

THE HOSPICE LINK

JUNE – AUGUST 2019 • MCI (P) 108/12/2018

dedication

Selfless

compassion

**Comfort
without
words**

**Giving
to meet
patients'
needs**



Why volunteer?
To improve palliative patients' quality of life

SNAPSHOTS OF LOVE

PLUS
Volunteer
programmes



SINGAPORE
**HOSPICE
COUNCIL**

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Contents



- 2 Members' Contact
- 3 Chief Executive's Note
- 4 Snapshots of love
- 6 Our palliative healthcare superheroes
- 8 Unsung heroes in our community
- 10 A breath of fresh air
- 12 Volunteer programmes
- 14 Giving to meet patients' needs
- 16 Comfort without words
- 18 Bringing end-of-life matters closer to the community
- 20 A presence that heals
- 21 Life near death
- 20 The power to comfort
- 24 Upcoming Events & Announcements

Why volunteer?

There are many reasons why people choose to volunteer. For some, it's an opportunity to give back to society or it makes them feel good to help people in need. For others, it offers the chance to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge. Whatever the reasons, volunteering enhances one's self-worth and purpose in life.

According to the last survey conducted by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), the rate of volunteerism in Singapore has almost doubled from 18 per cent in 2014 to 35 per cent in 2016. This is very encouraging and it goes to show that Singaporeans are becoming more caring and compassionate towards people in need. The increase could be due to the rising trend of informal volunteerism, which refers to people volunteering without going through any organisation. More are now giving their time and money to directly support causes that resonate with them. Even ad hoc volunteering or a one-off event can be meaningful to both the volunteer and the beneficiary.

In the palliative and hospice sectors, our member organisations welcome volunteers and there are many areas you can contribute and be involved in to make our patients comfortable and allow them to enjoy quality of life. Be it befriending, organising interactive sessions or leveraging on your field of expertise, your contribution will definitely make a difference to the lives of our beneficiaries.

Well, it is often the case that people do not know where and how to start volunteering. To help inspire you to start, we have compiled a table of volunteering activities and programmes from our member organisations on page 22 of this issue.

We hope that you will consider offering your time, energy and commitment to contribute meaningfully to the cause you believe in.

Ms Yeo Tan Tan
Chief Executive
Singapore Hospice Council

Singaporeans are becoming more caring and compassionate towards people in need. The increase could be due to the rising trend of informal volunteerism.



From left: HCA Star PALS beneficiary, Mohamad Dzukifli (centre), poses for a photo with his parents and the volunteers from Caring Clowns. HCA Day Hospice patient Madam Huang Hock Sing enjoys a spot of fun with the Nerf gun



From left: The beauty volunteers are hard at work, helping patients and their loved ones look their best; the theme for the last Family Foto Fair in February was Superheroes, which was a clear highlight of the day



Snapshots of love

Creating beautiful memories for patients and their families is the key objective of HCA's biannual Family Foto Fair.

Photography captures the fleeting magic of moments for posterity. From delightful smiles to irrepressible joy, photographs are able to preserve the beauty of memories, which can be looked at again and again.

When the end of life draws near, these memories become especially precious, simply because time is now in short supply. Creating beautiful memories for patients with life-limiting illnesses and their families is the key objective of HCA Hospice Care (HCA)'s

biannual Family Foto Fair, an event primarily driven by volunteers. The first iteration of the event in 2015 began as Portrait from the Heart, where a group of volunteers would visit the homes of HCA patients to capture family portraits, complete with hair and makeup services.

What began as a small-scale project eventually evolved into a lively, carnival-like event — the present-day Family Foto Fair. But the underlying motivations of the volunteers remain the same — to create wonderful memories for patients and their loved ones.

A DAY TO REMEMBER

Twice a year, HCA's headquarters is transformed into a themed carnival, bustling with myriad fringe activities, including food and game booths. To enhance the experience even further, patients and their loved ones have the option of getting their hair, nails and makeup done by the beauty team, comprising professional makeup artists.

Armed with trolley bags full of beauty tools and cosmetics, the volunteers get to work quickly — a spritz of hair spray

here and a dab of mascara there — and the final result is nothing short of impeccable. The beauty station concludes the first stop of Family Foto Fair and the families then move on to the outdoor photoshoot, a specially selected spot amid lush foliage.

The blazing sun may beat down relentlessly upon the volunteer photographers and chaperones who accompany the patients and their loved ones through the Family Foto Fair, but the heat does nothing to dampen their enthusiasm. Heading back indoors into a cheerfully decorated space, the patients and their families are treated to a feast for the senses, with music, art and craft, food and games. The booths are manned by volunteers, usually a group of nursing students.

At each run of the Family Foto Fair, the young volunteers devote much time and effort to numerous aspects of the event, including the décor, setup and props for the game booths. These add delightful pops of festivity to the event, creating a convivial atmosphere for everyone involved. Within the same space, there is also indoor photography, complete with quirky props. This gives patients and their loved ones different creative options for their family portraits, all of which are saved on a thumb drive for their keeping. At the printing station, a selected photo is printed out and placed in a plain photo frame for the family. Deliberately kept plain, the frame provides a blank canvas for the family to decorate as they please

with the paints and markers at the art and craft station, which is always a hit with the children.

For many patients who are homebound as a result of their condition, the Family Foto Fair is a precious opportunity to spend quality time out with their loved ones with much joy and laughter. The volunteers for Family Foto Fair come from all walks of life — from corporate organisations to students and informal groups — but they are united by a common mission: to bring joy to the remaining days of our patients, with their time, effort and expertise. 📸

Our palliative healthcare superheroes

The annual Singapore Health Quality Service Awards and Healthcare Humanity Awards recognise members of the healthcare community who make a difference. We congratulate the winners and thank them for their service.

