

# THE HOSPICE LINK

JUNE – AUGUST 2021 • MCI (P) 003/10/2020

**Better and better,  
day by day**

**The final wish**

**Who are you  
caring for?**

**The good  
goodbye**



SINGAPORE  
**HOSPICE**  
COUNCIL

PLUS  
**SHC's Silver  
Jubilee**

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In our hectic everyday life, we are often so busy on-the-go that we do not take the time to slow down and think about what it really means to depart this life. Saying "goodbye" seems like a subjective experience as we know that we could easily move on to the next task.

However, saying farewell to your loved ones will become an important signal when it is at the ending point in the life journey together. This mindful goodbye becomes the hardest thing to say to someone who means the world to you, especially when we struggle just thinking about losing our loved one.

It may be easier if we use the conversation cue cards or metaphor phrases to share the last words to make it less uncomfortable and heavy-hearted. We should tell or write to our loved ones about:

- reconciliation
- forgiveness
- love
- appreciation
- honour

We can try to plan ahead and understand that every individual is unique and has different needs or ways to express their wishes. It is an important process and many will find comfort in having their voices heard and eventually find closure.

## Tips for face-to-face, calls or written communication:

**1 Start off by focusing on the sweet memories and expressing gratitude**

**2 Express your emotions openly, seek forgiveness and not be too formal with goodbyes**

**3 Offer reassurance that you appreciate the times together**

**4 Remind your loved one of the many joyful times you've shared together that will always be treasured**

Ms Evelyn Leong  
Chief Executive  
Singapore Hospice Council



“

What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.”

HELEN KELLER

# On your own terms

*In using the dignity model of palliative care, Singapore Cancer Society enables patients to have closure.*

**P**reserving one's dignity in satisfying a person's end-of-life care needs is often associated with describing a 'good death'. Dignity care at Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) focuses on maintaining one's dignity in three broad domains relating to illness-related concerns, psycho-spiritual wellbeing, and social needs. This approach is also known as the dignity model of palliative care (Chochinov, 2002). Addressing this spectrum of needs enables patients to make more informed choices, have better symptom management and offer opportunities for working on personal dignity-preserving matters for a good closure.

SCS adopts the dignity model approach in helping terminally ill patients to receive care beyond symptom control. These are stories of how SCS supports their patients and families to maintain their sense of dignity in a variety of ways.

Seventy-year-old Mr Zainal was diagnosed with terminal cancer a month before his 90-year-old mother was diagnosed with cancer. They were both referred to SCS Hospice Care Services. Mr Zainal's mother had a wish to maintain her sense of autonomy and preferred to pass away at home with her son and grandchildren by her side. Mr Zainal wanted to continue his role as a son to his dying mother and requested for symptom control. Mr Zainal also wished to pass on at home.

SCS Hospice Care Services provided three months of intensive care and support for both patients and their family to achieve two 'good goodbyes' for the family. Mr Zainal's daughter, Haslina, was awarded the Singapore Health Inspirational Caregiver Award 2021 for her courage and resilient spirit in working with SCS to look after her father and grandmother concurrently at home, and for demonstrating filial piety in honouring their wishes and dignity till the end. In her letter of appreciation to SCS, she wrote: "Looking back, I've never realised that I had fulfilled the wishes of my dear ones...



I could have never completed it alone... It's the beautiful kind souls that speak and these souls are within the SCS team. My family and I could never thank these God-sent angels enough. They journeyed with us till the end".

For some, leaving a legacy for the living is important in preserving personal dignity. This may come in the form of a family photo album, video, personal memoir, letter, or journal. For Mr T, connecting to his daughter was very important. However, Mr T's daughter was not emotionally ready to talk about his disease and hear his final words to her. As Mr T had wished to have closure with his daughter before his demise, a SCS social worker facilitated a letter-writing activity

WORDS: VIVIAN KOO, FLORINA WONG  
PHOTOS: SINGAPORE CANCER SOCIETY

SCS adopts the dignity model approach in helping terminally ill patients to receive care beyond symptom control.

To enhance the patient's sense of dignity, SCS also checks for any final wishes the team can help to fulfil. SCS Living Well Fund supports end-of-life patients who have financial challenges. SCS also partners with Ambulance Wish Singapore, an independent charity organisation that helps to actualise final requests from terminally ill patients. More than 20 patient wishes were fulfilled in the last 12 months. Patients and their families have given feedback that the act of wish-granting provided a positive end-of-life experience. Our patients have also expressed a sense of contentment and closure.

In conclusion, the dignity model is how we can make our end-of-life patients feel valued, thereby bolstering patients' dignity in dying to bid their loved ones a good goodbye. 🙏

Left: Mr Zainal and his wife resting at home;  
Below: Haslina attending to her father's medical needs



# Better late than never

*St Luke's Hospital's chaplain, Esther Goh, reflects on making a final farewell without regrets.*

When people learn that they are only left with a few months or even weeks to live, they may inadvertently face overwhelming feelings, not knowing what to do. With the clock ticking, it may be advisable to draft a to-do list when the emotions settle. One of these things may be to look back on life and see if there are any regrets one would like to address before leaving.

In this article, I recall the story of Linda (not her real name), 54, who had end-stage breast cancer. She found closure by finding the courage to resolve misunderstandings with her loved ones, and also regained meaning and purpose by reconnecting with her faith before the end-of-life.

It was Mother's Day at the palliative ward. Linda's son made her a Mothers' Day card, the first one she had received in years. In it,

he penned his love for her. Tears welled in Linda's eyes.

The reconciliation could have come earlier, but it was better late than never. The simple card provided closure for both mother and son.

