



A helping hand for the needy

The medical endowment fund, Medifund, helps needy Singaporeans who cannot afford to pay their medical bills despite the heavy subsidies, Medisave and MediShield

BY CHERYL TAY

Like many self-employed, the importance of having a Medisave account and taking out MediShield, a medical insurance scheme, became apparent to Mr Ong (not his real name) when the need arose, but the revelation came a little late.

After seeking medical help for a year for his persistent headaches, the 54-year-old, who used to work as a renovation contractor before he fell sick, was diagnosed with advance nose cancer. As with serious illnesses like these, the diagnosis was just one part of the bad news; the other part was the hefty treatment bills.

Mr Ong had to undergo two treatments concurrently – radiotherapy and chemotherapy. His medical bills: A staggering \$14,000.

But under the Government's multiple tiers of protection to ensure that healthcare is affordable, a large government subsidy – the first tier of protection – kicked in. This reduced Mr Ong's bill to \$6,000.

Given a choice, I would have done it differently. Now I can only hope for the best that I recover soon and re-enter the workforce.

- Mr Ong, a nose cancer patient

The second tier of protection – Medisave – should help pay this amount. But Mr Ong has contributed minimally to his Medisave account previously. His wife, who was previously a housewife, began working as a canteen stall operator only recently, drawing \$1,055 per month.

With the assistance of the Medical Social Worker at the National Cancer Centre Singapore, Mr Ong applied for Medifund. This was approved for his treatment for the period from December 2010 to June 2011.

Medifund is a medical endowment fund set up by the Government to be the ultimate safety net for needy Singaporean patients.

"So far, Medifund has provided \$1,500 for my treatment. A separate treatment subsidy of \$3,000 from the

Singapore Cancer Society has further eased my financial burden," says Mr Ong, who has lost more than 16kg since his diagnosis and is now a shadow of his former self.

Thankful for the Government's schemes to keep healthcare affordable for Singaporeans, Mr Ong says: "In the end, I was only required to fork \$102 out of my pocket."

Offering this advice to Singaporeans, he says: "Life is unpredictable and if it is within your means, do contribute to your Medisave. Given a choice, I would have done it differently. Now I can only hope for the best that I recover soon and re-enter the workforce."

HEALTHCARE MADE AFFORDABLE

Medisave is a compulsory individual medical savings account scheme which allows Singaporeans to pay for their medical treatment without financial difficulty. It can be used for hospitalisations, day surgeries and certain outpatient treatments.

MediShield is a low-cost catastrophic illness insurance scheme designed to help Singaporeans meet medical expenses for major illnesses or long hospital stay. Premiums for MediShield can be paid by Medisave. While MediShield is meant for those staying in Class B2 and C wards, Singaporeans who prefer Class A and B1 wards in public hospitals or private hospitals can opt for Integrated Shield Plans, offered by private insurers.

Medifund is an endowment fund set up by the Government to assist needy Singaporeans who are unable to pay for their medical expenses. Medifund acts as a safety net for needy Singaporeans who face difficulties paying for their bills despite having government subsidies, Medisave and MediShield.

Visit www.moh.gov.sg for more details.

FIVE THINGS TO NOTE

- ✓ **Understand the different schemes available.**
A good insurance scheme gives you adequate coverage. Buy a plan that is suitable for your needs. More does not mean better.
- ✓ **Know what you can afford.**
Subscribe to an insurance plan that you can afford so that it is sustainable in the long run.
- ✓ **Contribute to Medisave and use it carefully.**
Small and regular contributions help grow your Medisave account. Do regular top-ups for yourself and your loved ones.
- ✓ **Choose the right ward.**
Whether it is Class A/B1 or Class B2/C, choose one that is within your means.
- ✓ **Buy young.**
It is important to buy and stay in an insurance plan from a young age while you are still healthy so that you will not face exclusions at a later age.