

A Letter from a Volunteer

Life's Lessons in Hospice *By Hazel Zheng Keli*

Our team had a very enthusiastic time and festive fun with the elderly at HCA Hospice Care's day centre. We are very honoured to have been given the opportunity to interact, play games with and bake pineapple tarts with them. These are precious moments that they have shared with us.

All of us understood why these patients are a lively lot – by virtue of them spending time together and making friends with one another in adversity. We felt a sense of family cohesiveness and believe that we have achieved our objective in celebrating Chinese New Year with them. We learned a lot from our visit and were especially touched by their positivity and admire how they face their predicament with fierce fighting spirits. Many thanks to Valiant, one of the staff spearheading HCA's student outreach, for an in-depth presentation on what patients and their families go through. The SMU team was really moved by it all because it is clear to us how we should respect the elderly, the ill, and how we should manage our attitudes in life.

Most of us have parents at home. I can relate to this visit, as I have a father who is suffering from a terminal illness from kidney failure due to a smoking habit. I know these pa-

tients are physically weak, which makes it easy for us to

see them as victims. But I have caught glimpses of the victor in the patients, as they continue their daily private battles with illness. My father's circumstance is not a pleasant thing for me to share, but spending time with others facing life-limiting illnesses made me feel that I was sharing meaningful moments. I hope I have touched their lives in some way. My dad once said to me that doing something with your heart is better than doing something without it.

I believe the team understood that treating the patients with dignity and respect was crucial. In a space of a few hours, we can reach out and make the lives of our fellow human beings a little bit better. We have come to feel that often the simplest things are the hardest to do and yet be-



Above: a student rolls up dough and pineapple filling with patients.



Above: Hazel poses with her violin before her performance.

We sincerely hope to create many more of such moments with HCA Hospice Care, as these are truly enriching and life-changing.

Hazel is part of a team of SMU student volunteers, who came to HCA Day Hospice on 28 January. She was half of a violin-erhu duo who played for day hospice patients and helped bake pineapple tarts for them as a treat.



Right: Students busy with pineapple tarts in the kitchen.

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Corporate Volunteers

Rolling Up Sleeves for a Cause

By Christine Van Der Ven

In the early afternoon of 25 January, a group of 17 from Buckman Laboratories came to visit our HCA Day Hospice Centre. Wanting to do something for our patients, they sang, lead a DIY photo-frame art and craft project and provided tea to nourish souls and stomachs. The volunteers didn't only stop there, but also rolled up their sleeves and spring-cleaned the Day Centre premises after the patients had left for home.

It was altogether a very enjoyable afternoon both for everyone. Hazel Siew from Buckman's marketing department says, "There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving...the inner joy and satisfaction can only be tasted by the person rendering the giving." When it was time for time for the patients to leave, some volunteers assisted to bring the patients home. Others said their farewells and helped clean the Day Centre premises. We would like to say a big heartfelt thank you to the volunteers. Kudos to them!



Above: Buckman volunteers engage patients in a photo-frame making session.

Below: Cleaning out cupboards at the day hospice centre.



Below: A smile and wave before patients head back to their homes.



Preparing the "yusheng" - fish, vegetables and sauces - to toss for good luck.



Mdm Chin Koh Hwa (C) smiling with actor Chen Jian Bin (L) and DJ Fenying (R).

Celebrating CNY with MediaCorp

By Christine Van Der Ven

According to the lunar calendar, Chinese New Year ended on 17 February, but just for our patients, the festivities were extended for a few more days. On 19 February, about 50 staff of MediaCorp welcomed 40 patients as well as 12 HCA staff and volunteers to their studios to celebrate with them.

MediaCorp staff mingled with the patients and made sure they were well taken care of. The traditional Lo Hei was not forgotten and everyone tossed a mix of raw fish and vegetables to gain good luck and prosperity. Actor Chen Jian Bin and DJ Fenying from 97.2 FM were there to entertain the patients with songs, games and handed out prizes too!

Our patients were also treated to a preview of the movie "It's a Great Great World". To round off the event before going home, not only one, but two goodie bags were given out to each patient.

Inspiring the Young on Eldercare *By Emma Goh*

If caring for the ill and dying is a duty for those currently in hospice services, so is educating the youth of today on the issues surrounding palliative and eldercare. Increasing awareness of hospice work, its role in healthcare and the stress and strain patients as well as caregivers go through is essential in a society facing a rapidly ageing population.

With this phenomenon, more and more youths will gradually and increasingly shoulder care-giving responsibilities. Awareness of eldercare and hospice work cannot happen overnight; hence the need to start inculcating in our young a sensitivity and empathy for patients with life-limiting illnesses. After all, who will carry and pass on the torch to address and create solutions to sustainable end-of-life care in the near future?

In a bid to get more students and members of the general public to understand hospice care and its role in the community, HCA Hospice Care participated on 26 February in YOUth Got Heart 2011, an initiative to expose the young to community service and service learning opportunities. Organised annually by the Raffles Institution Interact Club, the event provided a platform to establish partnerships between VWOs and interested youths. Held this year at the National Library Building, The Plaza, its theme “Find Your Cause” encourages youths to engage in volunteerism. Ms Melissa Kwee, founder of Beautiful People, was the Guest-of-Honour.

Children and youths who visited the booth were encouraged to participate in games, which included role-playing to simulate disabilities which set in with old age and illness, such as poor eyesight, shaky hands and slurred speech. This helps them better understand physical limitations experienced by the elderly as they step into their shoes through these activities.

