



*Nursing*  
*Our Profession*  
*Our Pride*



## — Nurse's Pledge —

*In full knowledge of the obligations I am undertaking, I PROMISE to provide a competent standard of care for the sick, regardless of race, religion and status, sparing no effort to alleviate suffering and promote health and to refrain from any action which might endanger life.*

*I will respect at all times the dignity of the patients under my care, holding in confidence all personal information entrusted to me.*

*I will maintain my professional knowledge and skill at the highest level and give support and co-operation to all members of the health team.*

*I will honour and abide by the Singapore Nursing Board Code for Nurses and Midwives, and be responsible and accountable at all times for my nursing actions and decisions.*

*I will uphold the integrity of the professional nurse.*



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*This book is dedicated to all nurses in Singapore – past, present and future – for your courage to care selflessly for patients in hospitals, nursing homes and in the community*

Special thanks to our talented nurses who took photographs and produced amazing artworks for this book



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**  
SINGAPORE

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## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

# Nurses truly care to go beyond

**2020** has been designated by the World Health Organization as The Year of the Nurse and Midwife. It also marks the 135th anniversary of nursing in Singapore.

The healthcare landscape in Singapore has seen tremendous change in the last century. Advancements in medical knowledge and technology have brought about new possibilities in how we prevent, diagnose and treat diseases, as well as how we care for our patients.

Our nurses have been pushing boundaries and embracing change along the way. When digitisation and technology changed the way we delivered care, nurses not only equipped themselves with new skills and competencies, but also adopted the use of technology to enhance patient care.

Our nurses' scope of practice has also expanded. Advanced Practice Nurses may now collaboratively prescribe medication, while Community Nurses lead the community nursing posts to help clients manage their conditions in the community and at home, enabling them to age in place.

More recently, as Singapore tackled the COVID-19 outbreak, nurses stepped forward to the call of duty. Many were amongst the first to be deployed to our border checkpoints to step up temperature surveillance and health screening. They work tirelessly in our healthcare institutions to care for our patients. Together, nurses and our healthcare colleagues on the frontline work as a team to fight the disease.

We can always count on our nurses' resilience and dedication in times of emergency or crisis, to deliver the best care to their patients.

This book, "Nursing: Our Profession, Our Pride" is a celebration of this meaningful profession. I am encouraged to read about the lives of so many who have chosen to dedicate themselves to serving the frail and the sick, and be an advocate and source of support to our patients.

I would like to thank all nurses in Singapore for giving yourselves and your time to care for others. Truly, you care to go beyond!

**Mr Gan Kim Yong**  
Minister for Health



## MESSAGE FROM DIRECTORS OF MEDICAL SERVICES

# Doctors cure, nurses care

**AS WE** transform our healthcare system to support the challenges of an ageing population and rising chronic disease prevalence, our healthcare workers need to evolve in tandem.

Nurses make up the largest proportion of (wo)manpower amongst healthcare professionals and play a critical role in leading as well as effecting transformative change in healthcare delivery. They form the most resilient workforce, as evident in how they launched into action to manage the COVID-19 outbreak that we faced. They had to adhere to revised updates on infection control procedures and many acquired new skillsets so that they could be deployed to other areas of need.

For long-term sustainability, we must continually ensure that our nursing workforce grows, adapts and develops skillsets that ensure their knowledge and practices are relevant. Over the years, the Ministry of Health introduced initiatives to grow the nursing workforce. For example, the Professional Conversion Programme in Nursing to encourage mid-career switches to nursing, and the Care To Go Beyond campaign to promote the profession to a wider audience. These initiatives boosted our nursing workforce by some 17 per cent between 2013 to 2018. We now have more than 42,000 nurses, forming the backbone of our healthcare system.

