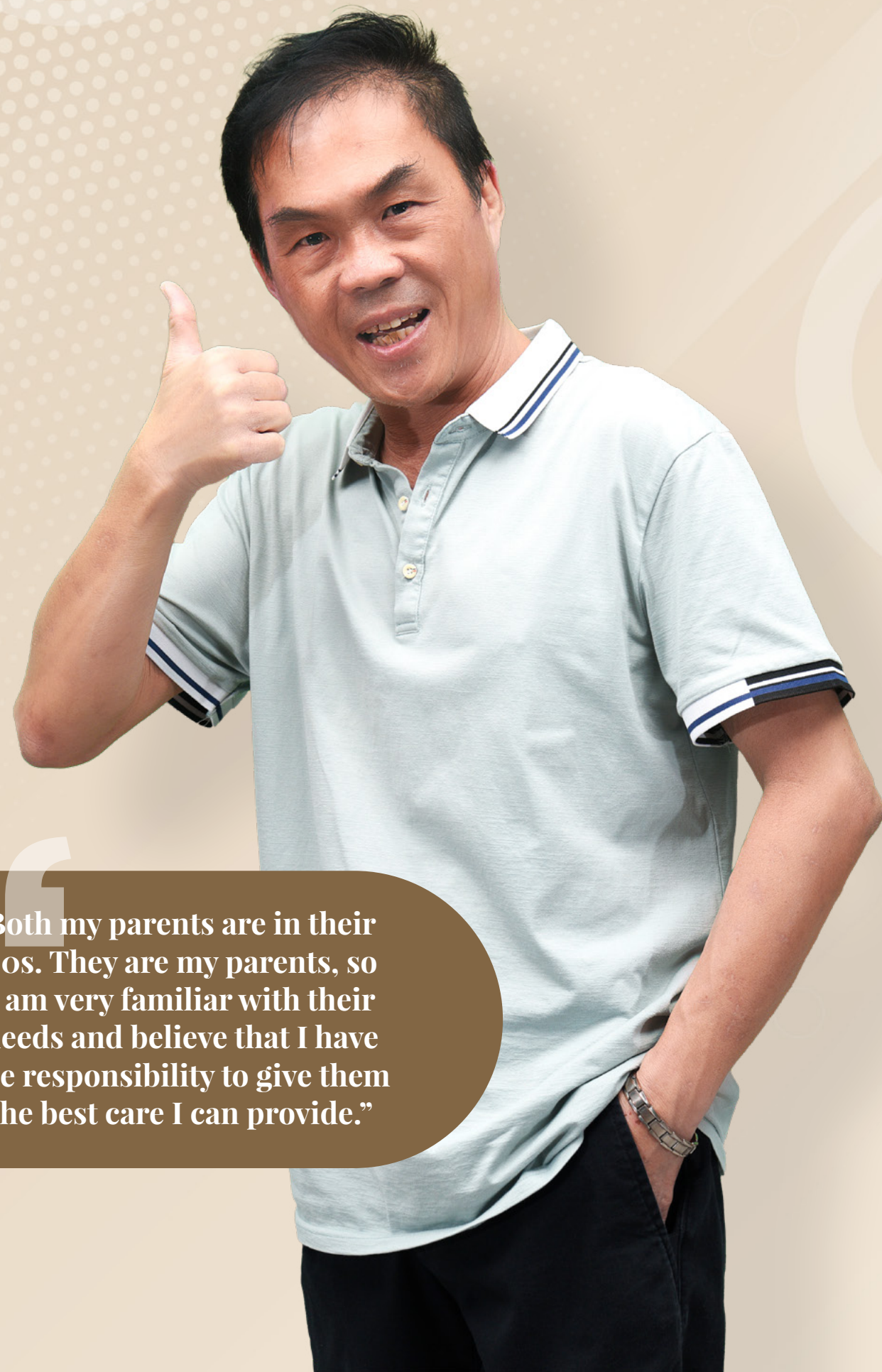
Even though Pappamat is not an expressive man, I can see the appreciation in his eyes. My wish is for him to adjust to his handicap and live a normal life. I told him that someday when the pandemic is over, we should go travelling and see the world together.

“

**Mr William's resilience in being a caregiver for two dependents who have significant medical issues is inspiring. He is patient and caring, and is an exemplary person who inspires with his depth of care.”**

**Dr Meykkumar s/o Meyappan**  
Deputy Director  
SingHealth Polyclinics – Pasir Ris





“Both my parents are in their 80s. They are my parents, so I am very familiar with their needs and believe that I have the responsibility to give them the best care I can provide.”

**M**y mother, Mdm Ho Soi Eng, who has dementia, suffered a stroke in 2018. Since then, her health

has deteriorated. She became bedridden and spent about six months at St Luke’s Hospital, where she required tube-feeding and frequent turning to prevent bed sores.

