

THE HOSPICE LINK

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A journey of love

**Building resilience
in caregiving**

**Helping
caregivers
to stay
resilient**



SINGAPORE
**HOSPICE
COUNCIL**

PLUS
Key Findings
from Caregiver
Survey

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Contents



- 2 Members' Contacts
- 3 Chief Executive's Note
- 4 SHC Caregiver Survey: Effectiveness of SHC Caregiving Material Resources
- 5 A journey of love
- 8 Building resilience in caregiving
- 10 Nurturing the spirit
- 12 Grief and Bereavement Conference 2021
- 14 Caregiving in a time of COVID-19
- 16 The resilient love
- 18 Trusting each other to care
- 20 Come what may
- 21 Leaving no one behind
- 24 SHC Resources for caregivers / Upcoming events

“

It's so important, as a caregiver, not to become so enmeshed in your role that you lose yourself.”

DANA REEVE

One may ponder: what is the job description of a dedicated caregiver? Ironically, this position does not have a defined role and responsibilities as you will need to wear multiple hats, from being a soulmate, to a nurse, driver, cook or even the key “someone” who addresses the demands and desires of the person who is terminally ill.

Often, caregiving activities cannot be planned in advance as the execution and expectations remain unpredictable. Therefore, as a dedicated caregiver you will need to find the right support to remain positive at all times.

Oddly, most caregivers prefer to handle all care activities single-handedly and extend relentless care for their loved ones, hence neglecting their own well-being. This often results in one feeling weary and burnt out or even lamenting “if only I could have done more”.

Most will avoid thinking that the whole period was gruelling, especially over the long haul. However, it is necessary to pay attention to your own mental, physical and spiritual needs, and discuss with the multidisciplinary palliative care team who will take your needs into consideration, and provide a pillar of support that you need to care for the patient.

These are key and essential steps that can lessen the load as this dedicated integrated team can then look into overall needs and introduce appropriate intervention and support for you to maintain you and your loved ones' well-being. The holistic care approach offered

by the palliative care team can provide the synergy as the family transits their loved ones into the quality end-of-life journey because the palliative care team will:

1 review the terminally ill care programme

2 listen to your thoughts

3 map these needs by introducing the most desirable approach

4 identify the mitigating measures to the challenges, strike a balance to allow you and your loved ones to feel better

5 recommend appropriate respite care options for you and your family

Remember, you are not alone.

The support group is always there to provide spiritual and emotional support or even the training intervention to allow you to better function as a caregiver.

To the palliative care team, your well-being matters as much as the patients'.

Ms Evelyn Leong
Chief Executive
Singapore Hospice Council

Effectiveness of Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) Caregiving Material Resources: Key Findings



PERIOD

Jan - Mar 2021



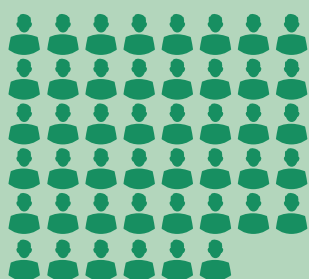
SURVEY TOOL

Discussion,
phone interviews,
online



PARTICIPANTS

46



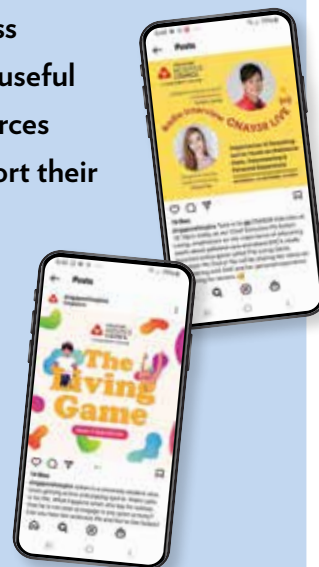
OBJECTIVES

- To understand the types of SHC caregiving materials that are currently available and accessed by caregivers
- To evaluate the usefulness and relevance of SHC caregiving materials
- To identify gaps and unmet needs of caregivers
- To gather perspectives on the best platform and medium of engagement for caregivers



KEY FINDINGS

- Caregivers wish their general awareness and education of what it takes to be a caregiver begin earlier than at the point of diagnosis or onset of illness
- SHC materials have been found to be useful
- More can be done to make SHC resources available and easily accessible to support their caregiving journey e.g.
 - website to be organised along caregiving journey
 - various media formats to be used: podcasts, mobile applications, chatbot, tutorial videos
 - bite-sized and practical information



For the latest updates on SHC's caregiver resources, visit <https://singaporehospice.org.sg>



Caricature of the late Madam Chin Tin Tew drawn by Ryan Choy He Rong during SACH Palliative Care Ward Grandparents' and Parents' Day 2019

A journey of love

The special bond with her mother-in-law enabled a daughter-in-law to walk the last stretch with her without regrets.

I was first introduced to palliative care when St. Andrew's Community Hospital (SACH) set up its Palliative Care Ward in 2015. Then, I would avoid the ward as facing death denotes sorrow. Palliative care addresses the needs of patients with life-limiting illnesses. The SACH Multidisciplinary Palliative Care Team comprising doctors, nurses, therapists, pharmacists, medical social workers and pastoral care workers, journeys with patients and their families throughout their stay, and aims to maintain the best possible quality of life for patients and support their loved ones by encouraging them to live life to the fullest, to "Celebrate Life" and "Cherish Moments" together.



Mei Mei has been supporting the work of SACH Palliative Care Ward with festive cookies and mooncakes from her aunt's bakery, Garden Pastry and Cake Pte Ltd!

Over the years, through interactions with patients and their loved ones, palliative care now denotes a journey of love. One such heartwarming journey was that of See Mei Mei and her late mother-in-law, Madam Chin Tin Tew, whom she affectionately addressed as "Mama".

Smiling sweetly at the memory, 48-year-old Mei Mei shared, "I got to know my husband through my mother-in-law at the age of 18. When I got married at the age of 25, my mother advised me to love my mother-in-law as my own. Having lost my own father at the age of 30 years old, I also treated my father-in-law as my own father."

