

# Fund helps the dying live last days at home

By **JANICE TAI**

CANCER patient Chong Ah Huat wanted to die at home so that he could spend more time with his brother in his last days.

But he was worried that this arrangement would add to the financial burden of his sibling as the latter would need to take time off from work to accompany him for hospital check-ups.

As a part-time factory worker, his brother was already having a hard time making ends meet.

But with the help of a new fund – the first such fund that supports needy, terminally-ill patients who wish to die at home – Mr Chong, 47, is now comfortably settled at home.

The \$500,000 Respectance

Fund was set up by philanthropic outfit Lien Foundation in April.

Twenty-seven recipients have benefited so far, with the amount given decided on a case-by-case basis.

In the last few months, Mr Chong has been getting a \$100 transport allowance for check-ups and \$400 worth of milk feeds a month.

Applicants can tap the fund to rent equipment, such as hospital beds or commodes, that they need at home or hire nurses or therapists to care for them at home.

As most will need to travel to the hospital for medical appointments, they can also get help with transportation expenses.

If the patient is the main breadwinner of the family, the latter can also get interim help when he

or she dies.

Chief executive of the Lien Foundation, Mr Lee Poh Wah, said it decided to launch the fund as there are no community grants available to help defray the costs of dying at home.

“Dying at home is sometimes more expensive than in a hospital,” he added, but noted that the environment in hospitals can be “sterile and alienating”.

“We want to help relieve the costly burden of dying for the sick from low-income families at a time when they are experiencing great stress and anxiety in their lives,” he added.

About 17,000 people die in Singapore each year.

While most prefer to die at home, more than half do so in a hospital, said then health minister

Khaw Boon Wan in 2007.

The fund is open to needy patients deemed to have 12 months or less to live.

They must be recommended by medical social workers from partner institutions like Assisi hospice, HCA hospice care and St Luke’s hospital.

Mr Mohd Yusof, 45, another cancer patient who received assistance, spent four days in his newly-rented flat before he died in April.

“We are so grateful. The money was used to buy paint to paint the walls of our home and hire a private nurse in his last days,” said his unemployed wife, Madam Rosnah Rahim, 46.

Close to \$1,300 was disbursed to the family.

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**Thanks to the Respectance Fund, cancer patient Chong Ah Huat, 47, does not have to burden older brother Chong Swe Fat (behind him), a factory worker, to pay for milk feeds and transport to the hospital. ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG**