



THE

HOSPICE

LINK

DECEMBER 2022 – FEBRUARY 2023 • MCI (P) 042/05/2022

**Repaying our
father's love**

**Shouldering the
burden of love**

**Nurturing
the young
caregiver**



SINGAPORE
HOSPICE
COUNCIL

Members' Contacts

Alexandra Hospital
378 Alexandra Road, S(159964)
T: 6908 2222 F: 6379 4339
www.ah.com.sg
contactus@nuhs.edu.sg

Assisi Hospice
832 Thomson Road, S(574627)
T: 6832 2650 F: 6253 5312
www.assisihospice.org.sg
assisi@assisihospice.org.sg

**Buddhist Compassion Relief
Tzu Chi Foundation (Singapore)**
9 Elias Road, S(519937)
T: 6582 9958 F: 6582 9952
www.tzuchi.org.sg/en

Changi General Hospital
2 Simei Street 3, S(529889)
T: 6788 8833 F: 6788 0933
www.cgh.com.sg

Dover Park Hospice
10 Jalan Tan Tock Seng, S(308436)
T: 6500 7272 F: 6258 9007
www.doverpark.org.sg
info@doverpark.org.sg

HCA Hospice Limited
705 Serangoon Road, Block A #03-01
@Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital, S(328127)
T: 6251 2561 F: 6291 1076
www.hca.org.sg
contactus@hcahospicecare.org.sg

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital
90 Yishun Central, S(768828)
T: 6555 8000 F: 6602 3700
www.ktph.com.sg

**KK Women's and
Children's Hospital**
100 Bukit Timah Road, S(229899)
T: 6225 5554 F: 6293 7933
www.kkh.com.sg

Lien Centre for Palliative Care
Duke-NUS
Medical School Singapore
8 College Road
Level 4, S(169857)
T: 6601 2034 / 6601 7424 [Education]
T: 6601 5113 [Research]
www.duke-nus.edu.sg/lcpc

Metta Hospice Care
32 Simei Street 1,
Metta Building, S(529950)
T: 6580 4695 F: 6787 7542
www.metta.org.sg
hhospice@metta.org.sg

MWS Home Care & Home Hospice
2 Kallang Avenue,
CT Hub #08-14, S(339407)
T: 6435 0270 F: 6435 0274
www.mws.sg/centre-location/
mws-home-care-home-hospice/
MWShh@mws.sg

**National Cancer
Centre Singapore**
11 Hospital Crescent, S(169610)
T: 6436 8000 F: 6225 6283
www.nccs.com.sg

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital
1 Jurong East Street 21, S(609606)
T: 6908 2222 F: 6716 5500
www.ntfgh.com.sg
contactus@nuhs.edu.sg

**The Palliative Care Centre
for Excellence in Research
and Education (PaIC)**
PaIC c/o Dover Park Hospice
10 Jalan Tan Tock Seng, S(308436)
T: 6500 7269
www.palc.org.sg
enquiries@palc.org.sg

Ren Ci Hospital
71 Irrawaddy Road, S(329562)
T: 6385 0288 F: 6358 0900
www.renci.org.sg
renci@renci.org.sg

Sengkang General Hospital
110 Sengkang East Way, S(544886)
T: 6930 6000
www.skh.com.sg

Singapore Cancer Society
Temporary HQ: 48 Pandan Road, L4M,
PTC Logistics Hub, S(609289)
T: 1800 727 3333
www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg
hospice@singaporecancersociety.org.sg

Singapore General Hospital
Department of Internal Medicine,
The Academia, Level 4,
20 College Road, S(169856)
T: 6222 3322
www.sgh.com.sg
sghfeedback@sgh.com.sg

**SingHealth Community Hospitals
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Outram Community Hospital,
Sengkang Community Hospital)**
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www.singhealth.com.sg/SCH

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T: 6586 1000
www.sach.org.sg
general@sach.org.sg

St Joseph's Home
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T: 6268 0482 F: 6268 4787
www.stjh.org.sg
general@stjh.org.sg

St Luke's Hospital
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T: 6563 2281 F: 6561 8205
www.slh.org.sg
referral@stluke.org.sg

Tan Tock Seng Hospital
11 Jalan Tan Tock Seng, S(308433)
T: 6256 6011
www.ttsh.com.sg

Tsao Foundation
298 Tiong Bahru Road
Central Plaza, #15-01/06, S(168730)
T: 6593 9500 F: 6593 9505
www.tsaofoundation.org
info@tsaofoundation.org

Woodlands Health Campus
9 Maxwell Road,
MND Complex Annex A,
#03-01A, S(069112)
T: 6681 5999
www.whc.sg

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I remembered her resilience and fun-loving nature: her fight to breathe with a weak heart, her knock-out win against cancer, her ultimate delight with sumptuous food, her sportiness and sense of fun. We learned to say 'I love you' aloud, kissing with dramatic 'muacks', fun banter and hugs that many would say are so 'un-Asian'.