Linda had a divorce and both her children were in their father's custody. The circumstances during that phase of her life were complicated, causing many misunderstandings and much pain. Despite loving her children deeply, the traditional Asian mother did not know how to put her love into words. As a result, their relationship was strained over time.

Lying on her bed in the palliative ward, Linda often thought about how she could have handled the separation better. She wished she had done more to protect her children from the emotional trauma and feelings of loss, abandonment and anger.

Linda found closure by finding the courage to resolve misunderstandings with her loved ones, and also regained meaning and purpose by reconnecting with her faith before the end-of-life.

After speaking to the chaplaincy team, Linda was encouraged to have a heart-to-heart talk with her son.

On one of her son's visits, she took the courage to start a conversation. Breaking the silence, they reminisced about their happier times together. The connection was bridged. At the opportune moment, Linda took a leap of faith and initiated the open and honest conversation that was long overdue.

The air was cleared. Linda reassured her son that despite all the challenges they have faced, she has and will always love him unconditionally and irrevocably. She wished she had more time to make up for the lost opportunities over the years, and will always cherish their memories together.

One month later, she passed on.

In her last days, Linda made cards for her children and even knitted a pair of booties and bonnet for her future grandson. These gifts of love will give her loved ones something to remember her by.

During her time at St Luke's Hospital, Linda also regained meaning and purpose by reconnecting with her faith. A Catholic by marriage, Linda had no strong biblical foundations and fell away from her faith after the divorce. With the help of the chaplaincy team, she strengthened her spiritual faith and found the inner peace she yearned for.

It was a good goodbye. 🙏



## To "Live Well. Leave Well."

I believe that reconciled relationships are important for both the leaving and the living. For the leaving, it gives them a sense of peace and harmony and enables them to leave peacefully. Likewise, the bereaved will also experience inner peace and prevent any regret and guilt if they missed their final opportunity to make good. Restored relationships allow for mutual support, enabling the dying to feel loved, and leaving precious memories for the bereaved.

Sometimes, all patients need is a little help. They may lack the courage to take the first step because they fear rejection. They may also be feeling overwhelmed as they experience an onslaught of complex emotions such as sadness, anxiety and loneliness as they near the final phase of life.

As chaplains, we care about the spiritual and emotional well-being of our patients and their families. We can step in as a friend to better understand the misunderstanding that caused the strained relationship. We can provide an objective perspective and help both parties to connect in an open and honest conversation.

In my experience, patients who have made the conscious decision to make good and resolve misunderstandings were able to embrace their death, and find peace with the inevitability of it.

It is a consolation to see a troubled face evolve into one that exudes peace.

### How to broach the topic?

Below are some ways to approach the situation if you have an unresolved situation with someone who is terminally ill:

- Start with a simple greeting
- Make conversations about the things you have always talked about together in the past
- Have a heart-to-heart talk when the moment feels right
- Touch can be a powerful tool — holding their hands or giving a simple hug can sometimes be more powerful than words



St Luke's Hospital chaplain Esther Goh helps patients to reconcile relationships and untie their spiritual knots

WORDS: ESTHER GOH, CHAPLAIN, ST LUKE'S HOSPITAL  
PHOTOS: ESTHER GOH, CHAPLAIN, ST LUKE'S HOSPITAL & UNSPLASH

# My hospice, my home

*It's possible to find fulfilment of one's final wish in the most unexpected of places. Dover Park Hospice Medical Social Worker Clara Kong shares how it was possible for one of her patients.*

I first met Mr Leong Siew Khai when he was admitted to Dover Park Hospice with stage 4 lung cancer on 4 November 2020. Mr Leong was a single Chinese man in his 50s who had lived alone in a rental flat for two years. His parents had passed on and he had not been in contact with his siblings for years.

As a last resort, Mr Leong chose to be admitted to our hospice, even though he perceived hospices as gloomy places. He had no other alternatives in receiving medical care, as he did not have a caregiver.

Mr Leong was a rather quiet and reserved man. Initially, it was extremely arduous for the care team to approach him as he was very guarded, refused to speak to the staff and would rather we speak to his close friend regarding his care plan instead. He had a mind of his own and would often be short-tempered due to the frustrations and discomfort brought on by his condition.

The team decided to approach Mr Leong at a pace that he was comfortable with, conversing with him regularly to explore how he was settling in at the hospice. We encountered numerous setbacks but the team persisted and gradually we noticed changes in him. He stopped chasing us away and began to open up to us slowly, sharing his interests and life stories with us. We learnt that Mr Leong was a devout Buddhist who enjoyed mobile games and, more importantly, someone who really treasured his relationships with the people around him.

On one occasion, I saw an opportunity to broach the topic of family with Mr Leong and noticed tears welling up in his eyes. He felt that he had no 'family' as he had nowhere to go, and



his wish was to belong here. As much as he was grateful to his friends who visited often, his friends had their families to go home to. Unlike them, he did not belong anywhere. He felt empty and lost.

A few days after that conversation, we organised a Deepavali celebration for our patients and the team was pleasantly surprised! The once-cautious Mr Leong was fervently dancing to the music and even improvised the dance moves. The uplifting music and vibrant atmosphere had reminded him of his younger days at the discos and it was the first time we had seen him with such a radiant smile. As the team danced along with Mr Leong, he beamed and was choked with tears. In his own words, he was deeply moved and felt a sense of belonging for the first time in his life as he had always yearned for a family. He kept iterating to us that we were his 'jia' (family in Mandarin) and requested for photographs to be taken with the clinical team who cared for him, so that he could fondly cherish all the memories he had with the team. Mr Leong had also requested that I share these photographs on our social media platforms and to convey to all the non-Mandarin speaking staff that 'jia' in Mandarin meant 'family'. His intention was to let every member of the team know what they mean

to him, and that he deeply treasured the bonds he had forged with them. Each time his friends visited, he would always proudly show them the photographs and referred to us as his family.

Mr Leong's wish at his end of life was simple — he wanted to be part of the Dover Park Hospice family, a 'jia' that he had unexpectedly found at the darkest moments of his days. He told me that he wanted all his treasured memories with the team to be shared, since this was one of the most joyous times in his life. He wanted to let the world know that he had finally found a sense of belonging for the first time in his life and was part of a family — the Dover Park family. It was an extremely emotional moment for the care team as well and we fought back tears at Mr Leong's words, remembering his initial hostility, his eventual acceptance and finding a sense of familial belonging with the team.

Three weeks after Mr Leong was admitted to the hospice, he passed away peacefully at his newfound 'home' surrounded by his cherished 'family'. We were thankful that Mr Leong managed to fulfil his last and biggest wish, which we were deeply honoured to be a part of. Thank you, Mr Leong, for allowing us to be your 'jia'. 🙏

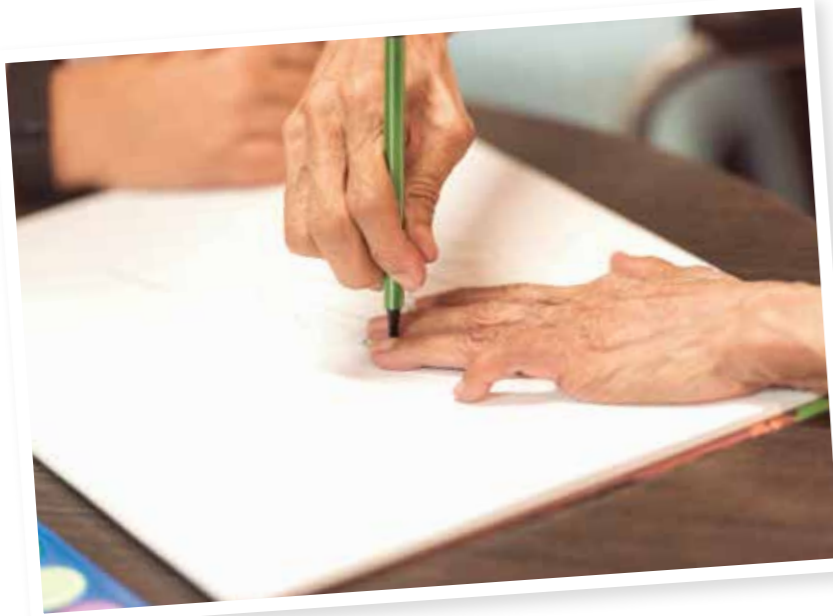


Mr Leong celebrated Deepavali with his Dover Park Hospice family with much gusto

WORDS MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKER CLARA KONG, DOVER PARK HOSPICE  
PHOTOS DOVER PARK HOSPICE

# Who are you caring for?

*Two care workers share their views on what is truly important when it comes to a good goodbye.*



**R**esidents arrive in a nursing home and hospice with a prognosis. With this in mind, care staff strive to meet residents where they are, to empathise and provide comfort care.

However, when faced with our residents' deaths, care staff are also challenged with our own thoughts and feelings about it.

What happens when we are at a different pace or have a different perspective as residents? How does that affect our care and our own lives?

## DIFFERENT PACE

Mak Lian had a lively spirit but she was non-verbal. Most days, the nurses heard nothing more than a grunt or an occasional shriek from her. She also had the habit of sporadically reaching out to grab and pull others. Nurses who assisted her at meal times needed to be alert to such behaviour.

One nursing staff, Valerie, was responsible for tending to her during meal times. Each bite took time and

Valerie would wait until Mak Lian had swallowed her food. During lull moments, Valerie would come by Mak Lian's side to smoothen her clothing and gently pat her hands.

Over the years, Mak Lian and Valerie developed a special bond. Mak Lian would eat more when Valerie was with her. Mak Lian would also keep snacks for Valerie.

This special connection was abruptly shaken when Mak Lian's condition rapidly deteriorated. Mak Lian passed away the weekend that Valerie was not working.

Valerie could not accept that Mak Lian was gone. During one of her daily duties, she was asked, "I know you took care of Mak Lian while she was around. How are you feeling?" Right there and then, she started sobbing. She steadied herself against the wall and muttered, "So fast. So fast."

As care workers, we might not expect residents to go quite so quickly. Seeing them day in day out, we might get the unrealistic expectation that they will be here every day. Or in their final moments,

we hesitate to leave their bedside. In providing care while protecting self-care, should we pace ourselves against a resident's prognosis or simply do our best during our work shifts?

## DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Tim's children would not describe him as a good father. He left his wife and three children when they were at a tender age. Most days, he gambled. After his admission to the home, his outpatient consults became opportunities to purchase a 4D or TOTO ticket.

Rose, our pastoral care staff, befriended him from his first day. They would talk about lucky numbers, his roommates and on occasion, the pain he was feeling. He never spoke about his family. Throughout his time in the home, only his youngest daughter visited him.

One quiet afternoon, Rose asked him, "How do you feel about leaving your family?" Softly but with certainty, he replied, "I let my wife down." She then shared with him that in the final moments, the "四道: 道謝、道愛、道歉、道別" (Translated to mean: Thank you, I love you, I am sorry and goodbye) were difficult but important conversations to have. Since his wife never visited him, he decided to write her a letter.

Defly, Rose pulled a clean napkin from her pocket. She did not have fancy paper or multicoloured pens. With the clean napkin and the nearest ballpoint pen she could find, she wrote down his message: "I am sorry for letting you down. Please forgive me. I love you."

Tim folded this recycled napkin, with his precious message, and tucked it in his shirt pocket. For the next few weeks, it remained unread, but the care staff could see his relaxed demeanour.

In his final days, the social workers invited his family over. When his wife arrived, he pulled the napkin out and passed it to her. Some quiet moments passed while she read his note. Simple, genuine and beautiful. Eyes swelling, she responded, "I forgive you."

Rose explained, "The material is not important. You can use fancy paper or a napkin. What's important is how the resident and the family are feeling." As care workers, we sometimes stress about giving the best to residents without checking what is best for our residents. Does the best come from the logistics or from tending the heart of our residents?

## DIFFERENT POSTURE

The window between the first signs of dying and the time of death can range from minutes to weeks. Rose, in her 10 years of experience as a pastoral care worker, has


encountered residents without next-of-kin leave peacefully within minutes. She has also witnessed residents, who having seen their children graduate, struggle to accept that they have reached the end.

She describes this time between the first signs of dying and the time of death to be the sacred encounter between self and God. It is unknown to care workers and not intended for us to get stress over and around. When Rose is called to the bedside of dying residents, she would give them a gentle touch and, with a warm voice, assure them that they are not alone. When the day's work is done, she passes the baton to the next care worker on duty.

Working in a hospice, where death is often at the forefront, it might seem like you need to work around the time of death. But the final moments are uncertain

*Below: The fresh perspective needed at the end; Opposite page: Keeping the patients' pace in mind*

and out of the residents and our control.

If we accept that we're not masters of death, but students of it, then this new posture might shift the way we perceive and pace ourselves around residents. It can help us navigate our own uncertainties and provide the care that residents really need. As leaders of nursing homes and hospices, timely debriefs or having a professional counselor can also ensure that care staff receive sufficient support. 

*Names have been changed to protect confidentiality*




WORDS: SHEREEN NG, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP & COMMUNICATIONS, ST. JOSEPH'S HOME PHOTOS: ST. JOSEPH'S HOME

# A Silver Jubilee to remember

*Singapore Hospice Council celebrates 25 years of the hospice and palliative care movement in Singapore with a 25th Anniversary Awards and Appreciation Day and a Silver Jubilee Charity Show.*

**S**ingapore Hospice Council (SHC) has come a long way since its formation in May 1995 with the goal of providing palliative care education for volunteers, nurses and doctors. As an umbrella body, the Council represents 25 member organisations that actively provide hospice and palliative care for the terminally ill and their families in Singapore. SHC has also taken on important roles of shaping policy, training healthcare professionals, overseeing quality improvement programmes, educating the public on palliative care and end-of-life care planning, and fundraising. In the years

ahead, SHC will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Health to enhance access, affordability and consistent quality of palliative care services.

Singapore President Halimah Yacob graced the 25th Anniversary Awards and Appreciation Day as Guest of Honour, with her congratulatory speech on SHC's milestone broadcasted during the virtual Charity Show. She expressed her gratitude to all the palliative care professionals for their dedication and tireless efforts in taking care of patients with life-threatening illnesses and their families. 

- 1 Guests writing their well wishes for SHC at the registration booth
- 2 Emcee Susan Ng welcoming guests to the event
- 3 The Guest-of-Honour and Welcome Party. From left to right: (1st row) SHC Honorary Secretary and Chairman of the 25th Anniversary Celebration Organising Committee Dr Wu Huei Yaw, Guest-of-Honour Madam President Halimah Yacob, SHC Chairperson Dr Patricia Neo; (2nd row) SHC Vice-Chairman Dr Chong Poh Heng, SHC Honorary Treasurer Mr Chey Chor Wai, SHC Chief Executive Ms Evelyn Leong
- 4 Dr Patricia Neo delivering her opening speech

## 25TH ANNIVERSARY AWARDS AND APPRECIATION DAY

Hosted by CNA938 Presenter Susan Ng at the Shangri-La Hotel Singapore on 26 March, the SHC 25th Anniversary Awards and Appreciation Day celebrated SHC's significant milestone and honoured the pioneers, past chairpersons and member organisations of SHC for their valuable contributions to the hospice movement. During the event, SHC Chairperson Dr Patricia Neo presented key findings from SHC's recent survey with 2,326 healthcare professionals. Results revealed that there was about 20% increase in palliative care awareness among healthcare professionals in Singapore, and affirmed a need for continual and targeted training to prepare them to care for patients with life-threatening illnesses. To close this momentous occasion, SHC unveiled its Vision and Mission statements.

**Vision:** Quality palliative care for everyone

**Mission:** Be the collective voice of the palliative care community to advance public understanding and champion for quality palliative care services



WORDS & PHOTOS SINGAPORE HOSPICE COUNCIL

- 5 Associate Professor Cynthia Goh, senior consultant at the Division of Supportive and Palliative Care in the National Cancer Centre Singapore, receiving her Token of Appreciation from Madam President and Dr Wu Huei Yaw. She was among 36 award recipients
- 6 Madam President and Distinguished Guests watching the tribute clips in honour of SHC's pioneers past and present
- 7 Madam President, Dr Patricia Neo and Ms Evelyn Leong launching SHC's Vision and Mission statements
- 8 Dr Patricia Neo presenting the Token of Appreciation to Madam President for gracing this event
- 9 Guests taking their leave after receiving an afternoon tea bento set





- 1 A lovely pre-show performance from pianist Joshua German
- 2 A warm welcome from emcee Cheryl Yao
- 3 Opening address by Madam President conveying her support for SHC and the palliative care sector
- 4 5 6 "Life" is a song composed and performed by Mr Mohamed Abdullah Alhabshee & First Fusion band, singer Tan Yu Qing and four veteran DJs from VintageRadio.SG