To support their professional growth and development, we have introduced new opportunities and pathways for upgrading. For example, the Community Nursing Competency Framework articulates the skills and competencies required of nurses practising in different community care settings at various stages of their career. This facilitates the development of nurses within the sector and prepares those in the acute sector to move into community nursing. The National Nursing Academy was set up to coordinate and support lifelong, workplace learning for nurses across institutions, schools and training providers. It will develop competency frameworks, enable course accreditation, skills recognition and qualification systems. It will also allow workplace-based training to be portable across institutions and settings.

This book, "Nursing: Our Profession, Our Pride" captures the developments of the nursing profession through the eyes of those who have made nursing their career. As the stories of our nurses – whose lives speak of their commitment and dedication in caring for our patients – are panned out in the book, it affirms in us that we have steered the profession in the right direction.

While the focus of doctors is to cure, it's the prerogative of nurses to care. We sincerely thank all our nurses for rising to the occasion whenever called for. Thank you for caring!



**A/Prof Benjamin Ong**  
Director of Medical Services  
(2014 – January 2020)



**A/Prof Kenneth Mak**  
Director of Medical Services

MESSAGE FROM  
CHIEF NURSING OFFICERS  
**Nursing Then,  
Nursing Now**



**TAN SOH CHIN**  
CNO (January 2015 – June 2020)

**PAULIN KOH**  
CNO

**WHAT** you hold in your hands is a huge chunk of Singapore’s nursing history, which dates back to 1 August 1885 when the French nuns stepped out of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus to nurse patients at the Sepoy Lines.

The first part of this 135-year history was documented in a book titled *More Than A Calling*. Published in 1997, it charted our noble profession’s milestones from those humble beginnings all the way to that year. This book picks up from where it left off, and captures the salient aspects of nursing development thereafter... through the experiences of our very own nurses.

At the time of writing, we are in the midst of fighting the global COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) pandemic. It is reminiscent of the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in 2003 and, once again, our nurses are at the forefront of the battle alongside other members of the healthcare family. They are caring for patients infected by the virus, as well as ensuring that patients with other illnesses continue to receive the care they need. The loss of one of our own in 2003, Nursing Officer Hamidah Ismail who was infected by the index SARS patient, is a stark reminder of how nurses put their patients first, often disregarding the pleas of loved ones to quit the profession and “come home”.

Not only have nurses displayed immense courage – this was recognised when Mdm Kwek Puay Ee, then Director of Nursing at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, received the Medal of Valour in 2003 for leading her nurses through the SARS crisis – they have also notched up many achievements to be proud of. This had led the World Health Organization (WHO) to designate 2020 as The Year of the Nurse and Midwife, a timely

acknowledgment of the work done by nurses and midwives as well as a reminder of the critical role they play in keeping the people healthy. Yes, this is a profession we are proud to belong to.

**Visioning and Leadership Development**

In 2009, nursing leaders from the acute hospitals came together for the Director of Nursing Leadership Team workshops to brainstorm their shared vision for nursing and to develop their collective, individual and team leadership skills. These development efforts were expanded to include second-level nursing leaders and were the precursor to the establishment of the Healthcare Leadership College in 2012.

In addition to the united vision for nursing, two major reviews took place in recent years. Their recommendations were wide-ranging and aimed to take the nursing profession further and ensure its sustainability.

**National Nursing Taskforce**

In 2012, the National Nursing Taskforce (NNT) was formed to make recommendations for enhancing growth, professional development and recognition



of nurses. Comprising more than 60 nurses from across the healthcare system and related healthcare sector colleagues, the NNT recommended the CARE package – with 15 recommendations in the areas of Career development, Autonomy, Recognition and Education. This included increasing opportunities for professional growth to meet career aspirations and sponsorships for upgrading; increasing nurses’ base monthly salary; re-designating the top nursing role in

**MILESTONES**



**1999**

Enrolled Nurse education is transferred from the School of Nursing to the Institute of Technical Education.



**2000**

President S.R. Nathan presents the inaugural President’s Award for Nurses in recognition of their outstanding performance and contributions to the profession.

restructured hospitals as Chief Nurse and effectively recognising them as part of the C-suite in hospital senior management.