Courageous, caring, passionate, selfless and honourable are traits of superheroes. However, not all superheroes wear capes, like the ones in the movies. Neither do they possess supernatural nor superhuman powers. These superheroes walk among us. They are our palliative healthcare heroes — doctors, nurses, social workers, therapists and other healthcare professionals who deliver unwavering care and demonstrate pure dedication to the members of the palliative care community each day.

We take this opportunity to honour all the healthcare professionals who often go the extra mile, and even beyond the call of duty everyday.

Congratulations to St. Andrew's Community Hospital, St Luke's Hospital and all the winners at the Singapore Health Quality Service Awards (SHQSA) on 15 January 2019 and Healthcare Humanity Awards (HHA) on 25 April 2019.

The SHQSA, since 2011, has been honouring healthcare professionals at public and private institutions for the community at large who deliver quality care and excellent service to patients. The HHA, since 2004, has been recognising outstanding healthcare workers who are inspirational role models offering care and comfort to the sick and infirm.

Thank you for your dedication to deliver quality care and a positive experience to patients and their caregivers.

ENJOY LIFE, ENJOY FOOD

St. Andrew's Community Hospital (SACH) took home a Merit Award at the SHQSA for Best Service Initiative Improvement Team for Masak Club, started in March 2018 as part of Project Makan. It is the brainchild of the inpatient palliative care team, in their never-ending pursuit to improve the quality of life for their patients.

Low food intake in palliative care is common as patients' ability to enjoy food is often affected by conditions such as anorexia and swallowing impairment. The SACH team brainstormed to develop strategies to tackle this issue.

Food is more than just a physiological requirement; it encompasses social and emotional aspects that, together, can create an enjoyable experience. This is



Opposite and this page: Congratulations to the team from St. Andrew's Community Hospital and Mr Yap Thian Long, recipients at Singapore Health Quality Service Awards ceremony

“Touching hearts is more about commitment rather than a job. We strive to continuously make an impact on the lives of our patients and their families.”

of paramount importance in the journey of patients receiving end-of-life care, as well as their caregivers.

Project Makan is the team's multidisciplinary approach which involves a speech therapist, nurses, dietitians, other staff as well as patients and their caregivers during planning and implementation.

The team successfully increased patients' satisfaction and the amount of food intake, and designed an educational brochure, Coping with the Loss of Appetite and Weight Loss, to allay the anxiety of caregivers and patients' loved ones.

To sweeten the life of patients, a Masak Club, comprising volunteers, nurses, speech therapist and staff, was formed. Twice a month, the Club members dedicate their time in the kitchen to prepare favourite local desserts, which definitely are sweet highlights for the patients. Staff nurse, Ms Ng Jingmei Jamie said, “It has been a fulfilling experience being able to bring love and happiness to patients.”

Patient Service Assistant Ms Menagah Rani Vajrvel agreed, “The smiles on our patients' faces give us fulfilment.”

“Touching hearts is more about commitment rather than a job. We strive to continuously make an impact on the lives of our patients and their families,” said Ms Jennifer Ofrin Pamplona, Staff Nurse and a member of Project Makan and Masak Club.

MORE THAN JUST A JOB

Mr Yap Thian Yong, a physiotherapist at St Luke's Hospital (SLH) received a Superstar Award at SHQSA 2019. His good nature and dedication is well known among his patients and colleagues.


When patients are reluctant to participate in therapy sessions, Mr Yap listens to their concerns and finds creative ways to incorporate exercises into their daily routine.

Beyond clinical work, Mr Yap devotes his time to education and training. He also looks out for juniors, guiding them through complex cases. In 2016, he initiated and assisted with delivering basic anatomy and physiology classes for therapy assistants. The classes are so well-received that they're now part of the training programme.

Being a strong advocate for care innovation, he implemented the ceiling track harness training trial project for patients in that year as well. These harnesses support patients during walking and balancing exercises. Working with

colleagues in the Rehabilitation Division, the harnesses have since been implemented as part of SLH's rehabilitation programme to help patients regain their confidence as they perform more challenging exercises in a safe environment. This helps them regain their mobility in a shorter time.

When Mr Yap found out that one of his terminally ill patients' last wishes was to visit Gardens by the Bay with her family, he immediately started to plan an outing for them. The outing became one of their most memorable experiences before the patient passed on. “I want them to treat me as their friend and not just a therapist who helps them to walk again,” he says.

“As physiotherapists, we want to help our patients get back on their feet so they can be active again. Whether I'm helping my patients or colleagues, I feel very fulfilled to help them achieve their goals,” said Mr Yap. 

To find out more about other Healthcare Humanity Awards received by SACH, please turn to page 8.



WORDS: SINGAPORE HOSPICE COUNCIL, ST. ANDREW'S COMMUNITY HOSPITAL, ST LUKE'S HOSPITAL PHOTOS: SINGHEALTH, ST LUKE'S HOSPITAL

Unsung heroes in our community

Our palliative care team journeys with patients and their families, allowing them dignity till the end.



Volunteer hairdressers Lin Lian Huay (left) and Betty Boon provide weekly haircuts to palliative patients



The St. Andrew's Community Hospital palliative care team and volunteers



Palliative Care Ward volunteer harpists and Pastor Justin Tan

The St. Andrew's Community Hospital (SACH) palliative care team, comprising doctors, nurses, therapists, pharmacists, medical social workers, pastoral care workers and volunteers, journeys with patients and their families throughout their stay. They celebrate life at every opportunity with the patients and their loved ones. This may take the form of lively sing-along music therapy sessions, birthday and festive celebrations, or a simple walk to the garden. These create beautiful memories treasured by patients and remain with their loved ones.

It takes a community to help patients live their lives to the fullest, and volunteers play an important role in adding value to the care of terminally ill patients.

WORDS: CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT, ST. ANDREW'S COMMUNITY HOSPITAL, AND MS. CLAIRE SEAH, SACH VOLUNTEER
PHOTOS: ST. ANDREW'S COMMUNITY HOSPITAL



Madam Chan Miew Leng (third from left) with other volunteers of the palliative care team

Medical director Dr. Angel Lee, who is also director of SACH Palliative Care Service and Chairman of Singapore Hospice Council, shared, "Work in the Palliative Care Ward is challenging. Volunteers are unsung heroes in our community of care — giving their all, yet expecting nothing in return. We thank God for providing us with faithful volunteers, as well as blessing Madam Chan Miew Leng, our volunteer, and Pastor Justin Tan, SACH Pastoral Care Services Associate Chaplain, with the Healthcare Humanity Award 2019!"

PIONEER PALLIATIVE VOLUNTEER

It was the selfless and giving spirit of Madam Chan Miew Leng that won her the Healthcare Humanity Award 2019 (Volunteer Category). A familiar face at SACH since 2013, Miew Leng regularly extends her help to patients and staff alike; she has been a volunteer in the palliative care movement since the 1980s.

When the SACH Palliative Care Ward opened in 2015, she naturally stepped forward to meet the needs there. An example is her involvement in the floral arrangement activities in the ward. Together with other volunteers, Miew Leng sources for flowers and other materials, and teaches patients flower arrangement. This activity has since been extended to patients in the Rehabilitative and Dementia Care wards.

Another example is the Masak Club. To improve patients' appetite, SACH volunteers started cooking desserts for them fortnightly. Miew

Volunteers are unsung heroes in our community of care – giving their all, yet expecting nothing in return.

Leng's creativity and culinary expertise is very much evident as she takes into account the patients' tastes and swallowing difficulties, and modifies the desserts to suit them. Miew Leng's desserts are always warmly received by patients and their families, bringing them much enjoyment and pleasure.

Staff nurse Ms Jamie Ng said, "Even in the midst of a heavy thunderstorm, Miew Leng still comes to SACH to cook for our patients. We are grateful to have volunteers who make such a difference in our patients' lives!"

SERVING WITH LOVE AND HUMILITY AS ONE

Believing in the soothing nature of music, several volunteer harpists serenade patients in the Palliative Care Ward weekly with a repertoire of English, Chinese and Malay songs. When the occasion arises, Pastor Justin Tan, Associate Chaplain of SACH Pastoral Care Services and recipient of this year's Healthcare Humanity Award, joins them in song.

One such harp session touched the heart of Ms. Deborah Kang, who was visiting a patient when

she heard the music trilling in the ward. This motivated her to join the team of harpists comprising Madam Prisca Liang, Madam Yang Sik San and Madam Mary Choo. In addition to the harpists, Mr. Ronald Quek, a Volunteer Befriender, also visits patients every week to offer companionship and encouragement.

On receiving news of Pastor Justin's award, Deborah said, "Justin's selfless love and care, and empathy has touched the lives of many patients and their families, as well as our team of volunteer harpists. He is ever ready to support and bring peace, comfort and love to the patients and their families, even at the expense of his own rest. He was driving to Johor Bahru with his family when he heard that a patient had passed on. He turned back to SACH to support the bereaved family. We were all very touched, encouraged and motivated by him. He brings great value to many peoples' lives. Justin is a good team leader and we are proud to serve the patients with him!"

In support of Pastor Justin, the harpists accepted the invitation from National Healthcare Group to perform at the Healthcare Humanity Award Ceremony on 25 April 2019. 🎵

A breath of fresh air

St Joseph's Home welcomes the energy and activity ideas that young volunteers bring to brighten the days of their residents.

If you are in your 20s, can you imagine volunteering in a nursing home? What can you offer and what is there for you to gain? We spoke with April Heng and Hilary Ma, two youth volunteers from the Art Jamming programme of St Joseph's Home to get first-hand insights on their experience interacting with the residents.

Tell us about yourself and how you came to volunteer at St Joseph's Home.

April: I am turning 29. I currently work as a case manager in a community-based organisation. I first heard about St Joseph's Home through word-of-mouth. Since I enjoy arts and craft, Art Jamming felt like a fun platform to connect with the elderly.

Hilary: I am 26 this year, currently a Psychology Masters student at Nanyang Technological University. I knew about St Joseph's Home because my family attends Sunday Mass at the chapel there. I came across the Art Jamming programme when the volunteer team set up a booth during the Home's open house, which was held after their move back from Mandai in February 2017. As I enjoy the arts — taking courses in university and learning from YouTube videos — Art Jamming sounded like a great opportunity to serve and have fun!

What is Art Jamming?

Hilary: Art Jamming is about exploring, expressing and enjoying yourself through the arts. As volunteers, we aim to create a fun and supportive environment for residents to do so. Since the programme started, residents have tried acrylic painting, watercolour



painting, sketching, and craftwork. We have organised excursions to museums and explored working on kilns which are large ovens used for making clay objects hard after they have been shaped to expose the residents (and ourselves) to more art forms.

April: As volunteers, we prepare materials beforehand and assist residents with their artwork. This includes outlining images and touching up the finer details. Sometimes, residents co-create an art piece. A meaningful part of the process is having a conversation with residents about the meaning behind their artworks.

What were your initial impressions of residents in a nursing home and hospice?

April: Before I started volunteering, I thought residents at nursing homes would be very guarded —

that they would be very unwilling to talk about sensitive topics such as their families or past work life. I was also under the impression that residents are mostly elderly and could only speak dialects. As such, I was quite worried that there would be a language barrier and that I would not be able to hold conversations with them.

Hilary: I formed an idea of the nursing home and hospice from what I see in the media. I had the impression that it might be a dull and depressing place, with nothing interesting to do. However, I have always enjoyed interacting with the elderly because of my relationship with my grandparents.

How would you describe your volunteering experience today?

April: The residents are friendlier than I expected! Furthermore, while there are residents who

predominantly speak dialects, many residents can converse comfortably in English and Mandarin. Even if we do not speak the same language, I have learnt to communicate with gestures. Without saying a word, I can ask them if they wanted to have snacks or if they wanted to turn off the air-conditioner.