- 7 Sand artist Tan Sock Fong illustrating the rich story of SHC, from its humble beginnings till present day
- 8 Dr Alex Su, Vice-Chairman of the Medical Board (Clinical Quality) at Institute of Mental Health, singing the Chinese classic "城里的月光"
- 9 Yu Qing, second runner-up of SHC 2019 Voices of My HeART Songwriting Competition, singing her song "Journey", echoing the feelings of palliative care professionals and volunteers who have served selflessly
- 10 MADDspace duo Rybelle with their hip-hop dance number "Shake-It-Up"



## SILVER JUBILEE CHARITY SHOW

The SHC Silver Jubilee Charity Show held on 27 March and hosted by Miss Universe Singapore 2019 second runner-up Cheryl Yao was live streamed on SISTIC's virtual platform. Guests enjoyed a special dinner at home prepared by the Shangri-La Hotel, while watching a variety of stellar performances. The charity show was part of SHC's fundraising efforts to continue its advocacy work in providing palliative care education and training for doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and the public so that more people will have access to better quality of life leading to a dignified end-of-life journey.

SHC would like to express their deepest appreciation to all performing artistes, sponsors, donors and partners for making this show possible.



- 11 Five members of EVOKX Youth Choir singing "We Will Rise Again" and "The Music's Always There With You"
- 12 Three students from NUS Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music playing "Eric Ewazen Trio for Horn, Violin, and Piano: III. Andante Grazioso", inspired by a Dover Park Hospice patient's artworks
- 13 Three groups of young performers from Pipa Society Singapore playing "赶花会", "阳春白雪" and "火把节之夜"
- 14 Actor Nick Shen, an active volunteer at one of SHC's member organisations, with his mask-changing performance and rendition of popular Chinese song "朋友"
- 15 Daniel Ong, winner of SHC's 2019 Voices of My HeART Songwriting Competition, presenting his winning piece "阿嬷的歌", inspired by SHC's Life Book publication *Granny Cool*
- 16 Veteran singer, actress, performer and VintageRadio.SG DJ Rahimah Rahim performing "Let Me Be There"
- 17 Closing the show, second-runner up of the popular singing competition, Sing! China, Joanna Dong performing her original songs "Close To You", "You Gotta Be" and "A Good Goodbye"
- 18 With your kind donations, SHC delivered bento meals and hampers\* to the patients, caregivers and healthcare workers of Assisi Hospice, Dover Park Hospice, St. Andrew's Community Hospital, St Joseph's Home and St Luke's Hospital



Support SHC in their efforts to transform the healthcare landscape and empower the general public to proactively look into their palliative care needs. Visit [singaporehospice.org.sg](http://singaporehospice.org.sg) or contribute towards SHC's fundraising efforts at [fundraise.singaporehospice.org.sg](http://fundraise.singaporehospice.org.sg)

# Better and better, day by day

*Madam Salmah retraced her husband's last journey and how she found the peace in acceptance and gratitude.*

**M**adam Salmah Beevi bte Kader has been married to Mr Abu Bakar bin Kunju Baba for 43 years and they were inseparable. Mr Abu Bakar was a protective husband who insisted on accompanying Madam Salmah everywhere. At the same time, he also encouraged her to do whatever she wanted. "He never ever said 'no' to me. He did everything for me," recalled Madam Salmah.

However, in 2015, Mr Abu Bakar's health started to decline. Eventually, he had to stop working and underwent as many as nine ballooning procedures and a heart bypass surgery to treat the blockages in his heart. Four years later, his health troubles culminated in a diagnosis of end-stage kidney failure. It was then that he and his family were referred to the Ageing-in-Place (AIP) palliative care service at Yishun Health (YH).

Through this service, Mr Abu Bakar received regular home visits from Resident Physician Dr Tan Shu Zhen and Senior Staff Nurse Thilagavathy d/o Muthusamy (Thila). They worked together with Madam Salmah to manage his symptoms, which ranged from swelling, to wounds and injuries. In addition, Senior Medical Social Worker Lim Li Ying provided psychosocial and emotional support, and connected the family to financial assistance schemes to relieve the burden of his medical expenses.

Every day, Madam Salmah would diligently record her husband's vital signs in a worksheet and show it to Dr Tan and Thila when they made their visit. Madam Salmah also learned to administer Mr Abu Bakar's medications.

From the time when she learned of her husband's prognosis, Madam Salmah was



determined to be the best caregiver she could be. In fact, the whole family was committed to meeting Mr Abu Bakar's needs, from cooking his favourite meals to keeping him well-groomed.

The family made it a particular point to respect Mr Abu Bakar's wishes to be as independent as possible. For as long as he was able, he did not wear adult diapers. Instead, his grandchildren accompanied him when he went to the washroom to make sure he was safe.

## TIGHTENING FAMILY BONDS

One of the things that have bolstered Mr Abu Bakar's spirit during his last days was his family growing closer. Their two daughters set aside a long-held misunderstanding, which brought joy and comfort to Mr Abu Bakar. "He loved the children so much," shared Madam Salmah. "Since young, he would never scold them. Just a little bit, once in a while. And he would do anything for the grandchildren."

One of the happiest periods for Mr Abu Bakar was when the couple moved in with their eldest daughter, Jannah, for three months. Everyone would gather in her spacious house for meals.

## A PEACEFUL GOODBYE


On 22 April 2020, Madam Salmah spent the day alone with Mr Abu Bakar. She laid down beside him and prayed with him. He passed away peacefully, resting on her arm. It was the day before Ramadan.

This is very meaningful for Muslims, said Madam Salmah. "It is the day Muslims pray before the fasting month. We pray and hope to die on that day, during that month."