**Future Nursing Career Review Committee**

Established in 2016 to identify areas of transformation for the nursing profession, the Future Nursing Career Review Committee (FNCRC) had nine recommendations. They were assembled under 3Cs – CARE: Enable nurses to focus on patient care; COMMUNITY: Strengthen community nursing; and COMPETENCY: Develop competencies to prepare nurses for the future. Job-redesign and more automation were introduced. With a greater emphasis on community nursing, nurses were also equipped with broad-based skills – all to enable better patient care, especially in the community.

**Nursing Education**

With the closure of the School of Nursing, the polytechnics took on the role of preparing our Registered Nurses (Nanyang Polytechnic in 1992 and Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 2005) while the Enrolled Nurse education was taken on by the Institute of

Technical Education (ITE) in 1999. Over the years, the nursing education system has evolved with the enhancement of training curriculum. This has equipped our nurses with the right skills and competencies to practise in a transformed healthcare system, and in expanded roles.

The Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies (NUS Nursing) was established in 2005 to provide Singapore's first Bachelor of Science (Nursing) programme. Its first cohort began their studies a year later. In 2009, it also took over the running of the Master Degree in Nursing (the training of Advanced Practice Nurses or APNs) which had been introduced in 2003, under NUS Medicine's Division of Graduate Medical Studies. Post-registration nursing education was also augmented, with the introduction of diploma-to-degree upgrading programmes as well as advanced



**2003**

Nurses are hailed as heroes for their frontline role in the nation's battle against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).



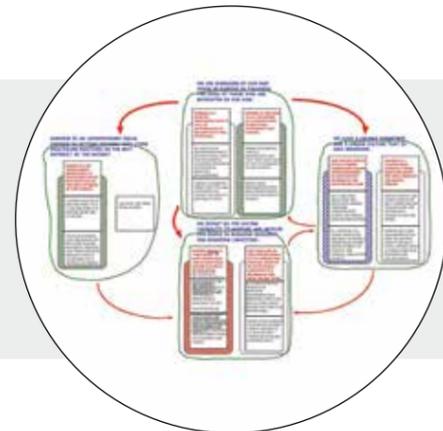
**2005**

The Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies (NUS Nursing) is established to offer Singapore's first full-time Bachelor of Science (Nursing) programme.



**2006**

The Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award is established by the D.S. Lee Foundation to honour outstanding Enrolled Nurses in Singapore's healthcare institutions.



**2009**

The Director of Nursing Leadership Team workshop is held and nurse leaders develop a common vision for the future of nursing.

and graduate diploma programmes.

Looking forward, we established the National Nursing Academy (NNA) in 2019 to promote continuing education and training, enabling nurses to continue their professional development through workplace-based learning.

**Nursing Regulation**

The Nurses and Midwives Act 1975 was repealed in 1999 and replaced that year, enhancing the role of the Singapore Nursing Board. It also improved the protection of the public by making it an offence for unqualified persons to call themselves nurses or midwives, and for employers to hire people without the right qualifications to practise as such. Practising certificates were issued for practising nurses and midwives; provisional registration and temporary registration were also introduced.

The Act was amended in 2005 to provide for the regulation and certification of APNs and introduced Continuing Nursing Education as a condition for the renewal of APN practising certificates. It also provided for the Director of Medical Services or his representative to be a member of the Board. This

allowed for a nurse to be the Chairman of the Board, a first for the profession. Nurse Nellie Tang was formally appointed to the position in 2006.

**Advanced Practice Nurse Development**

The introduction of the APN role in Singapore was in line with the global development of nursing, where Master-prepared nurses were able to take on more complex nursing and make care more accessible for patients.



The APN certification requirements and register were established through the Nurses and Midwives Act in 2005, and APNs were certified under one of four specialised branches of nursing: Acute Care, Medical/Surgical, Community Care and Mental Health. In 2007, we saw the first batch of APNs certified.