Relishing the memories, Mei Mei recalled, "Mama and Papa were very cute and loved us very much. When Mama and Papa were in good health, we enjoyed going to the beach every weekend as a family. I loved learning to cook traditional dishes such as yam abacus seeds from them. It was a joy cooking for our family as they would eat everything I cook."

In a softened tone, Mei Mei expressed, "In 2018, Mama was diagnosed with cancer. She was 74 years old. The sudden news shocked us and broke our hearts. She became weaker, needed

assistance with showering and drainage of her urinary catheter every few hours throughout the day. At that time, my children were nine, 17 and 18 years old. I had quit my part-time job to take care of Mama. Every day, I would cook for her and shower her. When I stayed overnight with Mama to take care of her and do hourly drainage of her urinary catheter, my husband took care of our youngest kid. Eight months later, Mama's condition worsened and she was admitted to Changi General Hospital (CGH). In view of Mama's need for professional medical care, doctors from CGH advised us to admit her to SACH Palliative Care Ward. At that time, I struggled with the decision. I loved Mama very much and wanted to bring her home so that I could take care of her. After speaking with the care team, I relented as admitting her to SACH Palliative Care Ward was the best care plan for her."

With her voice cracking, Mei Mei said, "It pained my heart when Mama suffered. We would often end up hugging each other and tearing together. Mama was a very strong and independent lady who did not like to trouble others for assistance. I felt gratified when she allowed me to attend to her personal hygiene and toileting needs.

With professional advice, guidance and support from the SACH Palliative Care Team, Mei Mei's family encouraged Madam Chin to live her life to the fullest.

Below: Mei Mei and her family



Mei Mei's Advice FOR CAREGIVERS

1. Do our best in caring for our loved ones, especially our parents. We are where we are because of them.
2. Forgive and forget.
3. Set aside time for yourself.
4. Seek professional help. Palliative care teams provide good support and advice for patients and caregivers. Besides caring for patients, the care team helps family members cope with distressing moments and prepares the family for the loss of their loved ones.

I was very touched that she treated me like her own daughter. Mama often told me that I should just let her go as she felt that it was tiring for me to take care of her."

Justin Tan, Associate Chaplain of the Palliative Ward shared, "Mei Mei is a superstar daughter-in-law. I had witnessed heart-wrenching moments of the late Madam Chin and her hugging in tears when Madam Chin was in pain. She is one of the few daughters-in-law I know who loves and treats her mother-in-law like her own mother. Mei Mei cared for Madam Chin tirelessly day and night in the hospital and often brought home-cooked meals for her. Madam Chin told me that Mei Mei is the dream daughter every mother-in-law would love and even advised me to find a wife with her attributes!"

With professional advice, guidance and support from the SACH Palliative Care Team, Mei Mei's family encouraged Madam Chin to live her life to the fullest. "Mama loved festivities and the many that the care team organised had brought Mama and my family much joy," said Mei Mei. "She even had a caricature drawn of her at SACH. I treasured every moment with Mama. I was with Mama when she took her last breath. My love for her remains etched in my heart."

Left: Be open to the support from your family and friends; Opposite (top-bottom): Yoga and meditation can relieve stress and ease anxiety; eat well to maintain good health

Building resilience in caregiving

Caregivers play an immensely vital role in the lives of their loved ones. Self-care is important to build physical and mental stamina for the long haul.

For most, the act of caregiving in itself is rewarding and one that is a testament to the strong bonds that underlie the relationship. As a Medical Social Worker at Changi General Hospital (CGH), I have been privileged to meet caregivers from different walks of life, who have demonstrated how caring for a loved one can be a deeply fulfilling experience. Yet one thing appears fairly consistent: caregivers take on the majority of responsibilities in

looking after their loved ones. And there is a tendency for many to inadvertently neglect their own well-being in doing so. Whenever I ask the caregivers how they are coping, or how they have been caring for themselves, the response I get is often a shrug and resigned smile. Indeed the physical and emotional demands of the caregiving role can be exhausting. If one does not take care of one's health and fortify one's well-being, the challenges can become

overwhelming over time. Research studies have shown that self-care and the ability to garner positive experiences from caregiving are important in helping caregivers remain mentally healthy and resilient. This form of resilience enables them to not only adapt to challenging situations, but to grow from it.

Here are some tips to build your resilience to prevent the buildup of stress and burnout.

Prioritise your health

I have seen a caregiver losing weight as she diligently cared for her husband due to his cancer relapse. It is easy to overlook the basic needs of eating well and getting sufficient sleep. A lack of these can lead to fatigue and compromise your own immunity. It is therefore crucial to take care of yourself before you can care for others.

Schedule regular breaks

Call it a time-out, a respite or simply take some moments to sip a cup of tea, listen to music, or catch up on your favourite K-drama. These regular breaks where you set aside time for yourself are necessary to help you rest and recharge. You may also wish to find time to pursue your own interests or hobbies. Exercising is also a good way to release stress and enhance your well-being.

Seek and accept help

Be open to the support from your family and friends, and ask them for help when you need it. It is also useful to suggest specific things for them to do, such as getting the groceries, preparing a meal, or even getting them to look after the patient for a short period while you get some rest or run errands. A caregiver once shared with me how grateful she was when her neighbours offered to bring meals for her children and accompany them to school.

Practise deep breathing exercises

Regular breathing exercises have a calming effect, release tension and aid relaxation. One simple breathing exercise is to breathe in slowly through the nose for five seconds, holding it for a further five seconds before exhaling through the mouth for two to three times as long. There are many other exercises such as yoga and meditation that are useful in relieving stress and eases anxiety.