Nevertheless, it was a painful separation for her. "I sat with him until the morning. I was very heartbroken."

Li Ying provided support and counselling to Madam Salmah with a home visit and phone calls. She also referred Madam Salmah to a counselling service by Montfort Care Grief Matters to help her cope with her grief and to come to terms with her husband's passing.

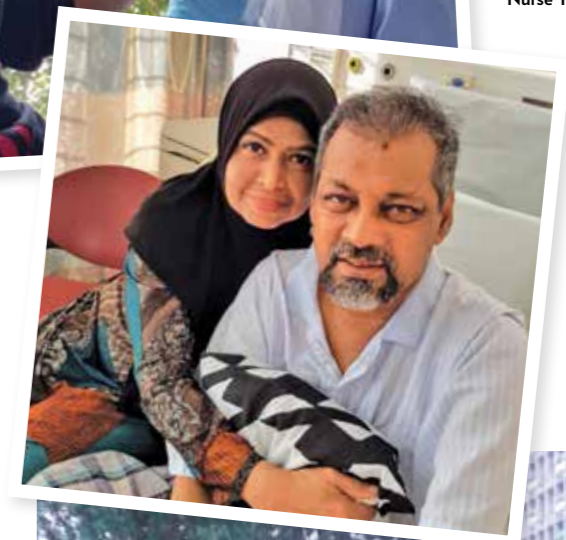
With the support of her family and care team, Madam Salmah was able to find gratitude in the peace her husband received at the end. She made a photo album documenting this journey and gave Thila a copy. At Deepavali last year, she also made kueh and cookies for the AIP team. This honoured her husband's wish which was to thank them for their care and support with homebaked goodies.

"It was very painful to see him suffering until the last day. When the doctor came every week to review his condition, it had helped me to be strong so that I could take care of him better, day by day. They encouraged me to do whatever I can. I'm really satisfied with what the doctors and nurses have done for my husband in Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. I've always tried to take care of my husband until his last breath. Thank God for the opportunity that he died on my arm," shared Madam Salmah. 

With the support of her family and care team, Madam Salmah was able to find gratitude in the peace her husband received at the end.



From top: Madam Salmah with the photo album she made of her caregiving journey; Madam Salmah keeping up Mr Abu Bakar's grooming routine; The loving couple; (from left) Senior Medical Social Worker Lim Li Ying, Resident Physician Dr Tan Shu Zhen, Senior Staff Nurse Thila



WORDS: TAN SHI HUI, EXECUTIVE, POPULATION HEALTH AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION, YISHUN HEALTH  
PHOTOS: TAN SHI HUI, MADAM SALMAH BEEVI BTE KADER

# A father's last bus ride

*A year has passed since Su Sok Khim's father left the family. Yet, the memory of his last days with her at Outram Community Hospital stay strongly intact in her mind.*

“P a... why can't you wait a few more minutes for me to say 'thank you' and 'goodbye,'" cried Sok Khim.

She was too late. He was already gone by the time she arrived.

She stood crying in the ward. The nurse next to her was saying something, but she could not hear her. Everything seems blurry as she looked at the motionless body of her father.

## THE SOLE BREADWINNER

Mr Su was the epitome of a Teochew father — he was a man of few words, strict with his ways and was the sole breadwinner of the family.

As a fishmonger, Mr Su's routine started as early as five in the morning, when he would travel from Holland Drive to go to the fishery port in Jurong. By 7 o'clock, he would have started earning his daily wage at Jalan Bukit Merah's wet market. His day at work usually ended before two in the afternoon. He would then go home to rest and go out again to meet his friends in the evening. On busier days, especially weekends, the family would spend time together by helping him at the stall.



“My father did not earn a lot. His salary depended on the seasons and if he had enough fish to sell,” shared Sok Khim.

Sometimes, Mr Su did not open his stall because he was short of cash to buy fish. Life was a struggle for them and because of this, her parents would often get into heated arguments.

But that never stopped Mr Su from putting food on the table for his family.

## PRECIOUS MOMENTS

When Sok Khim was seven, the family had to relocate temporarily due to Housing Development Board's redevelopment plan. For three years, Sok Khim was under her grandmother's care because she lived near her primary school. Mr Su would fetch her on Friday nights to spend time with the family, and then send her back to her grandmother's on Sundays. The moments spent riding in his scooter's sidecar were precious to Sok Khim.

“My father would buy Van Houten chocolates from the provision shops along Holland Village to prevent me from crying when it was time to go back,” shared Sok Khim.

“

Mr Su has finally decided to board the bus. He always liked to do things at his own pace.”



Left: Mr Su at Outram Community Hospital  
Below: Mr Su with daughter Sok Khim on her wedding day  
Opposite page: Mr Su selling fish at the market

## HAPPY FINAL DAYS

Mr Su was admitted for palliative care at Outram Community Hospital (OCH). Sok Khim would visit him every day to bring him meals as he enjoyed home-cooked food.

“I told my father that I wasn't as good as him when it comes to cooking but he did not mind at all. Yet, I would see him pouring a lot of soy sauce in his food to enhance the flavour,” laughed Sok Khim.

To fulfil his final wish to be home, Khim and her family requested for the Outram Community Hospital (OCH) palliative team to arrange for home leave.

“Planning for home leave for Mr Su was challenging because of COVID-19. We were also worried about his condition and had to have an ambulance ready to prepare for any emergency,” shared Sandy Koh, Principal Medical Social Worker at OCH.

The few hours were very valuable for Mr Su and his family. He slept on his bed, watched television, ate some steamed buns and drank his favourite Kopi O. They were simple activities but the family saw Mr Su enjoying those short moments.

Three weeks later, at the age of 82, he passed away peacefully in the ward. His daughter only turned up moments after his passing.