Caring for a loved one, especially when we know that time is precious yet limited, is a journey of love. Reading both Venus (page 4) and Sharine's (page 8) journeys as young caregivers brought back memories of my own experiences as I helped care for my parents. I was the 'night shift' and weekend caregiver. My shift started at about 10pm and ended just past 2am on good days, but more often, only as dawn breaks when my siblings took over. My parents were blessed with strong family support, and I did not have to make the hard choice of career or care.

I remember today the moments of making butter sugar toast and egg-white omelettes for my father, discussing how his obituary should be read, his wishes for his last rites, watching television together and just being present, all in the quiet hours of the night. After my father passed, my siblings and I concentrated our care on my mother. She gave us several scares in her last few years, but I remembered her resilience and fun-loving nature: her fight to breathe with a weak heart, her knock-out win against cancer, her ultimate delight with sumptuous food, her sportiness and sense of fun. We learned to say 'I love you' aloud, kissing with dramatic 'muacks', fun banter and hugs that many would say are so 'un-Asian'.

Being a caregiver is a privileged journey of love, care and fond memories, albeit physically and emotionally taxing. It is a journey of discovery of our loved ones and ourselves; and the last chance to do all the things we have always put aside for tomorrow. I hope this issue of *Hospice Link* on the journeys of young caregivers offers new perspectives on how we can value caregiving duties against the pain, stress and sacrifices.

Sim Bee Hia
Executive Director
Singapore Hospice Council

Easing the caregiving load

When 28-year-old Venus Lim quit her job to care for her 61-year-old mother, Madam Theresa Lim, she faced many challenges as an only child and sole breadwinner. Assisi Hospice was able to provide practical and emotional support that helped ease her burden.

Madam Theresa Lim was sold to her adoptive parents when she was eight years old. She did not have the chance to go to school and received frequent canings. Having had an unhappy childhood, she chose to raise her daughter, Venus, single-handedly after discovering that her partner had been unfaithful. She worked as a night-shift waitress so as to take care of Venus during the day. When Venus was older, she worked 12-hour shifts in a bakery. Eventually, she managed to support Venus through polytechnic.

Just when Madam Lim thought she could have more time with Venus, she developed hearing difficulties in her right ear, and was diagnosed with nose cancer in 2020. Venus had been working for a few years after graduation and was being considered for a promotion. Initially, she took leave frequently to bring Madam Lim to the hospital for her radiotherapy, chemotherapy and other appointments. However, she tendered her resignation after three months into her caregiving journey. She said, “Even though my boss was understanding, I found it difficult to juggle both work and taking care of Mum.”

She stopped work for about a year and found a new job with more flexible working hours when Madam Lim seemed to be recovering. But after eight months into the new job, she resigned again when Madam Lim suffered a relapse. Caregiving became more challenging as Venus’ mother started having difficulties swallowing solid food and lost her appetite. She experienced impaired hearing and vision, facial pain and swelling, and was also prone to falls.

As a caregiver, Venus felt that one of the challenges was the amount of new information she had to absorb within a short time. She had to read up on Madam Lim’s illness and symptoms,

the different medications and their effects, to help better manage her mother’s symptoms. She even had to research alternative treatments that well-intentioned friends suggested, to debunk the myths and advise her mother accordingly.

Feeling immense emotional stress as the sole caregiver, Venus said, “Mum was very emotionally dependent on me after her diagnosis. She would talk to me about the pain she was in, which made me feel helpless.” There were also times when she would have liked to go out with her friends for a break, but she felt guilty about being away from her mother.

Madam Lim came under the care of Assisi Hospice’s Home Care Service in December 2021. The Care Team’s nurses and doctors visited her regularly, helping to manage her symptoms. Venus said, “When the nurse visited, she spent a lot of time talking to her. The nurse was very professional and could understand how she felt, and offered her solutions to ease her pain.”

Venus was especially thankful for Assisi Care Team’s 24/7 helpline. She said, “There was once Mum had a fall in the early hours of the morning and had a cut on her forehead. The Care Team provided clear directions over the phone, and I was able to care for her wound and did not have to rush to the A&E. There were also times when I could adjust her medication, with clear directions given by the Team, to ease her discomfort.”

Venus appreciated the emotional support provided to her mother by Assisi Hospice’s social workers. She was also grateful that they offered practical help by linking them to available financial aid for subsidised purchases of medical consumables and pointing her towards suitable grant applications.

By the end of May 2022, Madam Lim’s condition deteriorated and

“

I am grateful that I managed to spend all that time with Mum. I am grateful to the Care Team of Assisi Hospice. They were like friends to me, who shared my burden.”

Assisi Hospice Senior Medical Social Worker Angela Tan shared her experiences with young caregivers

What are some of the common challenges faced by young caregivers who are less than 30 years old?

At this phase in life, they are supposed to be economically and socially active, but the caregiving role may limit these engagements. Due to the caregiving tasks or medical appointments that they need to attend with the patients, they may only be able to work part-time. Social engagement will probably also be reduced due to the caregiving role. As a result, their social circle becomes smaller. They may also struggle with their identity as their current primary role is a caregiver.

How does the Care Team help to address these challenges?

The Care Team provides emotional support as the caregivers’ needs are often put aside as they deal with practical caregiving tasks. It is important to validate and affirm all that they have given, and allow space to vent their frustration and share their struggles. There may be mental struggles with guilt as they wonder if the care they have provided is good enough. Being present and communicating support and that they are not alone is essential.

The Team may also refer them to relevant caregivers’ support groups, for example, the dementia caregiver support group. The Team will assess and explore the expansion of their social support network as they progress on their caregiving journey.

she was admitted into Assisi Hospice inpatient ward, where she received 24/7 care and symptom management. Venus said, “When Mum was at home, she had frequent falls, and her pain was bad. Being in the hospice enabled her to receive the help that she needed immediately. She also enjoyed the interaction with the nurses, therapists, and social workers. I was able to continue with my online

studies.” Madam Lim passed away peacefully on 14 August 2022.

Venus said, “Throughout the caregiving journey, there were times when I felt sad about lost opportunities or did not feel appreciated. However, looking back now, I am grateful that I managed to spend all that time with Mum. I am grateful to the Care Team of Assisi Hospice. They were like friends to me, who shared my burden.”



WORDS & PHOTOS: ASSISI HOSPICE

Shouldering the burden of love

Young caregivers can be nurtured through living examples and being taught the values of caring for others.

In 2018, the Ministry of Health Singapore announced that the caregiving responsibility will grow by 2030 with the rising silver tsunami. There seems to be more young adults taking up the caregiver role for their older family members due to the old-age support ratio with smaller family units of married couples with fewer or no children. Based on research conducted by the Centre of Ageing Research and Education, the underlying philosophy of care in Singapore appears to be associated with the Asian philosophy of familism and filial piety which are values imparted to some young caregivers (Wong & Chan, 2020).

There are some young caregivers of patients under the care of the Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) Hospice Care Team who perceive life as a circle where the old took care of the young and it is hence their turn to take care of their elders.

The Team also hopes to nurture the younger generation on the value of caregiving for the elders. Nurturing the next generation of caregivers involves modelling values of care within the home through social networks. This includes involving the next generation to contribute to caring for people with illnesses in any meaningful way.

Madam Wahidah, a caregiver of her terminally ill mother, shared, "There is so much satisfaction to be chosen by my own mother to be her caregiver. She took care of us when we were young, and it is our turn to look after her now. My twelve-year-old daughter sees that I'm taking care of my mother every day. One day, I was surprised to see my daughter wheeling her grandmother to the doorstep to have some fresh air and she sat beside her to keep her company. It was a heartwarming sight." Madam Wahidah also shared that when her mother became increasingly unresponsive, her daughter helped as well. She shared, "When I was preparing food in the kitchen, my daughter accompanied her grandmother by her bedside while studying for her PSLE."



Lynn, who is in her 30s, took care of her terminally ill grandmother at home, and roped in her primary-school-aged daughters to help with tasks such as wiping her back and eating durian with her. She speaks openly to her daughters about caring for the older generation. This value of caring for elders which she learned from her grandmother, also influenced her to actively support others to care for their terminally ill loved ones. She shared, "My grandmother would have appreciated that the experience of taking care of her is shared with others as well." She has been sharing her caregiving experience with friends who are also caregivers.

WORDS & PHOTOS SCS HOSPICE CARE TEAM

Eighty-eight-year-old Madam Chang had received 'love letters' from her grandsons, Kai Xuan and Ding Xuan who are in their 30s, when she was in critical condition in April 2022. Madam Chang was touched, sharing that "the letters are written from the bottom of my grandsons' hearts and out of their deep love for me and my care for them". Kai Xuan, an IT professional, reflected that he felt the urgency to step up in his role as a "caregiver to my mother, my grandma's caregiver" when he realised that he could lose his beloved grandmother who had doted on him since birth. He had not written a Chinese essay since his teenage years. Together with his brother, they wrote Chinese letters titled "彩虹的约定" ("The Covenant of the Rainbow") and "雨过天晴" ("Clear Sky After The Rain") to express their appreciation and affection, and encourage Madam Chang to "have faith in God that we can be together, whether in this life or in heaven". For these young caregivers, it is an important duty to support their mother, who is the main caregiver, whom they have witnessed providing round-the-clock care to their grandmother. As grandchildren, they have an equally significant role to return the love and nurturing they received from their grandparent and render direct care and support to her too.

Madam Chang's main caregiver and daughter, Catherine, feels blessed by her two sons and believes that Madam Chang gives back to her by reciprocating with constant words of assurance, "Without you I could not have lived on in comfort." Catherine's takeaway is: "A caregiving journey may be filled with challenges, but you can do it with a relay team of caregivers and receive blessings of love in return especially with God as the leader of the team."