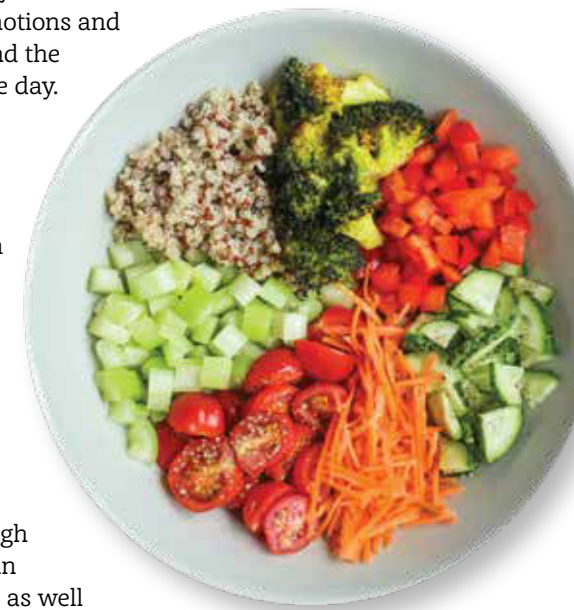
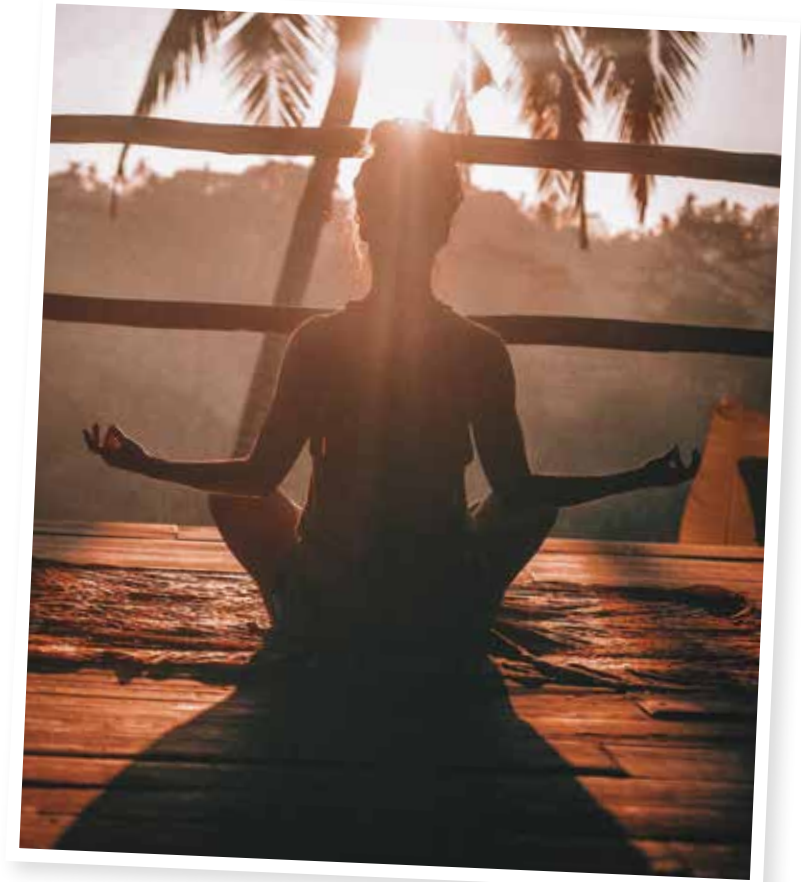
Join a support group

Knowing that you are not alone on your caregiving journey can be immensely comforting. In addition to providing encouragement and validation, one can also draw on the experience of others for problem-solving strategies. Moreover, with Whatsapp and Telegram, support is a mere chat away, without the necessity of leaving home.

Manage your expectations


Be kind to yourself; there is no 'perfect' caregiver. Learn to appreciate your own efforts. Focus on what you are able to provide, and start with small steps in establishing a daily routine. If you enjoy writing, start a Gratitude Journal both as a way to express your emotions and self-affirm your efforts and the small achievements of the day.

The hospital palliative and home hospice teams can be indispensable in providing the information needed to facilitate understanding, as well as allay concerns and fears of patients and their caregivers. CGH's Palliative Care Service supports patients with debilitating conditions or terminal diagnoses through our medical care, and pain management treatments, as well



as psychological, emotional, social and spiritual support. CGH also has a community palliative care collaboration with St. Andrew's Community Hospital, known as the Violet Programme (VIP), which provides end-of-life care for non-cancer patients residing in the eastern part of Singapore.

In caring for patients and caregivers, the medical social workers at CGH help in care planning and navigating through healthcare and social services, government grants and applications. We guide you in practical matters from Advanced Care Planning and Lasting Power of Attorney, to discussions on last rites. We also provide emotional and familial support, as well as connect you to the relevant agencies for assistance. Caregivers can also reach out to social service agencies such as Singapore Cancer Society, Dementia Singapore, and Caregiver Alliance Limited, which can render services catered to a variety of needs and patient profiles.

Instead of shouldering the entire scope of responsibilities, don't be afraid to reach out. A little help can go a long way in empowering your caregiving experience. 

If one does not take care of one's health and fortify one's well-being, the challenges can easily become overwhelming over time.



Nurturing the spirit

Spiritual counselling plays a key role in building the resilience of caregivers, as they grapple with the physical and emotional toll of caring for their loved ones.

For caregiver Juliana, life had been an endless cycle of responsibilities — caring for her ailing mother and elderly father; attending to her children's needs and managing the demands of work.

Physically and emotionally worn out, Juliana was finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with the daily grind of life. At her wits' end, she voiced her concerns to her mother's primary care nurse at HCA Hospice Care (HCA), who quickly arranged for HCA Spiritual Counsellor Irene Lee to pay her a visit.

BUILDING BRIDGES

On Irene's first visit, Juliana was reticent, as she had no prior experiences with spiritual counsellors. Sensing her hesitation, Irene patiently devoted time to getting to know Juliana better. Through Irene's various guiding questions and gentle prompts, Juliana eventually opened up about the worries that had been weighing heavily on her mind.

"I viewed the first session with Irene, as an epiphany with a higher power," Juliana shared. "I eventually recognised the importance of leaving all my worries and concerns in life to my faith."



WORDS & PHOTOS HCA HOSPICE CARE

By journeying with caregivers through both happy and painful times, I hope they will eventually find answers and peace, before their loved ones pass on."

From opposite page: HCA Spiritual Counsellor Irene Lee (left) shares a trusting relationship with Juliana; As her mother's primary caregiver, Juliana dutifully attends to all of her needs on a daily basis.