During the last few weeks of his life, Mr Su shared with the care team that he kept seeing a bus passing through in his single room. He told the staff that he would need to catch the bus and knew that it would bring him away.

“Mr Su has finally decided to board the bus. He always liked to do things at his own pace,” said Sandy. ☹

Van Houten chocolates were a luxury for her family.

She also remembers her father's culinary skills. Mr Su was a talented cook — he often remembered what he ate outside and would prepare those dishes for his family. From buying ingredients to cooking the dishes, Mr Su would do them all by himself.

He had many specialities — chilli crab, salted vegetable duck and curry chicken — but the one that Sok Khim still misses most is his pork knuckles jelly, a dish that's not easy to find nowadays.

A father's love is beyond words, running deep and expressed through actions.

Things went down south when Mr Su had a fall one day and was brought to the polyclinic. He had also been complaining of consistent coughing. Upon further examination, the family eventually found out that he was suffering from end-stage lung cancer.

# The final wish

*Relationships are critical to our existence, especially during end-of-life. Many patients' wishes are linked to reunions and reconciliations with their loved ones. Assisi Hospice's Psychosocial Support team shares two stories about fulfilling such wishes.*

## HER LAST WISH

Madam Chan (name has been changed) was admitted to Assisi Hospice in April 2020 with breast and ovarian cancer. She was 71 years old and her wish was to reunite with her son whom she had not seen in 20 years.

After journeying with Madam Chan for a few months, Assisi's medical social worker realised that she often talked about her past and her regrets, especially about the son whom she was unable to care for. However, she only remembered her son's full name, and that he had been sent to an institution more than 20 years ago. Hence, she did not request to meet her son as she felt that it would be impossible to track him down.

Nonetheless, Assisi's Psychosocial Support (PSS) team decided to take on this 'mission impossible'. After speaking further to Madam Chan and her sister, the medical social worker found out that her son could be staying in a welfare home in Hougang. The entire PSS team was activated and reached out to the Destitute Persons Service. After three weeks, the PSS team managed to locate Madam Chan's son in a nursing home.

Madam Chan was surprised that the team managed to locate her son and teared up when she heard the news. The team then arranged for a video call between mother and son. Seeing that they were so moved to see each other, the PSS team made plans for the son to have a face-to-face visit with Madam Chan.

The face-to-face reunion happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Special arrangements were made for Madam Chan's son to visit her in Assisi Hospice. Before the reunion, Madam Chan was very excited and requested that the team help her prepare chicken rice for her son. However, as her son had dietary restrictions, the PSS team helped to

To Madam Chan, the reunion was important as she had a chance to see her son and hug him again.

prepare gifts for him instead. Although not many words were exchanged during the visit, Madam Chan and her son cried and hugged each other. Madam Chan shared with her son that her time was short but reminded him that she would always want him to be well taken care of, and to listen to his carers in the nursing home. The visit was short, and the PSS team helped to take photos for them as keepsakes.

After the reunion, Madam Chan placed the photo of herself and her son by her bedside, reminiscing about the day they reunited till she passed on. To Madam Chan, the reunion was important as she had a chance to see her son and hug him again.

## HELPING HIM TO PEN A LETTER

Fifty-one-year-old Mr P (name has been changed) was in a destitute home before he was diagnosed with mouth cancer and admitted to Assisi Hospice. His parents and one of his siblings have passed on. He had lost touch with his sole surviving brother about 10 years ago. One of his wishes was to be reunited with his brother.

Mr P had a tracheostomy tube, and it was difficult for him to talk. He shared that he could not write. He was not able to remember his brother's identification number and the spelling of his brother's name. He was also unsure about his brother's previous contact details.

Our medical social worker spoke to the destitute home who looked after him previously to explore if they had any details of his brother. She also tried searching on the internet and social media. However, she was unable to trace his brother.

Our medical social worker asked him what he would say to his brother if he managed to see him, and helped to pen his words in a letter. He just wanted to wish his brother "good luck, and a good life". Even though he didn't manage to meet his brother, penning the letter helped him to feel more settled.

He also felt unsettled spiritually. As he was a Hindu, Assisi Hospice's Pastoral Care staff arranged for a Hindu priest to visit and pray for him. Assisi's social worker also helped him to reconnect with a case manager from his previous destitute home, who gave assurance that he would help to perform prayers for him in a Hindu temple a year after he passed on, according to his faith. Mr P thus gained peace of mind before passing on. 🙏



Reaching across the years lost for a last reunion is wish fulfilled indeed



## TAPESTRIES OF GRIEF

Following the success of the inaugural local Grief and Bereavement Conference in 2018, the 2nd conference is back. The theme *Tapestries of Grief* reflects the uniqueness and universality of individual and collective grief of the local community, and rallies multiple stakeholders from relevant sectors who interface with those touched by death to share, learn and explore how bereavement care can be better woven to form a compassionate network to hold the space for grief. There will be 3 workshop tracks on Healthcare, Community, Practice.

### Learning Outcomes

- Consider the repertoire of appropriate responses to the needs of the grieving and bereaved
- Build knowledge on grief and bereavement work
- Increase their capability to deliver grief and bereavement care
- Expand their network of service partners across the care continuum in delivering grief, bereavement and death-related services

### Programme

SEP 4-19	<b>Tapestries of Grief</b> (community engagement project) Virtual talks, experiential workshops, community art exhibition for public	
SEP 20-21	<b>Pre-conference workshops</b> (for professionals)	
SEP 22-24	<b>Grief and Bereavement Conference</b> (for professionals) Keynotes, plenaries, workshops for professionals	

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Associate Professor  
Lauren **BREEN**  
Curtin University,  
Australia



Professor  
Amy **CHOW**  
University of  
Hong Kong,  
Hong Kong SAR



Professor  
LIN Qi Yun  
National Taipei University  
of Nursing and Health  
Sciences, Taiwan



Professor  
Margaret **STROEBE**  
Utrecht University,  
University of Groningen,  
The Netherlands



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[gbc.singaporehospice.org.sg](http://gbc.singaporehospice.org.sg)  
to find out more.