Observing other volunteers has allowed me to pick up more ways to connect with the residents. I can ask open-ended questions about their day and their opinions about the things that we can see and hear around us. For instance, I can ask them about



“

After interacting with the residents, I realised that ageing is a natural process in life. Ageing does not diminish the person and it does not need to stop one from living life to the fullest.”

Opposite: Guided by the volunteers, a resident recreates a bird from a photo image; Top: A combined art piece by three residents

their favourite songs when we hear music playing in the background.

As I spend more time with the residents, I also get to know more about their families, their experiences and even their pains and unhappiness. It takes time to get to know a person better. More important than trying to think of what to say, we take genuine interest in the lives of residents.


Hilary: After being a part of the Art Jamming programme for close to two years, the residents have become my friends. Going to St Joseph's Home has become more of a casual visit to catch up with friends.

I enjoy listening to residents share their daily experiences, from eating something new for lunch to having their grandchildren visit last weekend. I am learning more about them with each visit to the home. It is a very rewarding experience and I consider it my privilege to be a recipient of their treasured and personal stories.

What has been a valuable lesson you learnt from volunteering in a nursing home and hospice?

April: In the past, the idea of ageing was frightening to me. It signified the beginning of the end. Death also seemed like a taboo subject to

discuss, particularly in front of the elderly. After interacting with the residents, I realised that ageing is a natural process in life. Ageing does not diminish the person and it does not need to stop one from living life to the fullest.

Hilary: My experiences with the residents have highlighted the frailty of life and the finality of death. The breath we get daily and the human relationships we get are gifts to cherish. This motivated me to listen to the stories and experiences of others — including my own family. Not only can I share in the stories of others, I can also reciprocate with mine. 

Organisation	Name of Programme	Description of Programme	Day / Time of Activity	Commitment Level	Volunteer Training Required (Y/N)	Contact details / person
ASSISI HOSPICE	Volunteer-Carers	Supporting nurses in patient-care duties, duties include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct patient care, such as sponging, turning of patients, diaper-changing, oral care and feeding • Providing companionship to patients in the wards • Escorting ambulant patients to the toilet (do not need to assist in toileting) • Accompanying patients to other locations in the hospice (eg: garden, fish pond) • Assisting the nurses in meal service (eg: distribution of meals, feeding of patients) • Sitting with high fall-risk patients (especially in the dementia ward, so that patients do not wander off by themselves) 	Volunteers can choose their volunteering hours from: Mondays to Sundays 8am-8pm	At least 4 hours / month or at least 48 hours within 1 year	YES 1. Volunteer Introductory Session 2. Volunteer Training (Core + Patient-Care)	Ms Lee Tien Sin T: 6832 2853 E: volunteers@assisihospice.org.sg
	Van Escorts	Accompanying patients in the vans while travelling between the Day Care Centre and their homes, and ensuring patients' safety during the ride. Interested candidates should not suffer from motion sickness (be able to travel at least two hours in a van)	Volunteers can choose their volunteering hours from: Mondays to Fridays (except public holidays) AM shift: 8am – 10am PM shift: 3pm – 5pm Reporting time: At least 15 minutes before rostered shift	At least 4 hours a month or at least 48 hours within 1 year	YES 1. Volunteer Introductory Session 2. On-the-Job training	
	Volunteer Musicians	Befriending patients through providing music, on a referral basis from the Music Therapist. Volunteer Musicians are required to provide a brief report (eg. through WhatsApp), on music engagement with each assigned patient, to the Music Therapist after the session.	Volunteers can choose their volunteering hours from: Mondays to Sundays 8am-8pm	At least once a month (2-hour session)	YES 1. Volunteer Introductory Session 2. Volunteer Training (Core)	
	Fundraising Volunteers	Supporting fundraising team through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling of charity tickets • Manning of carnival booth at Assisi Fun Day (annual carnival fundraising event) • Selling of charity dinner tables 	Ad-hoc (based on events)	As needed	NO Briefing will be provided by fundraising coordinator	
DOVER PARK HOSPICE	Volunteer Hairdressers	Providing hairdressing and grooming sessions for patients	Tuesdays (except public holidays) 8.30am-10.30am	Once a week	YES	Ms Tok Shou Wee T: 6500 7265 E: volunteer@doverparkhospice.sg
	Patient Outings	Conducting weekly excursions for patients to various parts of Singapore	Thursdays (except public holidays) 8.30am-12.00pm	Once a week	YES	
	Gardening	Maintaining the garden and the greenery in the hospice	Saturdays (except public holidays) 10am-12pm	Once a week	YES	
	Arts & Crafts	Creating art & craft items for DPH fundraisers	Alternate Saturdays (except public holidays) 2pm-5pm	Twice a month	YES	
	Befriending Programme	Interacting with and providing social support to patients	Daily, during visiting hours 7am-10pm	Once a week	YES	
MWS HOME HOSPICE	Befrienders	Interacting with and giving emotional support to patients in their homes. (Must be above 18 years old)	Ad hoc; depending on patients' preference	Monthly	YES	E: volunteer@mws.sg
	Medical Escorts	Accompanying patients to their medical appointments. (Must be above 21 years old; patience is required for waiting in clinics)	Weekdays before 5pm	Ad hoc	NO Briefing will be given before the appointment	
	Roadshow / Outing	Running events or helping out at roadshows	When needed	Ad hoc	NO	
ST JOSEPH'S HOME	Night Café	Organising themed projects for residents to enjoy live band music, barista coffee and time to chill with friends	First and third Fridays of the month (except public holidays) 7.30pm-9.30pm	Twice a month	YES	Ms Shereen Ng T: 6761 9303 E: volunteer@stjh.org.sg
	Stitch with Love	Working with residents on fabric projects	Mondays 10am-11.30am	Once a week	YES	



Joseph Cheng interacting with one of Assisi Hospice's patients, Uncle Joseph

Giving to meet patients' needs

For Team Assisi volunteers, no task is too small or too difficult. From supporting nurses with sponging of patients to just sitting quietly by the patient's bedside, we speak with two volunteers to find out what drives them to give their time.