Caregivers often struggle with anticipatory grief, compounded by the mental and physical toll of caring for their loved ones. Existential questions also often arise: "Why does this have to happen to my loved one? Where will they go after they die?"


There are no clear answers to these difficult questions, but Irene believes that caregivers eventually arrive at their own conclusions. "Life is a mystery and I don't have the answers to everything," Irene said. "But by journeying with caregivers through both happy and painful times, I hope they will eventually find answers and peace, before their loved ones pass on."

Irene often works hand-in-hand with HCA's doctors, nurses, medical social workers and art therapists. Patients and caregivers are usually referred to her by the nurse, doctor or medical social worker in charge, according to the needs of the case.

Irene recounted an elderly lady who envisioned going to a beautiful landscape of expansive grasslands and blue skies after her passing. The patient also spoke about how peace, love and joy were important to her. With the help of HCA Senior Art Therapist Gracia Lim, they worked on a painting of nature, with the words "peace", "love" and "joy" written on it.

"Her daughter framed the painting and placed it on the wall opposite her mother's bed," Irene said. "It made the patient smile, whenever she looked at it."

The process of creating the artwork helped the elderly lady arrive at her own after-death conclusion and also brought comfort to her daughter.

Irene's role as a guiding pillar of support helps caregivers find that element of peace, steadying them as they navigate the uncertainties of illness and dying. 

Over the course of the next few sessions, Juliana started to find peace within herself, which enabled her to cope better with her daily challenges. Apart from spiritual support, Irene also gently guided Juliana through the conundrums she faced. When Juliana fretted over her brother who was living overseas and unable to see and spend time with their mother, Irene guided her in finding a workaround. Eventually, Juliana worked out that she could tap on technology and connect her brother with their mother through video calls.

"Initially, Juliana was very anxious and stressed from caregiving. Now, she is relaxed and expressive about her journey in looking after her mother," Irene said.

BEYOND RELIGION

Most people have a common misperception that spiritual care is necessarily rooted in religion. "Spiritual care is more about bringing hope to patients and caregivers, and helping them realise there is love and peace," Irene shared.

Grief and Bereavement Conference 2021


"Tapestries of Grief" weaves a compassionate network of support for the grieved and bereaved.

From 20 to 24 September, the first virtual Grief and Bereavement Conference 2021 organised by the Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) saw over 250 participants coming together to share, learn and explore the building of more compassionate communities and informed practices to support the bereaved. Participants included health and social care practitioners, academics, faith leaders, educators, counsellors, therapists, service providers of death-related services and many more.

Themed "Tapestries of Grief", the conference represented the unique and universal nature of individual and collective grief. The main conference offered three workshop tracks on Healthcare, Practice, and Community, with a total of seven overseas and 18 local speakers, as well as 14 abstract oral presenters providing insightful sharing and discussion. There were also two pre-conference workshops "Grief and Bereavement 101" and "Masterclass" to better equip professionals of various expertise with the tools they need.

Leading to the conference was the Tapestries of Grief community engagement project organised by Grief Matters, which featured virtual talks, experiential workshops, and a community art exhibition to improve grief literacy in the community. Using quotes from the bereaved and helping professionals who participated in the community art project, a pledge was co-created by SHC and Grief Matters for individuals to show their support in making Singapore a more bereaved-friendly community.

In the post-conference evaluation, when asked how they would apply what they have learnt to the workplace, it was heartening that multiple participants

saw the need to improve grief literacy among their staff and to better support their clients on the bereavement journey. Indeed, as SHC Chairperson Dr Patricia Neo mentioned in her closing remarks: "As services and bereavement practices continue to evolve, there is much opportunity for all of us to be constantly appraised of the landscape changes and harness opportunities of learning from one another to ensure good bereavement care across the continuum." 

Pledge

As our collective expressions
weave a tapestry of grief
We honour individual experiences
as authentic and unique
Yet there are common elements, intertwined
like shadows of grey and glimmers of light
Bonding us as one humanity.

We embrace all colour threads of stories
on love and life
With presence, without judgement
We are committed to build a safe sanctuary
To cradle the sacred narratives
that each of us embodies.

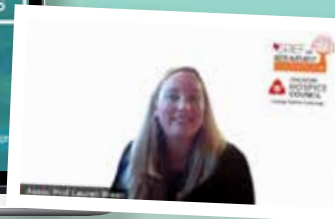
The common yarn of loss and longing binds
us as we knit our hearts as one
Stitching together cherished memories;
celebrating life, with courage
and compassion
We pledge to always remain
open and inclusive
To shape and be shaped by the
bereavement journey.

WORDS & PHOTOS SINGAPORE HOSPICE COUNCIL



Photo moment with the Guest-of-Honour. From left to right: (1st row) Guest-of-Honour Director of Aged Care Services, Ageing Planning Office, Ministry of Health Mr Titus Lee; SHC Chairperson Dr Patricia Neo; SHC Chief Executive Ms Evelyn Leong; (2nd row) Chairperson of the GBC Organising Committee Ms Chee Wai Yee; GBC Organising Committee Member Associate Professor Lee Geok Ling; GBC Organising Committee Member Ms Candice Tan; (3rd row) GBC Organising Committee Member Dr Gilbert Fan.

Day 1: Keynote address by Professor Margaret Stroebe, Utrecht University, University of Groningen, The Netherlands



Day 3: Keynote address by Associate Professor Lauren J. Breen, Curtin University, Australia



All smiles with workshop leader Professor Robert Neimeyer, Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, USA and participants of the pre-conference Masterclass workshop.

Caregiving in a time of COVID-19

Dover Park Hospice Medical Social Worker Michelle Lau and Music Therapist Camellia Soon talk about the Hospice's new initiative DPHCares, which aims to support caregivers virtually during the pandemic with stress-relieving tips.

What are the stressors to caregivers brought about by COVID-19?

The current COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional layers of stressors in terms of social isolation and complexity in navigating resources for caregivers of terminally ill patients. On top of their overwhelming caregiving duties, caregivers find the COVID-19 restrictions challenging as they could not gather in support groups like they used to in the past and this contributes to a sense of loneliness on their caregiving journey.