While every young caregiver may come from different backgrounds and have different caregiving experience, they have been conscious recipients of similar cultural and family values which have helped them in picking up the caregiving load with purpose and unconditional love. 🙏

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Opposite page: Madam Wahida's daughter helps with feeding Grandma, with love. This page from top: Ding Xuan and Kai Xuan's love letters to Grandmother; Lynn's children with their great-grandmother.





Opposite: Sharine and her elder sister spent a wonderful day at the seaside with their father for the last time

Repaying our father's love

Two young sisters find themselves having to care for their sole parent on his final journey.

It was a perfect day to be at the seaside. The weather was great, and the breeze was soothing for the two sisters and their ailing father. That day, they had fun spending quality time together taking photographs. It would be one of the last few photos they would have as a family.

It was the most memorable experience Sharine and her sister have while caring for their father.

BECOMING YOUNG CAREGIVERS

Their father was a man of few words but showed his love through actions by

working hard to bring up his two daughters as a single parent.

Being the sole breadwinner, he believed that with hard work comes great rewards. He was also there for them — always — as their confidant and a shoulder to cry on.

But that soon changed when he was diagnosed with stage three colon cancer in 2014, which progressed to stage four within the next six years.

Since then, Sharine and her sister have been shouldering the responsibility of caring for their father.

As young caregivers, it was a struggle for the two sisters. Juggling between their jobs and caring for their father was tough.

“

We are grateful that the care team at OCH provided a listening ear for us to pour out our feelings while caring for our father. I remember their reassuring advice following many tearful sessions.”

Every day, their father would need to take 20 pills throughout at almost two-hour intervals. The sisters relied on their phone alarms to remind them to dole out the medication.

Apart from this, their father had a percutaneous nephrostomy (PCN) catheter to drain his urine which needed proper wound care procedures before and after showering. Due to the constant use of surgical tape, the two sisters spent a lot of time cleaning his skin's surface.

As their father's illness progressed, his dexterity worsened to a point where he struggled even to feed himself and became dependent on the two sisters.

However, the two sisters persevered in caring for their father and ensured that they were there for him during his last stage of life — like he was for them when he was healthy.

And in early 2022, their father's condition deteriorated further, and he was admitted to the Outram Community Hospital (OCH) for palliative care.

The OCH palliative care team made sure the sisters were not alone in tending to the care needs of their father.

“We are grateful that the care team at OCH provided a listening ear for us to pour out our feelings while caring for our father. I remember their reassuring advice following many tearful sessions,” shared Sharine.


When faced with difficult situations, such as how to stop the bleeding when their father had a bad case of water swelling, the two sisters would turn to the care team for help.

“Their journey was tough, but it was their way to repay their father's love and sacrifices all these years. We are glad that we were there for them,” shared OCH Medical Social Worker Sandy Koh.

PROVIDING HELP FOR CAREGIVERS

Caring for a palliative patient can be stressful for caregivers. At times, this might mean they have to seek emotional and physical support.

Whether it is helping to prevent burnout or providing financial assistance, caring for caregivers is vital to ensure that both patient and caregiver are ready for the journey ahead.

“Apart from medical advice, the care team also encouraged Sharine and her sister to take care of themselves so that they will be able to continue caring for their father,” shared Sandy. 



WORDS OUTRAM COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
PHOTOS OUTRAM COMMUNITY HOSPITAL, FREEPIK

Keeping your chin up

A registered nurse recounts the mutual learning experience she had working with a pair of young caregivers.



Caregiving for a loved one who is approaching the end of life can be an intense and emotional experience. It takes a lot of strength and willpower to juggle one's life while providing full care and support to their loved ones. Even the most determined individual may find it challenging to cope with this uphill journey. They would inevitably have to deal with loss as a family caregiver, while learning to adjust after their loved ones' passing.

Our registered nurse, Bee Suan, has been asked many times why she wanted to work in hospice care and she would always answer with a beaming smile, "I adore my job here!"

She explained, "Working in a hospital won't give me the opportunity to know our patients and their families on a personal level." We could sense that she is fulfilling her dream, and caring for people is what she enjoys.

Each day for the past three and a half years that she has been with Metta Hospice Care, every home visit has been a new learning experience for Bee Suan. Finding out more about her patients' way of life helps her to provide better care options and support to them. "You get to understand their perceptions, likes

and dislikes, as well as small details we might miss when working in a hospital," she explained. "When your patients feel that you care about them, it genuinely warms their heart."

One case made a deep and lasting impression on her. In her first year with Metta Hospice Care, she was assigned a patient who had advanced cancer, and was staying with her elderly husband and her two adult daughters.

"Both sisters were around my age at that time and it was difficult to see two young women who left their jobs to become full-time caregivers for their mother," shared Bee Suan. She was determined to help them provide the best care and support to their mother. Caregiving duties for these two young caregivers who lack experience were a challenge at the beginning. Simple care interventions such as handling morphine can be quite overwhelming for inexperienced caregivers.