**Collaborative Prescribing**

A further enhancement to the APN role was the

introduction of collaborative prescribing rights for APNs in 2019. This enabled APNs and senior pharmacists who had completed and passed the National Collaborative Prescribing Programme, and who had been credentialed by their institutions, to prescribe medications for their patients, thereby affording the patients greater convenience.

### Nursing Role Development

Over the years, nurses have developed their skills to expand the scope of patient care. Nurse-led clinics, new nursing procedures and nursing innovation have all come to the fore, backed by research, and more often than not conducted by nurses. Many of the hospitals have nursing innovation teams which have developed devices, products and procedures that all contribute to better patient care.

Nurses have also played a big role in the development and building of hospitals and other healthcare facilities to care for our growing and ageing population. Unknown to people outside the healthcare sector, there is a substantial number of nurses on the teams which provide inputs to the development and commissioning of the new hospitals – some of them

even have their own hard hats for use during on-site inspections in the building process.

### Strengthening Community Nursing

Faced with an ageing population, community nursing has become an increasingly important aspect of nursing in recent years. Community nursing teams have been making home visits to patients and Community Nursing Posts have been set up around the island, to make care more accessible to Singaporeans. Regional Health Systems have also been piloting community nursing models in an effort to meet the unique needs of the patients in their geographical service areas.



To develop nurses and nurse leaders for the sector, a Community Nursing Scholarship was launched in 2017 and the Singapore Nurse Leaders Programme in 2018. These were designed to equip nurses with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead across settings from acute to community care sectors.

A Community Nursing Competency Framework (CNCF) was also developed in 2019, articulating the roles, responsibilities and competencies required of community nurses in various care settings. The CNCF serves as a reference for nurses to develop the competencies required to care for patients in those settings, and for employers to plan for the necessary training and development of their nurses.

### Outreach, Branding and Recruitment

Programmes such as the Asian Nursing Scholarship and the Professional Conversion Programme (PCP) were introduced to help build up the nursing workforce. Since its introduction in 2003, the PCP has been an avenue for many mid-career switchers to find their true calling in nursing. In 2018, NUS Nursing introduced a two-year Bachelor of Science (Nursing) programme for such mid-career switchers.

In an effort to encourage more young people to choose nursing as a career, the Care To Go Beyond



(CTGB) campaign was launched in 2013, engaging current nurses to share stories about their lives and their work. Nurse ambassadors are also engaged to reach out to the young ones through social media platforms and outreach activities at schools and community events. We also ran three seasons of a Channel 8 nursing drama, You Can Be An Angel Too. Nurses provided consultation and inspiration to the story planning and scripting teams as well as on-site guidance to ensure that nursing procedures were accurately portrayed. Nurses also played cameo roles in all seasons.

We are pleased to say these efforts have paid off, and nursing intakes at the schools increased by 30 per cent from 2013 to 2018.

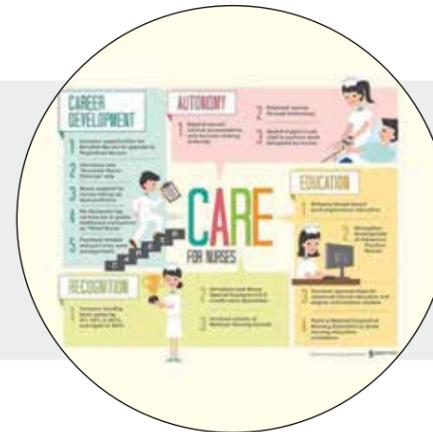
### Recognition

Many know that nursing is a noble profession – and we were deeply honoured when, in 2000, then President of Singapore S.R. Nathan inaugurated the President's Award for Nurses. As the nation's highest accolade for nurses, the award is presented to "role model" nurses who have made outstanding contributions to the nursing profession and the community. The



2013

The national branding campaign Care To Go Beyond is launched to promote the nursing and allied health professions in Singapore.



2014

The Ministry of Health's National Nursing Taskforce recommends a CARE package to improve Career development, Autonomy, Recognition and Education of nurses.



2014

The School of Nursing, which closed in 1999, is demolished. The site is used for the new Outram Community Hospital (which was completed in 2019).



2017

The Future Nursing Career Review Committee recommends 3Cs – Care, Community and Competency – to transform the nursing profession.

award continues to be presented annually by the President of Singapore at the Nurses' Day Reception held at the Istana.

Other awards for nurses include the Nurses' Merit Award and the Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award for Enrolled Nurses. We are also proud that nursing students have topped their cohorts across the School of Health Sciences, and won the Tay Eng Soon Health Sciences Award and Tay Eng Soon Gold Medal (the latter recognises the top student in the polytechnic cohorts who came from an ITE). Such awards recognise the importance of nursing and encourage nurses to continue to give their best. We are heartened by the nominations received from the public and healthcare sector colleagues which express their admiration and support for nurses.

### Singapore Nursing on the International Stage

In 2011-2012, then CNO Pauline Tan was invited to be part of the 10-member International Council of Nurses



Observatory for Licensure and Registration. Singapore also became associated with the International Nurse Regulator Collaborative as well as an Associate Member of the American National Council of the

State Board of Nursing.

In 2019, the Singapore Nurses Association hosted the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Congress in Singapore. The theme for the five-day conference was 'Beyond Healthcare to Health', and it was attended by more than 5,000 delegates from 140 regions and territories. We were honoured that the event was graced by the Director-General of the WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and Singapore's President Mdm Halimah Yacob was the Guest of Honour. The presence of our President at the ICN Congress was a strong signal that the voice of nurses is heard in Singapore at the highest level. In her speech, President Halimah lauded the nurses for having the passion, resilience and stamina to carry out their roles. She

said: "Save one life, and you're a hero. Save a hundred lives and you must be a nurse. It is an honour to be among so many heroes this evening."

### Conclusion

We hope that our President's words above will continue to inspire our nurses and the many more who will walk in their footsteps. As nurses, we have a responsibility to develop our knowledge and skills, our profession and future generations of nurses so that we can continue to care for those who need us. We want to thank all nurses for the care, compassion and warmth they bring to their patients and people around them; and nurses who have dedicated their time and career to help to shape and advance the profession. We are thrilled that some of these talented nurses and outstanding role models are featured in this book. We hope their stories will make existing nurses proud of their passion and profession; and give readers a



greater insight into the broad realm and possibilities of nursing, thereby inspiring more to respond to the calling of being a nurse.

Last but not least, we would like to make a special mention of the nurses who were involved in the creation of this book – the artworks and photography

that fill these pages are original works by nurses. The Resource and Advisory Committees, responsible for content development, comprised nurses too. So you could say that this book is really... **made by nurses, about nurses and for nurses.** We hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed seeing it come together. We would also like to thank the MOHH Corporate Communications team for coordinating the overall work – from conducting interviews, to writing the stories and providing direction for the artwork for the book. Having run the Care To Go Beyond campaign for almost a decade, they are truly a part of the nursing family. ●



2018

Collaborative Prescribing privileges are introduced to enable Advanced Practice Nurses to prescribe medicines in a collaborative framework.



2018

The Singapore Nurse Leaders Programme is introduced to develop mid-level nurses for better collaboration and support to the community care sector.



2019

The National Nursing Academy is established to coordinate and strengthen workplace-based training and develop nursing capabilities.



2020

The Community Nursing Competency Framework is launched. It defines what is expected of community nurses by describing the competencies required and the scope of work.



*Faces of Change,  
Making a Difference*

*John Smith*

# Strengthening the threads of care

## ANG BENG CHOO

Chief Nursing Officer (2001-2007)

Ministry of Health

**A SINGULAR** belief took Ang Beng Choo to the School of Nursing in 1969... that nursing was her calling. Once a nursing student, she expected to stay on the clinical path through her career. However, serendipity had other ideas.

At age 35, while working at Singapore General Hospital as a Nursing Officer, she was offered a World Health Organization scholarship for the Bachelor of Applied Science (Nursing) at Curtin University in Australia, majoring in administration.

"It was very sudden as the original scholarship recipient resigned with one day's notice and I was asked if I was open to nursing administration. Though I knew administration would be tough, I thought I might as well give it a try," Beng Choo, now 68, recalled.

*It was very sudden as the original scholarship recipient resigned with one day's notice and I was asked if I was open to nursing administration. Though I knew administration would be tough, I thought I might as well give it a try.*

After getting her degree, this soft-spoken lady took on management roles in various hospitals and at the Ministry of Health (MOH), where she was Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) from 2001 to 2007. Overseeing policy development for the nursing profession in Singapore, she realised "nurses were stretched on the ground".

In response to the manpower crunch, Beng Choo and her team introduced staffing norms in the acute hospitals to ensure patients' safety.

"There were only broad guidelines then and staffing was left to the discretion of each hospital," she said. "We got staffing ratios and manpower

norms for general wards and intensive care units approved by MOH."

To address the need to have advanced clinical education for nurses, Beng Choo and her team started the Master of Nursing course at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2003. The 18-month course trains Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) who collaborate with doctors and other healthcare professionals to diagnose and manage common medical conditions, including chronic illnesses. The team also worked with NUS to start the three-year Bachelor of Science (Nursing) at the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies in 2006.

"I was fortunate to work with a great team during my stewardship as CNO," Beng Choo said. "Many people helped me along the way, including (Nurse Educator) K. Premarani, who was instrumental in designing and coordinating the master's and bachelor's courses as I was not a Nurse Educator."

Thanks to the team's efforts, the Nurses and Midwives Act was amended in 2006 to include the regulation of APNs. This was a key milestone in the profession's progress as it recognised the nurses' potential to take on added

responsibilities and raised their status as an important contributor to the healthcare system.

Another key milestone for nursing was having a nurse chair the Singapore Nursing Board, a role previously held by the Director of Medical Services who was a doctor. In addition, a structured career path was introduced for registered nurses who could grow and develop their skills in three areas: clinical, education and management.

Not surprising then that this unassuming nurse has had a passion for needlework – sewing, knitting and crocheting – since her school days. After all, she did play a significant role in stitching together the nursing tapestry in Singapore. ●



# The sky is her limit

**PAULINE TAN**

Chief Nursing Officer (2007-2014)

Ministry of Health

**FROM** Enrolled Nurse to Chief Nursing Officer to Chief Executive Officer... not bad for someone who, at age 18, joined nursing to supplement the household income. No wonder Pauline Tan says her personal motto is “to be the best that I can be”.

Drawn to nursing after being inspired by a close nurse-neighbour, Pauline started her career at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. She still remembers a patient who suffered from lupus (a disease where one’s immune system attacks the organs and tissues). Although the patient was very demanding, she recalls building rapport with her and they corresponded via letters for many years: “Years later, after seeing her obituary in the newspaper, I went to her wake to say goodbye because of the bond I had built with her.”



Now 60, Pauline considers nursing a calling and a service to mankind. “So, I served with my whole heart,” she added. “And I think my leaders noticed; they gave me opportunities.”

One such opportunity was a World Health Organization Scholarship which armed her with a Bachelor of Nursing and Graduate Diploma in Nursing Administration from La Trobe University in 1983. More than a decade later, she added the Master of Science in Asia-Pacific Human Resource Management at the National University of Singapore.

By 2007, when she was the Institute of Mental Health’s Director of Nursing, the Ministry of Health (MOH) came knocking: they wanted her to be its Chief Nursing Officer.

The avid learner agreed, taking on a Master in Public Administration at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy to be better at her role.

Pauline faced three key challenges during her seven years at MOH: unifying the nursing community to pursue national objectives over institutional and cluster goals, enhancing the intermediate and long-term care sector and developing the profession at the national level.