Often, caregivers also face issues such as dedicating personal time to take care of their own well-being as they adjust to the demands of caregiving. This contributes to a more sedentary lifestyle, lack of self-care and having insufficient rest. Caregivers are also more socially isolated due to the inability to go out and socialise as a result of looking after their loved ones. This further worsens their mental well-being which could lead to caregiver burnout.

What is DPHCares?

Started in June 2021, DPHCares is a caregiver support initiative by the Dover Park Hospice Social Work and Psychosocial Services team that aims to provide caregivers of end-of-life patients a safe and therapeutic space to share their experiences, challenges and inspiration stories on their caregiving journey. It comprises Personalised Comfort Care Kits, DPHCares Telegram Support Group and Caregivers Bulletin Board. This multi-modality space helps to



Everyday Stress Busters FOR THE BUSY CAREGIVER

No time to exercise?

Try standing up whenever you can, even while watching TV or folding laundry. Use common household items as weights. You can swing a water bottle or carry a backpack of books.

Take a break or rejuvenate with your favourite food

Set aside time to indulge in your favourite food or drink, or add some spices or seasoning to your food for extra flavour! Food can nourish your mind and body, while providing you with the energy needed for the next thing you do.



Be in touch with your senses

Observe things around you such as clouds, plants, a picture, or even other people. Notice the scents and smells around you — the aroma of coffee, the scent of your food, and the fragrance of fresh flowers.

Relax with music

Listening to calming music can help to reduce stress levels, while listening to upbeat tunes can lift your mood while you do your chores. What music suits you today?

Reflect while on the go

When taking a break, consider reading some articles and subsequently, taking a moment to pause and reflect between your errands.

Connect with a friend for five minutes

Catch up with an old friend, join an online support or religious group, or simply have a casual chat with a neighbour.

Right: DPHCares bulletin board;
Opposite page:
A Dover Park Hospice caregiver and her late mother

Dover Park Hospice Perspective

Head of Social Work and Psychosocial Services Martha Ng shared, "The caregiving journey is one that is shrouded with various challenges and can be very demanding and stressful. Many caregivers often face issues relating to the lack of self-care as they adjust to the demands of caregiving. These stressors unfortunately have been exacerbated by the current pandemic — caregivers are more socially isolated and are faced with more uncertainties and fears. As such, it is even more pertinent to provide more support for the caregivers to empower them in providing care for their loved ones."

facilitate caregivers in expressing their emotions, discover a sense of belonging on their caregiving journey and enhance their coping methods in caregiving.

How does it benefit the caregivers?

DPHCares utilises the messaging platform Telegram to empower caregivers with caregiving and self-care tips on a weekly basis. A DPHCares bulletin board with psycho-educational materials is placed in the Hospice's visitor waiting area for caregivers to read when they are waiting to enter the wards to visit their loved ones. It also serves as a two-way communication channel for caregivers who may not be technologically savvy to share their thoughts on Post-it notes on the board. Caregivers of our patients will also receive a personalised comfort care kit from their social worker. The kit includes donation in-kind essential items such as eye masks, sanitisers and other self-care items, which serves as a reminder for caregivers to take care and have time for themselves. 🌟



Caregivers also face issues such as dedicating personal time to take care of their own well-being as they adjust to the demands of caregiving.

Reflection from a caregiver

"There are times when we don't feel okay too. The fear, despair and feeling of hopelessness because you think that you are not doing enough or well enough for your loved one. And that is when it is most crucial to realise that your loved one is not alone, because you are there to help; and you are not alone, because there are other caregivers who are in this with you. This thought afforded me much relief and confidence, even in the darkest of times — and I pray that it gives you comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Thank you Dover Park Hospice for helping to make it all better."

- Mr Victor, caregiver of a patient with advanced dementia

The resilient love

A senior staff nurse shares encounters of courageous caregivers who kept on going even as the going got rough.

I have been a senior staff nurse at Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) Hospice Care Service for nine amazing years, during which I've seen how wonderful caregivers are in caring for their loved ones impacted by cancer. A full-time housewife managing three schooling kids while caring for her sick husband; a 16-year-old daughter who quits school to care for her sick mother; and a husband who stopped working to care for his wife with multiple cancers for many years — the list goes on.

The caregivers are always grateful whenever I visit them to help manage the pain symptoms of the patients. I disagree with some who often say that our work is not easy. Being a caregiver 24/7 is significantly more tedious than being a nurse who makes short visits lasting a couple of hours at a time.

I have wondered many times how the caregivers manage this and these are the few words that come to mind: love, gratitude, respect.

Caregivers often tell me: "My wife needs me most now", "He has been a good husband to me", "I would do anything for my mother".

Being there for their loved ones is what keeps them strong. Seeing their loved ones getting better quality of life for as long as possible is what gives them courage. The smile on the faces of their loved ones give them the hope to continue despite the challenges they face. It is definitely not an easy journey for caregivers, especially when some patients are symptomatic and require the attention of their caregivers all the time.




Some of the complaints that the caregivers have are lack of sleep, no appetite or just exhaustion. I would always encourage them to take turns caring for the patient with other family members to ensure that they get adequate rest and recuperate. This will prevent burnout for the caregivers.