As my mother stopped being able to communicate after the stroke, I was very concerned about letting strangers take care of her in the long term. So, I asked to bring her back home.

We are not well-off, but I tried to make my home environment as comfortable for her as possible. I asked a contractor friend to demolish a wall in my flat so that my mother’s room became an extension of the living room. It is a simple solution to facilitate better airflow for my mother who has to lie in bed all day.

With this arrangement, it is also easier for us to engage with her and do things like watch TV together. Although she does not speak to us any more, I can tell from her smiles and expressions that she is happier and more relaxed at home.

Both my parents are in their 80s. They are my parents, so I am very familiar with their needs and believe that I have the responsibility to give them the best care I can provide. I am their main caregiver since my younger brother has his own family to take care of and my wife works full-time.

Although I have a domestic helper, I try to do most of the caregiving myself. I help my mother shower and

### **Mr Tan Hock Soon** *Bus Driver*

with her daily physical therapy. It is now a routine for us – while she watches TV, I guide her in exercises like leg and arm lifts.

I had been a tour bus driver for 28 years. In fact, my company knew of my family situation and was very supportive of my efforts to volunteer for a donation drive organised by St Luke’s Hospital. I was allowed to use the mini-bus to deliver donated items such as wheelchairs and adult diapers to the struggling families identified by the Hospital.

Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, my employer had to sell the mini-bus last year and I lost my job. I now work part-time as a bus driver with Singapore Bus Services so that I can still care for my mother.

In life, I believe that being happy or sad is a choice, so I choose to look on the bright side of things. Taking care of my mother is not easy as there are days when she takes a turn for the worse. I always remind myself to expect changes and to take things in my stride.

“

Hock Soon’s selfless love for his mother is inspiring. His story reminds us, as healthcare professionals, that empowering families to care for their loved ones in the community setting is a meaningful and worthwhile journey.”

**Chua Hwee Leng**

Manager, Corporate Communications and Partnership  
St Luke’s Hospital



The aim is to provide a safe space and normalise the cancer experience. By connecting with patients their age and getting to know others like them, they know they are not fighting a lonely battle.”

Dr Eileen Poon, Consultant and Advisor  
Ms Goh Wei Lin, Founding Member  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



Young adulthood is a time of transitions. Many are embarking on new phases in life, be it furthering studies, carving out a career, getting married or starting a family. But for the 450 to 550 adolescents and young adults (AYA) in Singapore diagnosed with cancer each year, life takes a more challenging turn.

While their basic medical needs are similar to other cancer patients, young adults face unique psychological, emotional and social challenges. In addition, they may also face biologically more aggressive cancers. In the prime of their lives, many find their plans for the future disrupted or put on hold indefinitely as they deal with the onslaught and aftermath of a cancer diagnosis.

Recognising the unmet needs of these patients, Dr Eileen Poon, a medical oncologist at National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), started the Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology (AYAO) Support Group in 2018 for cancer patients aged between 16 and 45 years old. Its core team consists of staff from various disciplines such as Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology, Supportive Care and Palliative Medicine, Nursing and Psychosocial Oncology. The AYA team complements existing clinical treatments to deliver age-appropriate and holistic care to every AYA patient who comes through NCCS doors, by focusing on the non-medical, yet important issues such as psychosocial distress, fertility preservation and reintegration upon completion of treatment.

“Cancer affects five to seven per cent of adolescents and young adults, compared to one per cent of children. A recent pilot study we conducted found that close to 40 per cent of AYA patients face significant distress in their everyday life,” said Dr Poon. Such distress is related to a lack of age-appropriate information on cancer, the need to make important treatment decisions

## Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology Support Group

independently, other family health issues and generalised worry.

Open to AYA cancer patients across all hospitals in Singapore, the group has about 40 active members today. They communicate actively through a WhatsApp group chat, which

includes clinical advisors who respond to medical-related queries. The group has started organising an annual AYAO Awareness Week since 2021. It aims to cover topics relevant to young cancer patients, such as coping strategies, sexual issues, fertility preservation, as well as opportunities for patients to share about their own cancer journeys. This year, they will be launching Asia’s first-ever AYA micro-documentary. The documentary features the challenges faced by four AYAO patients and their caregivers, showing the struggles that young adults with cancer face when they are venturing out and integrating into the society.

Moving forward, the group is also developing a digital app to provide information to patients and primary healthcare physicians, including general practitioners (GPs), to improve awareness of common AYA cancers. In addition, an AYAO podcast helmed by Miss Chong Hui Min and Ms Pratibha, two cancer survivors who are now members of the support group, is planned for launch. The podcast aims to address common and taboo topics surrounding AYAO cancer.

“

The hardest journeys are made easier when we have the warmth of care and guidance. We provide support for the children, parents, and partners so they never have to walk these paths alone.”

**Dr Victoria Wong**

Associate Consultant  
Division of Supportive & Palliative Care  
National Cancer Centre Singapore