To overcome this, Bee Suan conducted caregiver-training sessions, teaching ways to recognise pain, determine the type of intervention for the patient, and wound care management. Seeing how eager and dedicated both caregivers were in picking up these skills makes her feel that the training and time spent was worthwhile. "They became excellent


caregivers after training hard for a few months," she said.

Over time, she forged an exceptional bond with them. "We discovered similar interests and common topics like learning foreign languages and K-pop, which created enjoyable conversations!" Bee Suan added enthusiastically. "They became more laid back, playing some K-pop music, and just relaxing when I visit for my nursing interventions. It makes me genuinely glad to watch them enjoy a well-deserved break."

Bee Suan admitted that these two young sisters also taught her much. "It is heartwarming to hear how the two young caregivers remained positive and strong throughout the whole journey," she said. "Through them, I've also learned about staying optimistic."

She added that we should always "keep our face towards the sunshine so that we will not see the shadow". As hospice nurses journey with the patients till the end of their lives, they are often put on a rollercoaster of emotions. Hence, it is important for nurses to maintain their composure for the sake of their personal life and well-being.

Bee Suan journeyed with this family until the end of the patient's life. One Tuesday morning, she was informed by one of the sisters that their mother has passed away peacefully. Sharing their grief, she is glad that both caregivers had remained strong throughout this difficult time.

Caregiver burnout is a real and serious issue, and she urges caregivers to speak up and seek assistance if necessary. "No one can go through everything alone," she said. Being a young caregiver who has to stop working and sacrifice personal time is extremely stressful. "Even though these two caregivers had it tough, they never gave up and always remained optimistic. I believe this act of love is really admirable." 

WORDS: METTA HOSPICE CARE IMAGE: FREEPIK



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Look out for more updates on our website and social media!

KEY DATES

**1 Dec 2022 -
1 Feb 2023**

Abstract Submission

3 Jan 2023

Early Bird Registration

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Opposite page and right: Youths aged 17-19 participating in a Restful Retreat interactive session; below: Co-founders of Restful Retreat (from left to right) Koh Shan Jun, Jason Koh Lin Pin, Arthur Lee Xiu Qi, Cheo Hao Min.

will provide relief, and improve patients and families' quality of life. People of my age group generally feel the same as they lack exposure to such issues. However, they are more open-minded and willing to learn.

Why do you think it is important to normalise conversations about death and end-of-life care plans?

Death is a natural process but one with great uncertainty. We strongly believe in being well-prepared for the uncertain future by normalising conversations about death and end-of-life care plans, but not trivialising them. This is important not only to the elderly, but also to the youths. One of the group's co-founders, Jason, shared this story about his uncle who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and was in palliative care. Although his children, who are between 18 and 20 years old, wanted to spend the last few days with him meaningfully, they did not know



how to strike a conversation with him and just accompanied him in his room in silence. This shows us the importance of normalising such topics even to the youths.

Can you share what Restful Retreat was set up to do and what do you hope to achieve?

The team's aim is to raise awareness of end-of-life issues and resources, such as grief support, palliative care, and hospices. Our

target audience for this initiative is youths, specifically those aged 17 to 19, who are in pre-university institutions such as junior college, polytechnic or the Institute of Technical Education. We hope to educate youths on the importance of palliative care and the resources available in our community for palliative care patients, caregivers, and even the bereaved.

Lin Pin shared his hospice volunteering experience with the rest of the team. We felt deeply about his experience and concerns, though we also did not then know what palliative care was. Though the journey to raise awareness about palliative care has been long and bumpy, our passion for the cause, and personal experiences for some, drove us to do more.

What do your family, friends and teachers think about your initiative?

Our peers, parents, and teachers fully support our work to educate and raise awareness of palliative care among the youth. Palliative and end-of-life care are topics that are barely talked about in Singapore, much less among the young. Educating youths on such vital issues is crucial as they will be the caregivers of tomorrow. 🙌

Starting with the young

Cheo Hao Min from Restful Retreat, a student-led group from Anglo Chinese School (Independent), shares their objectives to raise awareness among youths about palliative care and his reasons for not viewing death and dying as taboo topics.

Our team wanted to start by sharing one of the quotes that inspired all of us, which is from one of the participants in our programme: "Funerals are not a celebration of death, but rather a celebration of life". Our team felt that this quote represents the essence of treasuring our lives and knowing how to live a life we will not regret. Furthermore, celebrating life also enables us to think and reflect on our contributions.

Another quote that resonated with me is by the author of *Life in a Hospice: Reflections on Caring for the Dying*, Ann Richardson: "We cannot change the outcome, but

we can affect the journey". Life-threatening illnesses can occur to anybody and at any age. I believe striving to live a life with no regrets is paramount to living a good-quality life, so I always tell my friend: "the quality of your life depends on the quality of your experiences".

