

DOING GOOD IN THE LONG RUN

We meet the doctor taking on a 17-hour ultra-marathon to raise funds for the terminally ill



JUDITH TAN

juditht@sph.com.sg

There are many ways to raise money for charity, but general practitioner Tan Poh Kiang is taking one of the most challenging routes.

On Saturday, the 48-year-old avid runner will be participating in The North Face 100, a 100km run (about 2½ marathons) to raise \$100,000.

Dubbing his effort 100k For 100k, the money raised from the run will go towards helping terminally-ill patients supported by HCA Hospice Care.

Dr Tan took over as president of the home palliative care provider in March this year.

He has already exceeded his target, even before the starting pistol has fired. As of yesterday, he has raised \$118,039 at his donation site www.hca.org.sg/100k.

His aim, he says, is not just to look for ways to raise funds for the charity, but to also increase awareness of palliative care.

The New Paper on Sunday caught up with him to find out what inspired this meaningful initiative.

Why is running such a passion for you?

Dr Tan: I have always loved running since my national service days. I do it to relax and get away from life's pressures.

I started long-distance running in 2008. I began with 10km, then a half marathon. In 2009, I signed up for The North Face 50 – my first full marathon.

My wife joins me whenever I train, so it's our time to paktor ("go dating" in Cantonese).

This isn't your first time raising funds through running.

Dr Tan: I raised \$24,000 last year for Beyond Social Services (an organisation which helps young people from low-income families).

The North Face 100 (the meeting point is at MacRitchie Reservoir and a bus will take participants to the start point at Hindhede Road) is on Oct 11, which is also World Hospice and Palliative Care Day. I think I was destined to run this.

I thought I'd raise a few thousand dollars but to my surprise, the money keeps coming in.

What has been your training regimen?

Dr Tan: It's been a slow build-up of running and walking in the forest every weekend since February.

Ultra-marathon essentials

- Compression shirt with moisture management technology
- 2-litre hydration bladder
- Energy gels: 100 kilocalories, good for about 45 minutes
- Salt packs
- Petroleum jelly to prevent chafing of groin and inner thighs
- Plasters, in case of blisters
- Tissue paper, handy for emergency toilet stops
- Mobile phone with charger
- Head lamp with extra batteries
- Map and cash



I began with one hour (of running) and started adding an extra half hour to subsequent runs. I've slowly but surely made progress.

I've achieved about 80 per cent of the race distance. I'm conditioning my body and mind to be on my feet for 17 hours – the time I believe I will need to cross the finish line.

Do you have a survival pack?

Dr Tan: I have a hydration pack with at least 1.5 litres of water.

I will also have several packs of energy gels (carbohydrate gels commonly used in endurance events). Each contains about 100 kilocalories that is good for about 45 minutes.

I have salt packs too, because after the first half of the race, isotonic water will no longer be effective in replacing salts in the body.

Of course, I'll also have tissue paper and plasters.

Any scrapes during training?

Dr Tan: Three weeks ago, I was chased by a monkey.

I was running towards the Singapore Zoo when an alpha male macaque suddenly rushed out of the brush and chased me, teeth bared.

Knowing I was unable to outrun him, I turned around, put up my arms and roared really loudly at it. Fortunately, it turned tail and ran. It was silly for me to do that.

It could have easily attacked me.