Volunteers at Assisi Hospice, are gentle pairs of hands, assisting patients who need help with eating, and their presence bring comfort to patients who appreciate a new friend. Their tasks can also involve supporting nurses with diaper changing and sponging of patients, accompanying patients in the van on their way to the Day Care Centre, or just sitting quietly by the patient's bedside. If it is something that will meet the needs of the patients, nothing is too big or too small, too difficult or too easy for Assisi Hospice's volunteers.

A COMFORTING PRESENCE

Nineteen-year-old volunteer carer Joseph Cheng wanted to make good use of his time through volunteering in-between graduating from Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) and enlisting for National Service. After going through Assisi Hospice's Volunteers' Introductory Session and training, he started with being a sitter. In Assisi Hospice, sitter duties are assigned to volunteers for patients requiring watching over. The patient may wish to leave the bed, but it is unsafe for him or her to do so due to risk of falling, or the patient may be confused.

His first sitter duty was with a 93-year-old patient. Joseph said, "With such a big age difference, I did wonder if we would be able to communicate. But I shared a little about myself with him, and he opened up to me with his story about his family and friends."

Sitters also offer support to caregivers. Joseph accompanied a lady when her husband needed to go home to shower and change, and he just wanted someone to be with her. Due to her condition, she was not able to communicate. He said, "I just told her 'Auntie, I am here' and continued to sit next to her.

Sometimes it is not what you can do with the patient, it is just about being there for them."

When it came to nursing care duties such as diaper-changing, he did not find them too difficult. He said, "There was adequate training and the nurses were there to guide us. Importantly, our involvement frees up the nurses to attend to other patients."

Joseph found volunteering at Assisi Hospice two to four times a week to be "an eye-opening experience". He shared, "Death is something that everyone has to face. Be there for the patient when we can, do whatever we can do. I see the need for help and my heart goes out to them. I feel that every patient should have a volunteer taking care of him or her."

His advice to those who are keen on volunteering, "Seeing the patients smile and giving me the thumbs up makes me happy. They will also ask about me when they don't see me around. Don't think that your actions are insignificant. The patients really appreciate it."

For the past seven years, 59-year-old Lim Siew Hoon has been spending two to two-and-a-half hours weekly in Assisi Hospice's van, accompanying patients from Assisi Hospice's Day Care Centre back to their homes. Assisi Hospice provides

door-to-door transportation for Day Care patients, and the duties of a van escort volunteer include accompanying four to seven patients between the hospice and their homes, making sure that they are comfortable in the van and calling the patients' caregiver on approach, or sending the patients right to the doorstep if the caregiver is waiting at home.


Currently a part-time accountant, Siew Hoon started volunteering at Assisi Hospice in 2013 after she decided to take a break from work. She first started with playing games with Day Care Centre patients and

helping to serve tea-time snacks. When she heard that the hospice was often short of van escorts, she decided to give it a try.

Due to the amount of time spent travelling in the van, some volunteers who have motion sickness are unable to contribute in this capacity. The van escort also needs to be physically fit as many of the patients are wheelchair-bound and require the van escort to send them back to their homes, which can be a distance from the drop-off point.

"Some of the wheelchair-friendly routes are longer, involve going up slopes and may not be sheltered. It can be tedious when it is very sunny or raining heavily," she shared.

Despite the challenges, Siew Hoon enjoys interacting with the patients during the journey. Many of them would share about their hobbies and families. It gives her a great sense of satisfaction to see the patients happy and smiling.

She said, "Some people ask me why I want to volunteer at a hospice. Isn't it depressing? But many people I meet here are more positive than those outside." 

Make a lasting impact on the lives of Assisi Hospice's patients by volunteering with us! Volunteers have to commit to volunteering at least once a month (or 48 hours a year). Sign up at <http://www.assisihospice.org.sg/individual-volunteer/>



It gives Siew Hoon a great sense of satisfaction to see the patients happy and smiling

WORDS: ANGELA YEO, MANAGER, COMMUNICATIONS, ASSISI HOSPICE
PHOTOS: ASSISI HOSPICE

Comfort without words

Bernard Yeo, the volunteer leader of DPH Ruby Group, shares his Pet-Assisted Therapy experience in bringing joy to the Dover Park Hospice inpatients.

How long have you been a volunteer with Dover Park Hospice (DPH)?

This is my 14th year volunteering with DPH.

How did you embark on your volunteering journey with DPH's Pet-Assisted Therapy (PAT) programme?

I was invited by my friends from the DPH PAT programme to try it out. I was already involved in another PAT programme. However, my friend who was a volunteer with DPH PAT Group, which has been around since 2001, invited me to join him and I did. The breeds of dogs that have joined me on the programme

include Miniature Schnauzer, Great Dane and Labrador Retriever.

What kept you going with providing this pet therapy to DPH patients?

We continued volunteering because we found that the programme was well received and welcomed by patients, their family, friends, caregivers and staff.

Can you share more about this programme and the benefits it brings to the patients?

PAT programme is a type of therapy that involves animals as a form of therapeutic intervention. Studies have shown PAT to have positive

outcomes and improved emotional well-being including social and cognitive functioning in those with medical conditions. Both the volunteers and their pets, either dogs or bunnies, will visit the inpatients twice a month where the pet-owners will bring their pets round the wards. The breeds of dogs comprises Dachshund, Golden Retriever, Labrador Retriever, Miniature Schnauzer, Rottweiler, West Highland Terrier, Singapore Special or cross breed.

Whenever the dogs make their rounds, they will bring smiles to the patients, brightening their day. The family members and hospice staff also feel that their spirits are



Opposite and this page: Dover Park Hospice Pet-Assisted Therapy volunteers with their canine partners

What are some of your experiences in working with the patients on this programme?