What is a dignified farewell to you?

A dignified farewell is one that gives people the care required, in addition to the final opportunity to enjoy their favourite things. The farewell should be one that is pre-planned beforehand by the deceased and not a version of what those around him think it should

be. It should be an occasion for the celebration of a life where the good they did is remembered.

What do you think of Singaporeans' attitudes towards death and dying matters?

Singaporeans are conservative regarding topics such as death and dying. Many think talking about such problems is taboo and try to procrastinate or avoid such conversations until on their deathbed. Many have misconceptions of palliative care, associating it with death, being bedridden, and a situation that you can never get out of. However, it is the stark opposite — such care

WORDS CHEO HAO MIN



Boosting community support

Singapore Hospice Council hopes new initiatives will allow patients, families and caregivers who could benefit from palliative care to be identified earlier



This page clockwise from left: (left-right) Ms Sim Bee Hia, Mr Henry Kwek and Mr Yip Hon Weng launching SHC Community Signposts initiative; visitors browsing free SHC booklets; String Art Wall polls visitors on their end-of-life views; Opposite page (left to right): Screening of SHC Life Films; participants at an art therapy workshop.



To mark World Hospice and Palliative Care Day (WHPCD) this year, Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) organised the “Live Well, Leave Well” Roadshow at Kebun Baru Community Club. SHC launched two initiatives at the event, “SHC Community Signposts” and “SHC Ambassador Programme”, which aim to increase awareness of palliative care in the community to support patients and families who could benefit from earlier palliative care.

Mr Henry Kwek and Mr Yip Hon Weng, Grassroots Advisers and MPs of Kebun Baru and Yio Chu Kang Single Member Constituencies (SMC), were present at the launch. The SMCs are the first with Community Signposts, allowing patients and families who could benefit from palliative care to be identified earlier.

The initiative will provide the SMCs with the necessary community support and access to palliative care resources and information. SHC resources such as brochures and self-help books will also be available at the Signposts. SHC aims to have a Community Signpost in every constituency in five years.

Mr Henry Kwek said, “During my house visits, I met with residents who could benefit from the new SHC Community Signpost initiative. We currently have 16 volunteers under this signposting initiative. We

hope to increase this number to 50 by the end of the year so that we can identify patients, families and caregivers earlier to benefit from this holistic, patient-centric care approach.”

Mr Yip said, “In the Yio Chu Kang SMC where I serve as the Grassroots Advisor, 30-40% of the residents are elderly seniors. It is thus important for more to be aware of palliative care. Having a Community Signpost will allow people to know how palliative care can help and where the resources are in the community.”

The SHC Ambassador Programme was also launched at the event. SHC aims to recruit 200 palliative care advocates annually from all walks of life as part of its community outreach efforts to promote and advance public understanding of hospice and palliative care. These ambassadors will lend their voices and start at least 2,000 conversations a year. Talking about death and dying removes the stigma and taboo surrounding them as it is the first step to normalising such conversations.

SHC Executive Director Ms Sim Bee Hia shared, “It is never too early to learn more about palliative care and be an advocate for it with family and friends. It is our duty and personal responsibility to be prepared for our departure, not just for ourselves but also for our loved ones.”

SHC data from FY2017 - 2020 showed that people who received specialist palliative care services did so very late on their illness journey. Ms Sim said, “The median time from referral to death ranged from 27 to 35 days for cancer diagnoses and 11 to 13 days for non-cancer diagnoses.”

She added, “Palliative care is most effective early in the course of the illness; it improves the quality of life of patients and families and reduces unnecessary hospitalisation.”

At SHC’s “Live Well. Leave Well.” Roadshow, a community outreach event to advance public understanding of palliative care and end-of-life matters, visitors participated in various reflective and hands-on activities designed to normalise conversations on end-of-life issues. Special workshops such as Art Therapy, Speech Therapy, and Nutrition Care also raised awareness of the multidisciplinary team approach to palliative care.

There were also interactive booth activities for visitors, including a String Art Wall to poll the participants on their views on end-of-life issues. Another booth invited visitors to tune into caregivers’ inner world, sharing audio recordings of their caregiving stories and a mini theatre screening of SHC’s Life Films — stories inspired by real-life events. 

In one voice


The Singapore Hospice Council presented a successful fundraising concert on World Hospice and Palliative Care Day.

A rousing evening filled with familiar tunes and heartfelt songs performed by Kit Chan, HaoFM deejays, as well as Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) volunteer and member performers as SHC held its first in-person fundraising event, the Voices For Hospices concert, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Graced by Speaker of Parliament, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin and attended by staff of SHC member organisations and supporters

of palliative care, the concert held at School of the Arts (SOTA) successfully raised \$500,000.

At the concert, Mr Tan shared why talking about death with loved ones is important, even if it is not easy. He said, "Healthcare expenditure increases dramatically in the last six to nine months of a person's life. With medical science, we can extend life, but whether the quality of life is the way it should be, perhaps not. All of us have to deal with these issues."