Illustrating by their own example the idea of youths for causes were the enthusiastic student volunteers from Saint Andrew’s Junior College (SAJC), who helped set up and man the booth. These students are part of HCA Hospice Care’s student outreach arm, known as the Young Caregivers Programme (yCG). Having gone through workshops conducted by yCG facilitators, they felt a need to do more and decided to volunteer at the road show to help create awareness of hospice work.



Student volunteers from SAJC preparing the booth.



Above: SAJC teacher Mrs Seet (R) chips in to speak with curious visitors.

These students arrived armed with packets of sweets they prepared as give-aways, together with coloured ice-cream sticks and a post-it board on which visitors could leave messages. Overall, the volunteer students had a fruitful day volunteering their time to spread awareness for a cause they believe in. Their teacher, Louis Ho, was glad his students saw the meaning in volunteering, “It will enable them to reflect on their role as a volunteer and better understand the social issues relating to giving care to people suffering from life-limiting illnesses.”



Right: Close up on painted ice-cream sticks with messages on them.

We hope that their example will be repeated many folds, and in several different ways by the youth we reach out to – for the benefit of the patients and caregivers that hospice work continues to serve.

Before 2010 came to a close...

Lifting Christmas Spirits at Home *By Vivien Seah*

Christmas, like any other festive period, is a time for merry making and catching up with friends and family. In December 2011, HCA Hospice Care held a Festive Cheer event for our home hospice patients. A total of 36 patients who were willing to receive visitors opened up their homes to volunteers to spend some time with them.

Four of us who were office support staff and a frontline nurse supervisor, discussed and decided to form a HCA staff group for this event. In spite of our different time schedules, we managed to squeeze in two evening practices to perfect five Christmas carols, two of which were requested by the patient we were about to meet.

Below: The HCA contingent sang to Mdm Wu, with Jonathan, Finance Manager, on the guitar.



Back Row (L to R) : Debbie Low (Day Care Supervisor), Susan (Mdm Wu's sister), Madam Wu, Jonathan Ng (Finance Manager);

Front Row (L to R) : Mrs Maria Ng (Jonathan's wife), Angela Tan (Senior Manager, Nursing), Vivien Seah (Admin Manager) and Arnel Villamin (Accounts Executive)

On 11 December, we met at the void deck of patient Madam Wu's home. It was nice to see that two of our staff had roped in their spouses to join in the caroling. We were a bit apprehensive as some of us had never visited our patients at home before and did not know what we should expect, let alone strike a sensitive conversation while being mindful that the patient was suffering from a life-limiting illness. We had one more practice session at the breezy void deck before heading up to Madam Wu's flat.

When we arrived, we were greeted warmly by Madam Wu and her sister. They were very pleased to see so many people. Immediately upon entering the living area, we noticed a large Chinese altar framed the wall opposite the entrance. Madam Wu explained that her husband is a Buddhist while she is Catholic but that they respect each other's religion. She then excitedly invited us into her bedroom where her Catholic altar was placed. She apologized that her family could not be with us as her husband was still at work and her daughter had taken her grandchildren out.

We gathered in her small bedroom which had a miniature Christmas tree lighted up at the dressing table. We stood around her and her sister and sang our Christmas carols, encouraging them both to sing along. At the end of it, she thanked us tearfully and said that she missed going to Midnight Mass and was very happy that we could take time out to cheer her up. We were then invited to refreshments in the living area where we shared information about ourselves and the jobs we performed at HCA Hospice Care. Madam Wu shared that she had a very supportive family. She was looking forward to the visit of her daughter who lives in Australia.

The following week, our Medical Social Worker visited her and heard that Madam Wu expressed she was able to sleep peacefully after the caroling session. We are happy that we brought cheer to Madam Wu and it was an especially meaningful time this Christmas for us as office staff to know first-hand how our work touches lives.

Before 2010 came to a close...

Shopping Days Out *by Christine Van Der Ven*

16 December and 22 December were designated shopping days for our patients. They were brought to Giant at IMM and Tampines in the morning on respective days. With the help of dedicated volunteers, including those from NUS Community Service Club and Serangoon Junior College (SRJC) students, these patients on a day out had fun choosing what they wanted to buy for themselves.

Here are some images from the trips, enjoy!



Mr Low Bak Meng displays what he bought from Giant@IMM, 16 Dec 2010



Serangoon Junior College student providing a helping hand to Mdm Wee Juat Hwa at Giant@Tampines, 22Dec 2010.



Left: SRJC students at the ladies' section helping Mdm Tan Chwee Lian and Mdm Ang Soon Bway find the correct sizes at Giant@Tampines, 22 Dec 2010.



Above: Volunteers getting Mdm Tang Kum Yong, Mdm Chua Beoy Kee and Mdm Rohani ready to start their shopping adventure.

Upcoming Programmes

- **PALLIATIVE CAREGIVERS' TRAINING (to register, please call 62512561)**
 - 5 Mar, 2 Apr, 7 May, 12:30pm - 5:30pm, HCA - Loving Heart (Jurong)
 - 12 Mar, 9 Apr, 14 May, 12:30pm - 5:30pm, HCA Bedok Centre
 - 19 Mar, 16 Apr, 21 May, 12:30pm - 5:30pm, HCA - Ci Yuan (Hougang) Centre & HCA (Woodlands) Centre
 - 26 Mar, 23 Apr, 28 May, 12:30pm - 5:30pm, HCA Hospice Care (Central), 12 Jalan Tan Tock Seng
- **HCA HOSPICE CARE ROAD SHOW:** 26 & 27 March, 11am-8pm, Youth Park
- **SUNFLOWER REMEMBRANCE DAY:** 30 April, 3-5pm, HCA Auditorium

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