Not all the patients will respond to PAT when the volunteer owners and their pets visit the hospice. Over the years, I have seen how PAT was able to connect and engage with some of the patients who refused to open up to people. Through a few sessions of PAT and interaction with the pets, the patients gradually warmed up and chatted with the volunteers. There are incidences where some of the patients requested to take photos with the dogs so that they can show it to their family members. At times, the family members will also join in the therapy session along with their loved ones.

What are some of the challenges you face in the course of leading this programme?

Often, not all volunteers are available as each volunteer owner needs to be paired with a pet and not all pets are naturally suitable. It is also difficult to sustain the interest of the volunteer owners once the novelty wears off. In addition, a lot of time and effort are needed before the therapy. The dog needs to be showered or groomed 24 hours prior to the visit as it must be free from fleas or ticks and other skin problems.

How can people get involved?

We recognise that some of our volunteers have to work during the week. Our sessions are scheduled on the second Monday afternoon and fourth Saturday morning of the month. We welcome interested volunteer owners to join us where the dogs will have to be assessed for suitability before acceptance into the programme. 🐾

Interested volunteers with pets can email the DPH Volunteer Programme at volunteer@doverparkhospice.sg.

Interaction with and petting of the dogs have a calming effect on the patients, relieve overall physical pain, reduce anxiety and feelings of loneliness and isolation.

lifted. Interaction with and petting of the dogs have a calming effect on the patients, relieve overall physical pain, reduce anxiety and feelings of loneliness and isolation. In some cases, the act of petting the animals produce an automatic relaxation response, reducing the amount of medication needed by the patients.

Most importantly, the smiles on the patients' faces are a testament to the positive impact which PAT brings.

Are the volunteer owners and their pet dogs specially trained?

For the volunteer owners, they have to go through a series of training conducted to equip themselves with the knowledge and relevant soft skills to befriend the patients.

There is no specific training for the dog. However, the dogs will be screened prior to being accepted where basic obedience will be a definite advantage. The dogs must be well-socialised, enjoy being petted, have a gentle temperament, and are toilet-trained, clean and free from disease.



WORDS AND PHOTOS DOVER PARK HOSPICE

Bringing end-of-life matters closer to the community

Community engagement projects such as Both Sides, Now have enabled conversations with the elderly about end-of-life care to take place through immersive experiences.

“I have always been inspired by my late aunt who planned for a good death,” shares Ms Jee Yin Ling, on what moved her to volunteer for Both Sides, Now (BSN), an initiative that aims to build end-of-life-friendly communities using arts-based strategies.

She first knew of BSN at Toa Payoh in 2014, when residents were invited to participate in activities, performances, and conversations centred on topics of living and dying at an open space outside the Toa Payoh Public Library. “Talking about death became less daunting and the residents began to share their stories and views on end-of-life (EOL) matters. This is so empowering. So when BSN called for volunteers, I signed up with them.”

In 2016, BSN brought “The Wind Came Home”, a puppetry performance, and “The Last Dance”, a participatory performance with small group conversations, to Senior Activity Centres. It was Yin Ling’s first outing as a volunteer, where she facilitated conversations on EOL matters with the participants.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE

Yin Ling recounts a time when she facilitated a conversation at a Senior Activity Centre for a group of six seniors. The five female participants were quick to share their experiences and thoughts on EOL matters, while the elderly man listened quietly. When prompted to share his thoughts, he declined, smiled and continued listening.

However, towards the end of the session, the elderly man began to ask questions on Advance Care Planning (ACP). As a volunteer facilitator, she learnt that it was crucial to provide participants space to digest and reflect on the topic, instead of rushing them into action. When people feel that it is a safe space for them to share their thoughts, they will eventually open up.

A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO EOL CONVERSATIONS

BSN volunteers like Yin Ling are part of a community-based approach to shifting mindsets towards EOL matters, and in encouraging people to make plans and have conversations with their loved ones. It is co-presented by Lien Foundation, Ang Chin Moh Foundation, Drama Box and ArtsWok Collaborative,

in collaboration with community partners such as Yishun Health (Wellness Kampung) and Montfort Care Goodlife.

In 2017, BSN kicked off its iteration in Chong Pang and Telok Blangah, adopting an innovative approach that saw the volunteer team establish a multi-year presence in both communities, and engaging residents through performances, workshops and art projects.

“Volunteers are the cornerstone of the project,” said Programme Manager of ArtsWok Collaborative, Ms Angie Cheong. “It is through their empathetic presence and deep listening skills that a safe space is created for the audience to engage and participate in conversations.” She also shares that interested volunteers undergo a training session to prepare

“It is through their empathetic presence and deep listening skills that a safe space is created for the audience to engage and participate in conversations.”

WORDS: ONG MIN LI, EXECUTIVE, ADVANCE CARE PLANNING, KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL. PHOTOS: BOTH SIDES, NOW



Clockwise from this photo: Both Sides, Now Project Team and volunteers in Chong Pang; Public Arts Installation @ Chong Pang; A Both Sides, Now Volunteer at work in Telok Blangah; creating conversation through the arts




them for the work ahead. This includes reflections on their own experiences and views on death and dying, how to build rapport with participants, how to use arts and creative activities to engage in conversations, and role playing in different scenarios. Volunteers are also trained to introduce ACP, where appropriate.

Dr Wong Sweet Fun, Deputy Chairman, Medical Board (Population Health), Yishun Health and Clinical Director, Population Health & Community Transformation, remarks that the

conversations arising from this approach are invaluable to the management of population health in the North. Dr Wong, who is also the Chief Transformation Officer at Yishun Health, says, “Arts and health are non-traditional partners and we are very grateful that this unusual partnership with BSN in the past few years has allowed us to see EOL matters through another lens and guided us to use different media to help residents in the community explore and voice their views on living well to the end.”

LOOKING AHEAD TO TELOK BLANGAH

Following the success of its work in Chong Pang, volunteers like Yin Ling will soon be deployed in Telok Blangah to help with BSN. This includes supporting arts workshops with residents facilitated by artists, being a docent for tours of the public arts installation by the residents, as well as facilitating participatory arts activities during a carnival reaching out to both young and old. The public arts engagement takes place at Telok Blangah from 26 June to 7 July 2019. 

For more information on BSN, go to www.bothsidesnow.sg



A presence that heals

Bright Vision Hospital's only caregiver volunteer, Christie Yeo, tends to the needs of palliative care patients by providing companionship through extraordinarily difficult times.

Christie Yeo began as a volunteer seven years ago by participating in various activities with patients. The mother of three enjoyed the flexibility of managing her own schedule and is able to set aside time to volunteer at Bright Vision Hospital (BVH).

"I started with simple activities such as morning exercises, playing board games and bringing patients out for refreshing trips. When the BVH Community Relations (CR) team introduced the Caregiver Volunteering Programme three years ago, I decided to find out more about it," she shared.

The CR team brought her to the palliative ward, and what Christie saw tugged at her heartstrings. She noticed that the patients have a lot of needs and were unable to communicate well with the nurses due to a language barrier. It was then that she decided to take on the challenge of being a caregiver volunteer. The hospital provided in-house training that covered

extensive skills on how to communicate, clean, feed and transfer patients.

PATIENTS' EMOTIONS A CHALLENGE

Christie volunteers every Tuesday for half a day. Her mornings start as early as 7.30am. She prepares breakfast for the palliative care patients, changes bedsheets or just spends time talking with them. These may be fairly simple tasks, but she feels a sense of satisfaction at the end of the day.

One aspect that Christie finds difficult, till today, is handling patients' emotions which can swing quite drastically. Most patients are hit by sporadic bursts of sadness and fear as they confront the last stages of their life. If left unattended, these feelings will eventually culminate in anger.

Christie takes up the role of companion to help patients cope with their emotions, especially those who are alone or without family. She usually starts by discussing general topics like TV programmes or asking

them about their favourite dishes. Being able to speak in their language also helps Christie make quicker connections.

A TOUCH CAN DO WONDERS

"Sometimes our presence and a warm touch is all that is needed," she said. She remembers a patient who was in such pain that it caused his whole body to shake. Instinctively, Christie held the patient's hand in the hope that it would comfort him.

Surprisingly the patient slowly began to calm down. Realising that what he needed was companionship, she accompanied him until he fell asleep. Her presence helped to lift his pain and fear.

"Many palliative care patients want to be comfortable, to receive a friendly gesture or just being able to have a good day. And while it may take a lot of effort to bring a smile to them, I feel appreciated and get to learn a lot of things in the process," she said. 🌟

To join BVH Caregiver Volunteering Programme, email community@bvh.org.sg.



WORDS & PHOTOS BRIGHT VISION HOSPITAL

Life near death

A medical student-led volunteer initiative at Tan Tock Seng Hospital not only benefits the patients but also informs the perspectives of all involved.

The heart of Pallipals, a Community Involvement Project of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKC Medicine), is perhaps best expressed in Dame Cicely Saunders' promise that the World Hospice Movement would help people "live until [they] die", a goal that sounds deceptively straightforward. After all, it cannot be denied that severe illnesses, prolonged hospitalisation and impending death can eclipse a person's life so entirely that they begin to exist rather than to live. Hence, preventing this from occurring, and instead encouraging patients to live life to the fullest even at the end of life, is the driving force behind what we do.

We are a group of 18 volunteers who engage palliative patients through interaction and conversation, and help to raise awareness about palliative care locally.

Our volunteers regularly visit palliative care patients in Tan

Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH)'s Ward 83. Through conversation, we befriend these patients and provide companionship. Not only do we wish to alleviate the boredom and other negative emotions that can accompany a long hospital stay, but we also hope that these chats give patients an outlet to share their thoughts, fears, experiences and advice. And indeed, we see their personalities shine through as they relate their childhood stories, talk about their families, or even discuss death. It is truly inspiring to see that the end of life does not have to obliterate identity, and we are heartened that as volunteers, we have, in our own small ways acted as conduits for patients' bonding and self-expression.

Apart from these visits, we work with the nurses of Ward 83 to organise celebrations for the patients during festive seasons, such as Lunar New Year and Easter, and, as much as possible, try to involve their family and friends. With simple activities such as handicrafts

or singing, we bring the festive spirit into the palliative care ward. While easily taken for granted in health, celebrations near the end of life are a crucial reminder to patients that they are an essential part of their families and communities, and that most importantly, they are being cared for.

Pallipals also strives to encourage people to take ownership of their end-of-life care by thinking and talking about palliative care, which we firmly believe is an important and holistic approach. To this end, we have participated in the World Hospice and Palliative Care Day 2018 Exhibition organised by TTSH Palliative Medicine, where we assisted the TTSH Palliative Department in preparing a series of posters introducing and clearing misconceptions about palliative care to the general public. In addition, we held a talk for LKC Medicine students last August to discuss and address their questions about palliative medicine. Eventually, through activities such as these, we hope to successfully encourage young people to consider the care they would like to have when they are near death and hence, plan for a fulfilling experience at the end of life, and a good death.

There is never a good time to die. As the biologist Richard Dawkins once wrote, "We are all going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones." It looks odd at first glance, until we realise that we can only die because we are alive; we should grasp every opportunity to live our lives to the fullest, even when we reach the end.

Ultimately, by engaging with current palliative patients and promoting early conversation about end-of-life care, Pallipals hopes that we can truly enable others to "live until [they] die". 🌟



WORDS HEATHER HENG, PALLIPALS PHOTO MORENO JENNILYN



Music therapist Isabel Tan leading patients in a session

The power to comfort

Music therapy can greatly improve a patient's remaining days with its effects of healing and comfort.