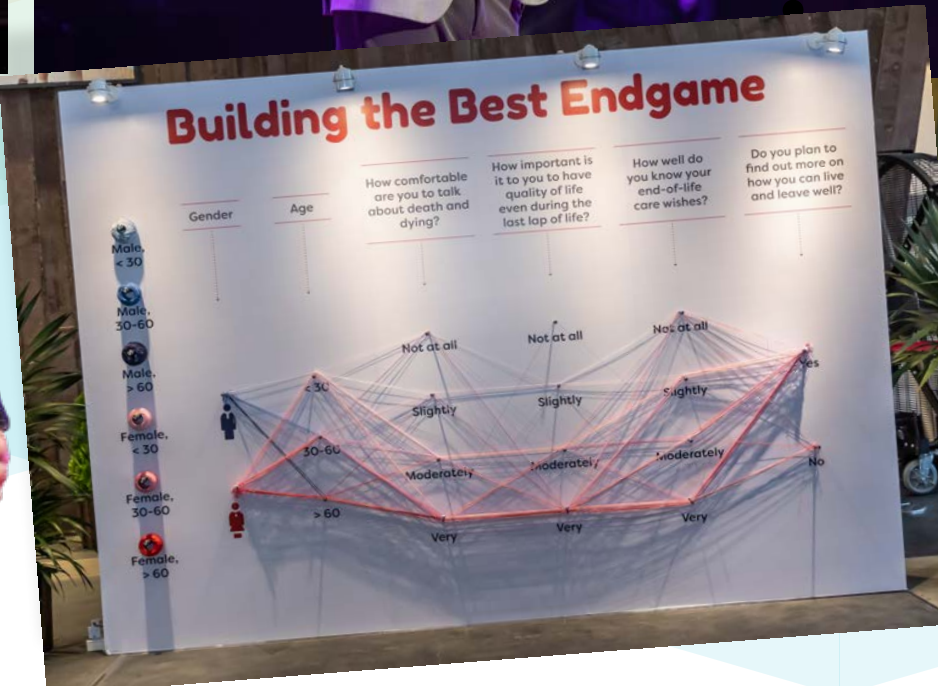
Held on World Hospice and Palliative Care Day, the event also paid tribute to the palliative care workers for their commitment and dedication to providing care to people in need.

Special thanks go to MYP Ltd, Xian Mi Du Mu Lin Buddhist Association, Neo Group Ltd, Sin Chew Woodpaq Pte Ltd, Yeoman Capital Management Pte Ltd, mm2 Asia Ltd, and SPH Media Ltd for their generous support in making the fundraising concert a resounding success. 

WORDS & PHOTOS SINGAPORE HOSPICE COUNCIL



- ① Dr Chee Chen Sin
- ② Deejay Jacky
- ③ HaoFM deejays
- ④ Performers with the band
- ⑤ Kit Chan
- ⑥ Dr Chong Poh Heng
- ⑦ Concert Audience
- ⑧ Hosts Anna Lim and Glenn Ong



“Caregiving where got such thing as fun?”



We know that caregiving can be stressful and tiring. But what if caregiving can also be... enjoyable?

During a search for caregiver-related articles online, one of the first results that popped up on my screen was: “Embracing the New Normal – Caregiver Stress”.

Yikes.

With a super-aged population on the horizon, our younger ones are poised to be new caregivers. How would they feel if they were looking at the same search results as I was? As a potential young caregiver myself, I could feel my heart drop a little and a tiny voice in my head saying, “Wah, *jialat*.”

Other search results, although not as gloomy, were also focused on the challenges and

stressors of caregiving for a sick loved one. With good reason, of course.

One would be ignorant to downplay the insurmountable responsibilities that caregivers shoulder every second of every day. The nature of caregiving is such that it demands not just physical effort but also mental diligence and emotional sustenance from its provider. Daily duties involve and are not limited to handling medical regimes, traversing the healthcare system and taking charge of other dependents, alongside providing psychological support to the patient throughout the illness trajectory. Caregivers must also manage a multitude of emotions and practical struggles as they

For too long, the caregiving journey has been depicted solely as an arduous mountain to climb; yet there are certainly beautiful and invigorating views to take in along the way.

navigate the changes, and sometimes losses, in their personal lives.

Narratives of such challenges throw light upon the day-to-day struggles of caregivers. They serve to strengthen the voices of advocacy for pro-caregiver policies, services and programs, so that governments, organisations and society can do their part in helping caregivers navigate their tremendous journeys with more ease.

However, to truly understand a phenomenon, it is important to explore all sides of the narrative.

When I casually mentioned to a friend that I would be writing about the enjoyable side of caregiving, he raised his eyebrows incredulously at me and uttered, “Caregiving leh! Where got such thing as *fun*?”

