

A beautiful departure

By Serene Deng, Community Relations Team
HCA Hospice Care

The cheery smiles that emanate from Mdm Hermien Iswantho and her three-year-old daughter are warm, genuine and full of love. Despite having gone through an indescribable loss in the form of the passing of Mdm Hermien Iswantho's four-month-old son, the closely-knit family soldiers on bravely.

Doctors told Mdm Hermien that she had very little hope of conceiving a child. Her husband, Mr Ady Atmadja and her were also against the idea of artificial insemination because they believed that God would bless them in due time.

After 10 long years of trying, Mdm Hermien managed to conceive her first child. Naturally, the couple were overcome with joy. Sadly the happiness was short-lived as it resulted in a miscarriage three months later. She had no physical pain but emotionally, it was every bit overwhelming.

But the miscarriage did nothing to dampen the couple's determination. They tried for a second child and they were miraculously blessed with an adorable baby girl in the form of Ashley, who also happens to be the sweetheart of the family. Soon after, their prayers for a third child were answered in the form of Andrew Theophilus, a cute and chubby baby boy. As everyone had anticipated him to be a girl, it was with great aplomb that he was welcomed as the first baby boy of the family.

After only four months, they lost baby Andrew to Patau Syndrome — a rare birth disease caused by chromosomal abnormality. Despite only being given two months to live, Andrew outlived the prognosis and had a fruitful four months including a restful staycation at Sentosa Island with the family.

"I cried when I heard about all his medical conditions. Why does a small tiny child have to go through such pain?" Mdm Hermien asks. "I constantly used to ask God to take me instead." Andrew faced multiple complications because of his health. Sometimes, he would even stop breathing for a few seconds. "I remember calling Dr Chong Poh Heng and Nurse Serene Wong for help and they never failed to give me appropriate advice," says Mdm Hermien.

"When it used to happen at home, I would pinch his tiny fingers to help revive his breathing."

About HCA Hospice Care

Established in 1989, HCA Hospice Care is Singapore's largest home hospice provider. It also offers a day hospice programme for mobile patients who do not require round-the-clock nursing care. It has a multidisciplinary teams of doctors, nurses, medical social workers and counsellors. Apart from its main facilities at Jalan Tan Tock Seng, HCA Hospice Care operates a day hospice centre and four satellite centres in other parts of Singapore. The satellite centres act as administrative centres and contain a home care showroom.



Despite not being able to assist with suction and tube feeding procedures, Mdm Hermien was content that Andrew was well enough to be taken cared of at home.

"I could not bear to see my child suffering and having so many tubes in him," says Mdm Hermien who

revealed the family's decision not to resuscitate Andrew should the need arise.

"He was an alert and cute boy," says Mdm Hermien as she recalls the moment of Andrew's passing in her arms on her birthday, the 28th of September 2015. That fateful morning, Mdm Hermien noticed that Andrew did not cry and had unusual bouts of coughing.

"He stared blankly at me and simply gave me three blinks when I asked if he wanted to go home with Jesus. Then, I hurried to call my husband."

While trying to compose themselves, the parents told Andrew, "If it's your time, we'll give you to Jesus," followed by a simple prayer. A few seconds later, Andrew closed his eyes for the final time without any pain or struggle.

Andrew had been a tough fighter since birth. Despite his medical conditions, he grew by the day like any other normal baby and his smiles brought joy and comfort to his family.

Those four months with Andrew were precious and his family would never trade anything else for it. Andrew's elder sister Ashley, is aware of her baby brother's absence. She used to stay by his side when Mdm Hermien stepped away to prepare food for him.

"Once in a while, she will look for Andrew in the baby cot. Sometimes, we will talk to her in front of Andrew's picture," says Mdm Hermien. "She still loves him".

Mdm Hermien is thankful for the support from Star PALS, a paediatric palliative care service, for their love, care and concern even after Andrew's passing.

"They assisted me and helped answer a lot of my questions whenever I was in doubt."

It has definitely not been an easy journey for the family who has had to deal with losing a child twice. Nevertheless, Mdm Hermien is full of gratitude. Together with her family, they continue to encourage families undergoing similar circumstances with their story of strength and hope. ❤️

Drop a word of encouragement for Mdm Hermien and her family at communications@hcahospicecare.org.sg. Visit <https://www.hca.org.sg/hospice/services/psychosocial-and-bereavement-support> to find out more about the bereavement support HCA Hospice Care provides for our beneficiaries