Imagine someone spending the final three to six months of their life bedridden. This would be a time for reflection about life. Fear, regret, confusion, sadness, loss of hope — such emotions may be overwhelming. This is where music can help. “Music has the power to heal and comfort as well as trigger emotions and vivid memories,” said Isabel Tan, a music therapist at St Luke’s Hospital (SLH). A new music therapy volunteer group started at SLH in February 2019, part of a palliative programme


led by Isabel. Certain aspects of this group make this volunteer programme especially meaningful. The group is made up of SLH ex-patients, with some having motor skill and coordination challenges because of previous strokes or other ailments. They are not musically trained and therefore need to work harder at reading the simplified music scores. They wanted to bring some relief to patients facing their life’s end. Through this exposure, the volunteers get to learn more about the ward. “When I knew I was going to perform in the palliative ward, I

felt a bit apprehensive. But after performing there, I realised some of them are even more cheerful than us,” said music therapy volunteer, Madam Kok Lang Fong. The opportunity to step into the palliative ward gave the volunteers a chance to understand palliative care and dismissed some fears they might previously have due to the unknown. They now realise that the palliative ward is just like any other ward, the difference being that the patients are in the final stage of their life and may require more symptom management as well as psycho-emotional care.

WORDS & PHOTOS ST LUKE'S HOSPITAL

Palliative patients may be physically challenged with loss of strength and functions. They may find it hard to even sit up, much less get out of bed for other activities. In such a situation, singing is something they can do with relative ease.

If patients feel more creative, during music therapy sessions, Isabel would encourage them to compose songs. “Writing songs to express themselves to their family members may help relieve their stress and negative feelings,” she explained. In addition, music therapists help family and caregivers with coping, communication, and bereavement.

Music therapy sessions may not always be a one-way street; sometimes, patients join in as well. In that particular first performance by the new music therapy volunteer group, the palliative patients guided the volunteers to sing a couple more songs of their choice. The group had a great start and looks set to continue bringing comfort to the palliative ward at SLH. 

“

Writing songs to express themselves to their family members may help relieve their stress and negative feelings.”

MUSIC THERAPY

Music therapy in palliative care can be spontaneous and customised to each patient's needs. It may involve just the therapist singing a song chosen by the patient or the patient singing along. Songs that hold special meaning to a patient or the whole family can bring them thoughts of happier days.

While physiotherapy aims to restore patients' functions, music therapy in end-of-life care helps to improve their quality of life. This can be achieved by addressing psychological needs, offering support, comfort and facilitating communication.



Tips for Caregivers

DR JAMIE ZHOU

Consultant, Division of Supportive and Palliative Care
National Cancer Centre, Singapore

Becoming a volunteer might be a meaningful way to share your skills and wisdom. Here are some tips:

#1: Reflect on your motivations

Think about why you want to volunteer, and what gives you meaning and drive. Volunteering can be very meaningful when you use your abilities and experience. However, be cautious if your motivation stems from unresolved issues from your caregiving experience that makes you want to make it up to someone else.

#2: Use your strengths to your advantage

Everyone has different strengths such as teaching, hands-on activities, befriending or teaching; choose a volunteering opportunity that brings out your best.

#3: Choose an organisation that you are comfortable with

Over the course of caregiving, there may have been an organisation that you benefitted from. If you feel they are a worthwhile cause, you can approach them to ask if there are any volunteer positions available. However, be aware that it may also bring about certain memories which may affect you adversely. It is absolutely fine to choose another organisation.



Upcoming Events & Announcements

28 JULY 2019 (SUNDAY)

Singtel-Singapore Cancer Society Race Against Cancer 2019

Venue: Angsana Green, East Coast Park

Time: 7am

The annual Singtel-Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) Race Against Cancer (RAC) will feature two competitive categories — the 10km and 15km Competitive Runs — and a 5.5km Fun Run. The RAC aims to raise awareness of cancer and the services which SCS provides.

Registration: www.raceagainstcancer.org.sg / 1800 727 3333

30 JULY 2019 (TUESDAY)

SHC Multidisciplinary Palliative Care Forum: The Right to Decide

Speakers: Dr Yoong Chee Seng & Miss Sumytra Menon

Venue: Multipurpose Hall, St Andrew's Community Hospital

Time: 1.00pm – 2.00pm

Contact: secretariat@singaporehospice.org.sg / 6538 2231

21 AUGUST 2019 (WEDNESDAY)

SHC Multidisciplinary Palliative Care Forum (For Healthcare Professionals): Quality Improvement Measurement Tools in Palliative Care, A Problem of Too Many Choices?

Speaker: Professor David Currow

Venue: Essery Hall, Assisi Hospice

Time: 1.00pm – 2.00pm

Contact: secretariat@singaporehospice.org.sg / 6538 2231

24 SEPTEMBER 2019 (TUESDAY)

SHC Multidisciplinary Palliative Care Forum: I Survived Palliative Care

Speaker: KK Women's and Children's Hospital Paediatrics Palliative Care team

Venue: TBC (check out SHC's website or facebook for updates)

Time: 1.00pm – 2.00pm

Contact: secretariat@singaporehospice.org.sg / 6538 2231

Download Caregiver Resource Booklets and "Granny Cool"

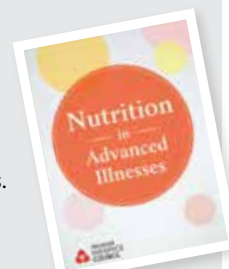
Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) has developed resource booklets (Nutrition in Advanced Illnesses, Understanding the Final Hours & Caring for Yourself After a Death) to support and empower caregivers. "Granny Cool" is the second in a series of three Life Books. This illustrated book tells the heartfelt story of how Melisa's granny sought comfort and support through palliative care, even as she remained unwavering in spirit.

Caregiver Resource Booklets

<https://singaporehospice.org.sg/caregiver/>

Life Book Granny Cool

<https://singaporehospice.org.sg/lifebook/>



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