**“Don’t be afraid to take risks and don’t discount yourselves. You can be anything you want to be. The sky is the limit!”**

The 2006 President’s Award for Nurses recipient recalls inviting organisational development thought leaders Daniel Kim and Diane Cory (D&D) to conduct workshops for nursing directors and leaders in 2009. It turned out to be the “galvanising move for collective envisioning of what we wanted nursing to be”. Subsequently, a local consultant customised a self-

empowerment and self-leadership programme for nurses, or Nursing DIY.

These paved the way for the National Nursing Taskforce in 2012 and the Future Nursing Career Review Committee in 2016. Pauline’s sense of mission caught the attention of the International Council of Nurses, which invited her to sit on the 10-member International Observatory for Licensure and Registration. As a result, Singapore had a place on the international nursing map. This was followed by four years at Yishun Community Hospital where, as its first Chief Executive Officer (CEO), she set up the hospital to serve patients in the north.

“Nursing taught me to care for patients in so many aspects, including the psychosocial, emotional, financial and spiritual. I’m glad my nursing background enabled me to approach things as CEO in a holistic, systematic and objective manner,” she said.

Now, having moved to private healthcare, she affirms that she’s still a nurse at heart. And here’s her advice to nurses: “Don’t be afraid to take risks and don’t discount yourselves. You can be anything you want to be. The sky is the limit!” ●

**GROWING** up, Yong Keng Kwang, Paulin Koh and Margaret Lee never thought they would become nurses. However, Keng Kwang and Margaret are now Chief Nurses (at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Alexandra Hospital respectively), while Paulin has just moved from the Chief Nurse role at Changi General Hospital to take on the mantle of Chief Nursing Officer at the Ministry of Health (MOH). All three still have a common mission... to inspire nurses to propel the profession to greater heights.

Keng Kwang and Paulin signed up for nursing through the Public Service Commission Scholarship. However, Keng Kwang – an avid football player in his younger days and regular gym-goer to this day – wanted to be a physiotherapist while Paulin was originally a National University of Singapore biology graduate. Margaret only chose to take up nursing after her O levels.

Thankfully, they found their calling; nursing is their first, and only job.

At Tan Tock Seng Hospital, which he joined in 1996, Keng Kwang played key roles in the Nursing Division's quest for ISO, SQC (Singapore Quality Class) and Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditations. The 49-year-old father of three actively championed Lean initiatives, quality improvement projects and the use of innovative technology.

Paulin, meanwhile, rose through the ranks over 20 years at KK Women's and Children's Hospital before joining Changi General Hospital as Chief Nurse in 2014. In between, she did a stint at the

Chief Nursing Officer's Office at MOH from 2003 to 2005, where she had a hand in amending the Nurses and Midwives Act to introduce the Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) role. Now, the 52-year-old mother of two and jogging enthusiast is back for a second stint at MOH as the Chief Nursing Officer.

Margaret joined the National University Hospital in 1996 and was an Assistant Director of Nursing when she was offered the opportunity to lead the nursing team at Alexandra Hospital (AH, which came under the National University Health System in June 2018). The 44-year-old mother of three is now the Chief Nurse at AH.

In their decades of nursing, the three of them have witnessed and been agents of the profession's transformation.

The Daniel Kim and Diane Cory (D&D) workshops in 2009, where Singapore's nurse leaders brainstormed for the future of nursing, were particularly memorable for Keng Kwang. The recipient of the 2014 President's Award for Nurses said: "Those sessions convinced us that nurses have more to contribute and united us to pursue a national agenda."

MOH subsequently set up the National Nursing Taskforce (NNT) in 2012 to strengthen

# Agents of change



<p><b>YONG KENG KWANG</b>  <i>Chief Nurse</i>                  Tan Tock Seng Hospital</p>	<p><b>PAULIN KOH</b>  <i>Chief Nursing Officer</i>                  Ministry of Health</p>	<p><b>MARGARET LEE</b>  <i>Chief Nurse</i>                  Alexandra Hospital</p>
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the development of the nursing profession, and the Future Nursing Career Review Committee (FNCRC) in 2016 to develop future-ready nurses.