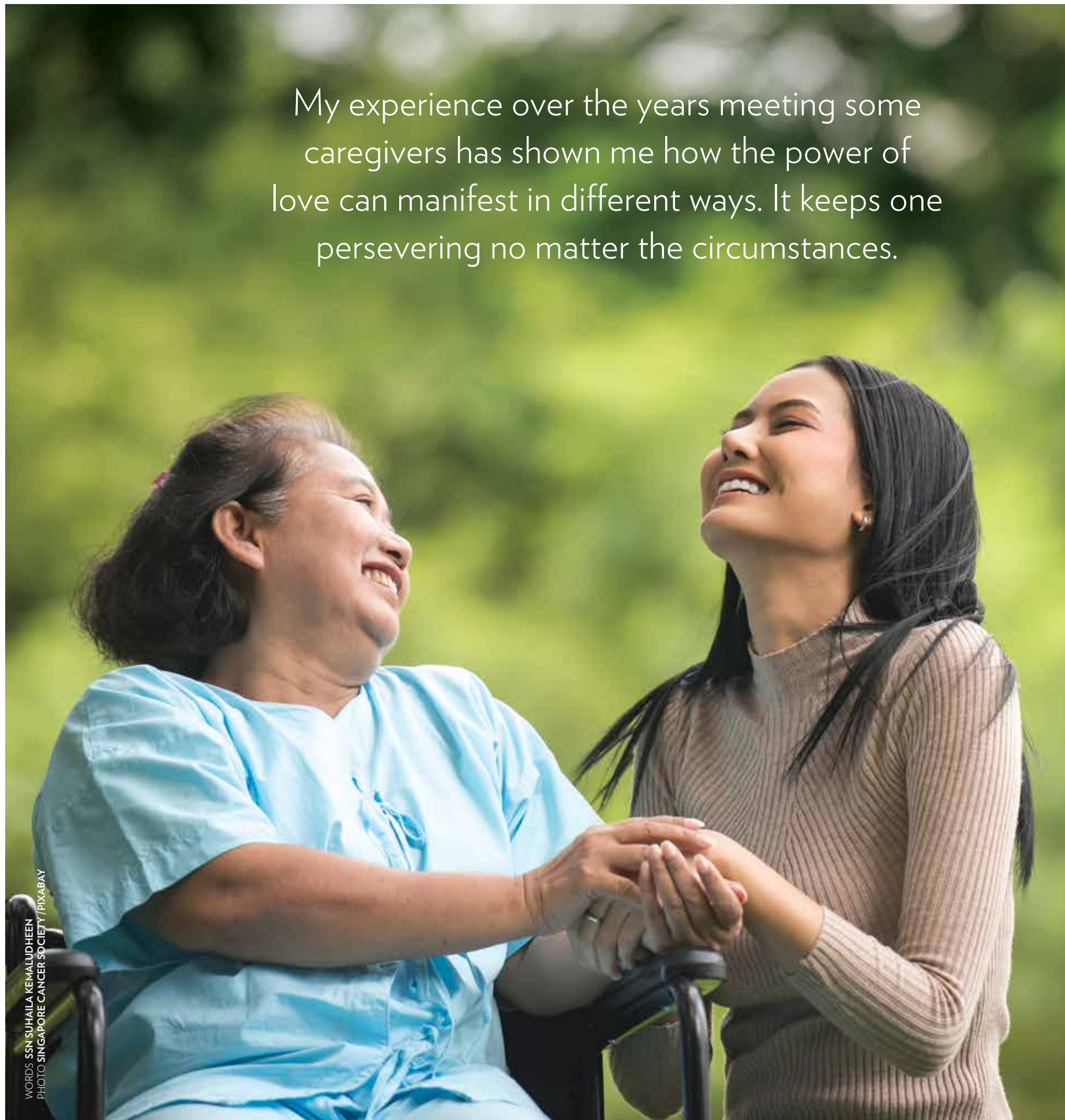
The SCS Hospice Care team facilitates online applications through the Agency for Integrated Care portal. For families who face financial concerns and are not able to engage a private nurse to relieve caregivers, they can tap on the SCS Living Well Fund that helps needy families in providing end-of-life care. SCS' medical social workers will identify cases that are eligible for the Living Well Fund, and apply for other financial aids to assist family members.

Caregivers who lack family support may engage a home personal caregiver or home-based respite caregivers. This service relieves caregivers for anywhere from one hour to 10 hours a day.

Support from the family and peers are even more important for a caregiver. The responsibility that comes with caring for sick ones may pose limits to a caregiver's social life. Therefore it is also crucial for relatives, friends and even colleagues to offer help in times of need. Even a phone call from friends provides an outlet for caregivers to relieve their stress.

My experience over the years meeting some caregivers has shown me how the power of love can manifest in different ways. It keeps one persevering no matter the circumstances. That has been the motivation for me to continue in this role. What an unbelievable journey it has proven to be! 

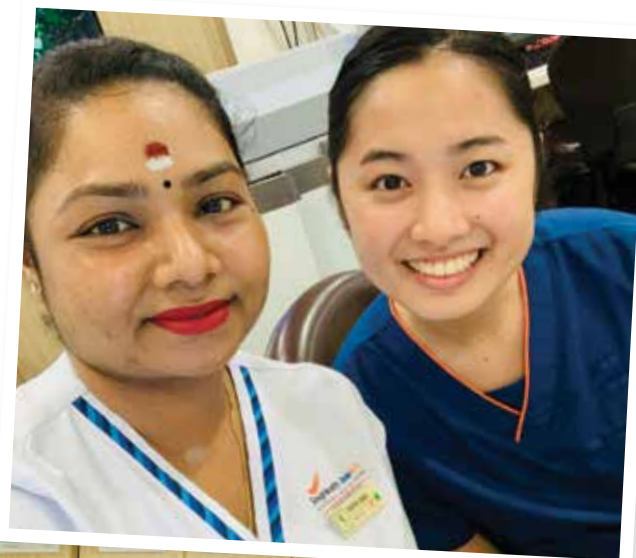
My experience over the years meeting some caregivers has shown me how the power of love can manifest in different ways. It keeps one persevering no matter the circumstances.



WORDS: SSN SUHAILA KEMALUDHEEN
PHOTO: SINGAPORE CANCER SOCIETY/PIXABAY

Trusting each other to care

Taking care of palliative patients can be a challenge for caregivers, but with the help of a trusted care team, the experience can be one filled with peace and dignity instead of being an ordeal.



“

I have learned that good communication skills can help to make the patients' journey easier and improves the rapport between nurses and families.”

(Photos taken before COVID-19): Senior Nurse Theviya with her palliative care team colleagues



PROVIDING FOR THEIR NEEDS

As a palliative nurse, Theviya provides holistic care for patients encompassing their psychosocial, physical, cultural and spiritual needs. Often, Theviya will work with caregivers in order to understand the patients' needs so that they can live comfortably during their last days.