Numerous peer-reviewed studies on positive caregiving experiences would prove my disbelieving friend wrong. Researchers are now paying attention to not just the burdens, but the blessings of the caregiving journey. And these blessings are plentiful.

We often talk about ‘coping’ as a caregiver – pulling together enough physical and mental resources to survive yet another day. However, an increasing number of studies show that caregivers are not just surviving but *thriving*. They are feeling positive emotions like happiness, gratitude and pride, fostering healthy relationships with themselves and others, enjoying quality time with their loved one (the patient), discovering their creative and spiritual sides, picking up new hobbies, and attaining a sense of fulfilment — all amidst well-known stressors and challenges. There are even caregiver websites dedicated to humour, where caregivers share the most embarrassing or hair-pulling moments of their day, and everyone has a good chuckle because *‘been there, done that’*. Caregivers are living and re-telling their stories in ways that showcase their ability to flourish and laugh in the face of adversity.

Caregivers are having fun.

Recent research has considered how an individual’s attitude towards caregiving can have a key impact on how they perceive

stressors and challenges; caregivers who approach their roles with more optimism, calmness and purpose are thought to have more positive outcomes in their quality of life and wellbeing. This means that apart from providing practical and ‘coping-centred’ support like financial assistance and competency training, creating a culture of positive attitudes and perceptions towards caregiving can enhance caregiver experiences and outcomes.

The younger generation knows that they are the caregivers of tomorrow. Do we want them to receive these roles with a sense of trepidation, dread and entrapment in their hearts? Or do we want our young caregivers to inherit their roles with optimism, hope and purpose?

In our attempts to advocate for and help those struggling, we may have neglected the voices of those who are flourishing. These voices are just as important — they are living proof that there is light, joy and fun to be experienced on the caregiving journey — and we need to let them shine. For too long, the caregiving journey has been depicted solely as an arduous mountain to climb; yet there are certainly beautiful and invigorating views to take in along the way.

In learning more about caregivers’ positive experiences, we will not only find hope, but also understand how to help ourselves and others get there. We can and must shift from a culture of surviving to a culture of thriving and living well.

A caregiver’s journey often encompasses the last moments they have with their loved one. Beyond practical matters of care, there lies a sacredness and stark temporality to this journey. When mindful of this, the immensity of making this journey much more than just about ‘coping’ becomes apparent. The first step is to revitalise the caregiving story — that it is hard, but also enjoyable, meaningful and to many, a cherished privilege.

And perhaps, one day, in the near future, the natural response to this narrative would be: “Caregiving? *Of course got fun!*” 🌟

WORDS: GERALDINE TAN HO, SENIOR COUNSELLOR AND RESEARCH FELLOW, DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGY, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY
PHOTO: JCOMP ON FREEPIK



"I don't feel like eating" is a common remark made by our loved ones with life-limiting illness as they face symptoms such as poor appetite and difficulty swallowing, hence meal preparations can be quite challenging for caregivers. Chef Hoo Chee Wei from Metta Café shares these healthy and easy-to-prepare recipes.

Vegetarian Silky Tofu

Serves 2-3 persons

INGREDIENTS

300g tofu/beancurd (1 box), cut into pieces
20g carrot, cut into strips
40g black fungus
30g fresh mushroom, cut into pieces
40g capsicums (red and green), cut into strips

SEASONING

1 tsp vegetarian oyster sauce
1 tsp light soy sauce
½ tsp vegetable/mushroom stock powder
½ tsp dark soy sauce
cornflour solution (½ tsp cornflour + 1 tbsp water)
1 tbsp olive oil
80g water

1. Heat olive oil in a saucepan. Pan-fry tofu until golden. Set aside.
2. Add a little olive oil to pan if needed, stir-fry carrot and fresh mushrooms until aromatic. Add and stir-fry the rest of the ingredients.
3. Return tofu to pan and season with vegetarian oyster sauce, light soy sauce and vegetable stock powder. Stir in the cornflour solution and add dark soy sauce for colour. Serve.

"Pao Fan" (Poached Rice) with tomato and celery

Serves 2-3 persons

INGREDIENTS

2 cups steamed white rice (overnight is better)
30g tomatoes, diced
80g fresh mushrooms, diced
50g abalone mushrooms, diced
20g celery leaves
50g carrot, diced
50g celery, diced
60g crispy rice

SEASONING

2 tbsp tomato puree
½ tbsp vegetable stock
1 tsp olive oil
200g water
½ tsp salt, to taste

1. Heat olive oil in a saucepan. Stir-fry diced tomatoes until soft. Stir in diced carrots and mushrooms until aromatic. Add some water to cover all ingredients and cook until it boils. Add diced celery.
2. Add tomato puree and vegetable stock. Add salt to taste. Pour in white rice and cook for 2 more minutes.
3. Top with crispy rice and garnish with celery leaves. Serve.

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535 Kallang Bahru #03-09 GB Point, S (339351)
T: 6538 2231 • E: info@singaporehospice.org.sg
www.singaporehospice.org.sg



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