For queries, please call 6538 2231 or  
email [gbc2021@singaporehospice.org.sg](mailto:gbc2021@singaporehospice.org.sg)



# SPCC 2021

Embrace • Engage • Envision

7TH SINGAPORE PALLIATIVE CARE CONFERENCE

9 - 10 Dec 2021 | [www.singaporepalliativecare.com](http://www.singaporepalliativecare.com)

9 - 10 December 2021  
(Thursday - Friday)



## 7th SPCC

is a biennial conference that engages professionals beyond the palliative care community.

We are proud to announce that SPCC is back! The virtual event will be held from 9 to 10 December 2021, bringing together a community of healthcare professionals, community services, industrial partners, scientists, educators, caregivers and volunteers with its theme of "Embrace • Engage • Envision".

In embracing the person and our core values in palliative care, engaging partners for excellence and envisioning the future together, SPCC 2021 aspires to provide participants with an inspirational vision into the future of hospice and palliative care with a stellar line-up of international and local speakers. Do join us for our conference and workshops!

For enquires, contact us at  
[secretariat@singaporepalliativecare.com](mailto:secretariat@singaporepalliativecare.com)

### INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS



Dr Marie  
BAKITAS



Asst Prof  
Rachelle BERNACKI



Prof Nicki  
COHEN



Prof Anthony  
DICKENSON



Dr Jo  
HOCKLEY



Dr Joshua  
LAKIN

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### PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

- Burnout and Resilience (Research)
- Chinese Medicine
- Collaborative Care Models
- Complex Ethics Case
- COVID-19
- Dementia
- Education
- Embracing Our Core Values/Root/Heritage
- Engaging the Person
- Envisioning the Future
- Immunotherapy & Immunotoxicities
- Models of Care (Research)
- Music & Art
- National Palliative Care QI Session
- Non-Cancer Updates
- Social Work
- Pain Management
- Patient Perspectives (Research)

### IMPORTANT DATES

15 APR' 21	30 JUN' 21	31 AUG' 21	31 AUG' 21
Call for Abstracts	Abstracts Submission Deadline	Notification of Acceptance of Abstract	Early Bird Registration Deadline
7-8 & 17 DEC' 21	8 DEC' 21	9-10 DEC' 21	11 DEC' 21
Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Main Conference	Workshop 3

[www.singaporepalliativecare.com](http://www.singaporepalliativecare.com)

# Leading youth in action

In March 2021, Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) initiated storytelling sessions for the second-year students from Anglo-Chinese Junior College (ACJC) as part of the school's Values in Action project. SHC's objective is to increase awareness of palliative care through available resources, with which the students and teachers can then use for their outreach programme. ACJC is the first school to conduct story-telling sessions for seniors on palliative care.

The SHC workshop for these ACJC students included the sharing of the heartwarming story *Granny Cool*, published by SHC, with seniors at Methodist Welfare Services (MWS) Senior Centres at four locations. Inspired by a true life story, *Granny Cool* is about how an elderly patient and her granddaughter, who was also her caregiver, have sought comfort and support through palliative care. Students were also introduced to End-of-Life Care

Planning, and spent time interacting with residents and staff of the MWS centres.

Students were encouraged to share their reflections on their SHC workshop experience. "Through meeting the staff of Singapore Hospice Council, as well as the staff and residents at the MWS Senior Centre, I have learned about palliative care and gained a better understanding of how to tackle difficult questions surrounding death," wrote Pow Shu Qi. "Although it was difficult initially to converse with the residents because of the language barrier, we were able to overcome this challenge by being open-minded and unafraid to seek help from the staff at the Centre. We were keen to learn more about these residents and we had fun conversing with them."

Her classmate Angelina Tan wrote: "Personally, I have learnt the importance of planning ahead.



For example, I never knew that we had to choose a spokesperson to speak for us should we be unconscious or unable to make decisions for ourselves. Overall, this experience not only taught me the importance of thinking for my future, it has also equipped me with skills that I would need to talk about death issues. I have also gained greater confidence now in interacting with our seniors."

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## Upcoming Events

**JULY - SEPTEMBER 2021**

**SHC "Live Well. Leave Well.": All you need to know about Palliative Care Talk**

Join us for an informative session to understand palliative care and end-of-life matters. The session also aims to increase awareness of the attitude towards death and its impact on the willingness to converse with family or loved ones.

**Time:** 2.00pm - 3.30pm

**Venue:** Online via Zoom

**Contact:** [contact@singaporehospice.org.sg](mailto:contact@singaporehospice.org.sg)

**Registration\*:** <https://tinyurl.com/shctalks21eng>

\*Please indicate your interest in the link and we will contact you via email.

**SHC @ National Library Singapore\***

Explore and learn more about palliative care and end-of-life care planning through infographics, stories and printed resources.

**Date:** 1 June - 31 July 2021

**Venue:** Marine Parade Public Library

Level 3, 278 Marine Parade Rd, #01-02 Community Building, S(449282)

**Date:** 1 August - 30 September 2021

**Venue:** Toa Payoh Public Library

Level 1, 6 Toa Payoh Central, S(319191)

\*In view of the COVID-19 situation, please check our website [www.singaporehospice.org.sg](http://www.singaporehospice.org.sg) for updates.



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