“I have learned that good communication skills can help to make the patients' journey easier and improve the rapport between nurses and families,” shared Theviya. Theviya also advises the care team to engage with the caregivers in all planning of patients' daily activities.

Confidence also plays a part especially when managing caregivers who are facing a lot of stress in caring for their loved ones. “Being confident reassures caregivers that nurses are doing the best for our patients and makes them feel safe!” said Theviya. 🌟

“Oh, my daughters are here!” cried Madam C (not her real name), jovially. Sitting on her bed, she extended her arms to her children for an embrace. A long hug ensued between the four of them before they exchanged kisses on each other's cheeks.

It was only yesterday that Madam C saw her daughters, yet she has already missed them.

From a distance, Senior Staff Nurse Theviya Parama Sewai watched the heartwarming scene unfolding in the heart of the busy palliative ward at Sengkang Community Hospital (SKCH).

THE STRUGGLE

Their mother was everything to them and so were they to her. Their bond was beyond a mother-daughter relationship — she was their best friend whom they often confided in whenever they needed a listening ear.

When Madam C was admitted for palliative care due to breast cancer, everything changed. It was hard for the family to piece everything together after their mother's diagnosis. However, they continued to put up a strong front to care for their mother with the remaining time they had.

As dutiful daughters, they would visit their mother religiously and would return home at night to rest. Seeing their cheerful mother reminded them of the days when she was healthy. But little did they know that Madam C would be confused and agitated at times during the night because of her condition.

To help her with the pain, the care team had to prescribe medication which made her drowsy and less communicative during the day. This did not go down well with her family, who were apprehensive of this approach which would leave

them less quality time with their mother.

Despite the care team's explanation, Madam C's daughters — due to caregiver stress — refused to accept the reasons until her third daughter experienced it herself during one of the nights she stayed late.

She struggled to keep her mother calm and had to request for assistance from the nurses. With her daughter's permission, medication was given to Madam C so that she could rest.

“Through the experience, the care team once again communicated to Madam C's family on her condition and provided them with guidance

and training to allay their stress, and help them with decision-making for her needs,” said Theviya.

With each passing day, the rapport between Madam C's family and the care team became stronger. Madam C's family was also able to control her agitation and sometimes would spend time with the nurses listening to her stories.

But within six months, the stories sadly ended.

As bitter as it was, Madam C's daughters accepted the fact that their mother was gone and were happy that she passed away without much suffering.

WORDS & PHOTOS: THEVIYA PARAMA SEWAI, SENIOR NURSE, SENGKANG COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Come what may

Here are 10 tips to help caregivers carry on caring.

Pandemic or endemic, lockdown or restricted measures, caregivers do not really care. When you have had to confront scarier C-words from cancer and chronic illnesses to cognitive disability, COVID-19 is just another item on the list. For this agile and

tenacious group, the caregiving journey can be long and arduous or sudden and swift. Whichever route their journey takes, we can learn from their positive attitude — roll with the punches and say, “come what may”.

Yet even the most resilient can do with some reminders

and respite. With this in mind, Tsao Foundation counsellors and social workers would like to offer formal and informal caregivers to seniors some facts, tips and resources to tackle their next road bump in the caregiving journey:

- 1. You're not alone:** We've witnessed about 33% increase in seniors with poorer mental health in the last year. Assure seniors in your charge it is normal to be anxious during this period.
- 2. Don't let seniors feel lonely in a crowded room:** Some seniors living with their families have told us they are often forgotten in the hecticness of the new work-from-home and home-based learning arrangements. Else, they are reprimanded for being “problematic” when they wanted to go out.
- 3. Some care and companionship can go a long way:** When seniors exhibit anxiety, “I can't sleep; I don't have appetite”, do not brush them off but offer to accompany them to the family doctor or community clinic.
- 4. Remind them that they are resilient:** Remind or assure seniors they have survived tougher times and have it in them till today.
- 5. Use a common language of love:** When we connect through the seniors' preferred language — be it Mandarin, Malay, Tamil or
- 6. Go digital:** Digital content and communications flourished during this pandemic, and we urge more seniors as well as caregivers to embrace this new way of staying connected to community resources.
- 7. Sync mind, body and soul:** When the external environment is stressful, our bodies may have acclimatised but our emotions have not yet caught up. Being aware of this and giving it time will help.
- 8. Give phone counselling a try:** A warm voice can do wonders and be just as effective as face-to-face counselling during these trying times.
- 9. Lean in on your village:** Keep exchanging notes with your community partners to work through tough cases and share interventions.
- 10. Call counselling and coaching hotlines:** These helplines are just a call away. Call them for critical cases or if you need help.

dialect — they feel a sense of security and will confide in you more.

WORDS: RYP YONG, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, COMMUNITY RELATIONS, TSAO FOUNDATION

Leave no one behind

Singapore Hospice Council celebrates World Hospice and Palliative Care Day (WHPCD) by honouring the palliative care professionals.

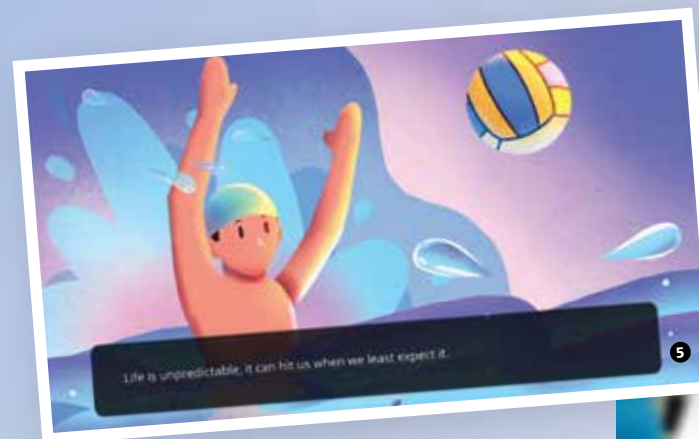
Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) collaborated with South West Community Development Council (SWCDC) to organise a 45-minute virtual concert on 9 October. Live-streamed on SHC's Facebook, it showcased SHC's community engagement and public education efforts within the South-West community and the seven palliative care service providers serving the residents.

The top five winners of SHC's first TikTok Dance Competition were also announced.

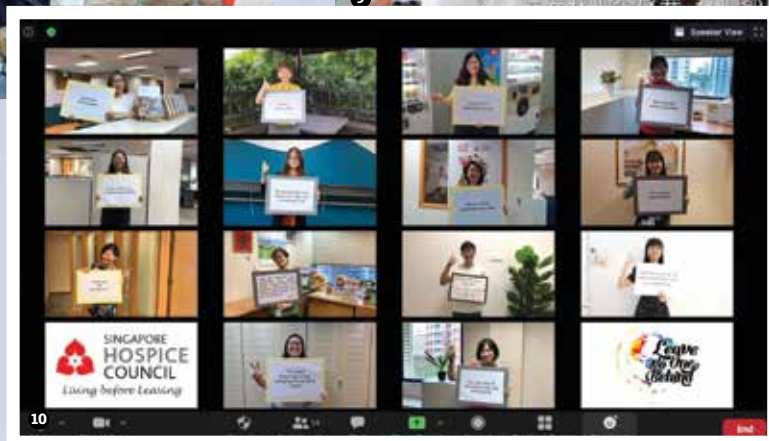
During the show, SHC's new online interactive role-playing game *The Living Game* was launched. The game aims to educate youths and young adults on palliative care and end-of-life care planning so that they can support those they love, to live well and eventually leave well. Play the game on game.singaporehospice.org.sg now! 🎮



- 1 Greetings from emcee Cheryl Yao, a volunteer with SHC ☺
- 2 SHC Vice Chairman Dr Chong Poh Heng welcomed everyone tuning in
- 3 Guest-of-Honour Mayor of South West District Ms Low Yen Ling, saluted all palliative care professionals and staff as well as caregivers for their commitment and dedication and thanked them for their contributions ♥
- 4 Dr Chong Poh Heng and Mayor Low Yen Ling launched SHC's first online game, *The Living Game*, with a high five!



5 A first look at Johan, the main character of the first episode of *The Living Game* ☺
6 SHC's community engagement efforts with SWCDC residents began in 2018. Today, there are seven SHC member organisations that actively provide hospice and palliative care in the district: HCA Hospice Care, MWS Home Care & Home Hospice, Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, St Joseph's Home, St Luke's Hospital, Singapore Cancer Society and Tzu Chi Foundation (Singapore).



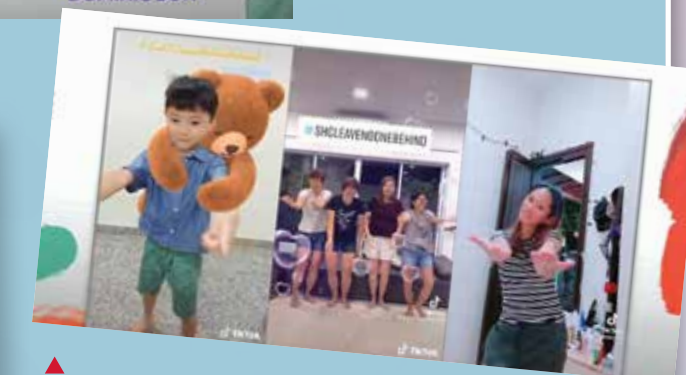
8 Daniel Ong, winner of SHC's 2019 Voices of My HeART Songwriting Competition, sang an original song specially written for WHPCD titled "Leave No One Behind"
9 Tan Yu Qing and Tan Yu Lin from the band TLQ and third-prize winner of SHC's 2019 Voices of My HeART Songwriting Competition sang their song "只要我们不放弃" (As Long As We Don't Give Up)
10 A big "thank you" from SHC staff and volunteers to all healthcare workers, caregivers, volunteers, donors, partners who have contributed greatly to the availability of palliative care! ❤️
11 Closing the event, the band TLQ sang their original song "Stronger Together" dedicated to all palliative care professionals

TikTok Competition

Congratulations to the top five winners of SHC's TikTok Competition!



THE JUDGES



▲ Kudos to the creative TikTok entries!

▲ Introducing the judges (from left): Secretary of the Healthy & Active Lifestyle Functional Committee, SWCDC Mr. Walter Lee, Dr. Chong Poh Heng and SHC Chief Executive Ms. Evelyn Leong

SHC Resources For Caregivers

Singapore Hospice Council is committed to supporting and empowering caregivers.



Looking after patients with life-threatening illnesses can take a toll on caregivers. To better support caregivers, the Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) has developed resource booklets titled *Caring for Yourself After a Death*, *Nutrition in Advanced Illnesses* and *Understanding the Final Hours*. These are available in four languages – English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil.

Caregivers may also consider inpatient hospice care to better suit their loved ones' needs. To allow caregivers to make more informed choices, an information sheet on inpatient hospice service providers in Singapore is available in English.

There may be times when caregivers are required to administer medication for their patients. For easy reference, caregivers can refer to step-by-step infographics on administering rectal enema and subcutaneous injection, applying transdermal fentanyl patch and giving suppositories. These are available in seven languages – English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, Burmese, Indonesian and Tagalog.

These resources are free to download and can be shared with your loved ones and community. For more information, visit <https://singaporehospice.org.sg/caregiver>

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Upcoming Event

**NOVEMBER -
DECEMBER 2021**
**SACH Palliative Care
Fundraising Run 2021**

Palliative Care Team
member of the
St. Andrew's
Community Hospital
(SACH) Palliative Ward Justin Tan
leads this fundraising initiative in
support of SACH Palliative Work.
Join them on this 1,000km
Journey of Love by scanning
the QR code and contributing
towards the cause.

Contact: laykoon_peh@sach.org.sg



JANUARY - MARCH 2022
**SHC "Live Well. Leave Well." Professional Series
@ The Public Libraries**

Date: 24 January, 28 February, 28 March

Venue: Online via Zoom

This series will be held monthly till December 2022.
Stay tuned for more details! Visit singaporehospice.org.sg
for the latest updates.