NNT was "a springboard to APNs' rights to prescribing today" and there are now "more stories about nurses in the public domain", Keng Kwang observed.

Meanwhile, FNCRC increased awareness that nurses must embrace technology and build capability in the community. Paulin explained: "As our population ages, nurses must help people live well, get well and age well, playing a role from preventive health all the way to end-of-life care."

She is heartened that perceptions of nursing are changing. Instead of bedside care providers who do mundane work, Paulin feels nurses are now seen as highly knowledgeable and skilled professionals who work with many care providers and deal with IT and data processing. Margaret added: "Nursing has progressed from a role that was more about taking orders to a thinking role which develops thought leaders."

As a result, she felt nurses are now increasingly involved in decision-making, governance and policy-making.

This trio has great hopes for future nurse leaders to continue the good work and they have a wealth of experience to impart. Margaret summed it up best: "We must be certain of our value as nurses before we can take the leap of faith to do things that were not done before. We must also look beyond our clusters' diversity and be united in striving for what's important. After all, we exist only because of the patients we care for." ●

# Spreading

**THERE** is a group of cheerleaders within Singapore's nursing fraternity who spread the word about nursing to everyone they meet, debunking myths and stereotypes, and share why they chose to be a nurse – one story at a time. Meet the Care To Go Beyond (CTGB) ambassadors!

When Muhaymin Sopii had an offer to join the police force after his National Service, he passed on it as he was more drawn to the heartwork of nursing.

That said, not everyone was open to the idea of him becoming a nurse and he revealed he was called *siao* (crazy in Mandarin) for choosing the profession. Which is why Muhaymin, 37, uses his role as a CTGB ambassador to share his experiences in nursing and the enormous satisfaction he gets from his career: "Hearing parents tell their children 'next time, you can be a nurse too' makes me feel like I've hit a home run!"

Ian Elangkovan and Thomas Lee sing the same tune. As nursing ambassadors, they take the opportunity to debunk myths, especially those about male nurses.

Thomas, 33, recalls his most gratifying moment at a CTGB outreach event when



**ASHLEIGH PANG**

Staff Nurse

Tan Tock Seng Hospital

a couple gained a new perspective of nursing after speaking with him. "They were surprised to learn about the different career tracks available," he recalled with a proud smile.

In late 2016, Ian had just started nursing school at the National University of Singapore (NUS) when he was nominated as an ambassador. The 25-year-old, now a Paediatric Nurse,



**IAN ELANGKOVAN**

Staff Nurse

KK Women's and Children's Hospital

said he was initially apprehensive about talking to people about his profession: "As a student nurse, I felt like I had little to offer. But I started sharing experiences about my clinical attachments, and stories I heard from my professors, which made a difference."

His former schoolmate Ashleigh Pang recounts how her years as a CTGB

# #happinurse



**MARILYN DAVID**

Lecturer

Nanyang Polytechnic

ambassador – from a nursing student to a full-fledged nurse – helped her see the growth of the profession over time.

"There is not only an increasing number of applicants for the nursing degree every year, but also a growing cohort for the course at NUS," observed Ashleigh, 25. "Being an ambassador allows me to change negative perceptions of nursing, and to reflect on



**MUHAYMIN SOPII**

Staff Nurse

Changi General Hospital

the reason I joined."

The Healthcare Merit Award scholarship recipient added: "With more people joining the profession, I think the future of healthcare looks promising."

In Marilyn David's case, a personal tragedy spurred her to join the profession... and she shares this openly with the young people she meets at CTGB outreach events. At the age of



**THOMAS LEE**

Senior Staff Nurse

National University Polyclinics

14, as the main caregiver to her mother who was diagnosed with cancer, she saw how nurses who cared for her mum were ever-present and implemented the care plans for each patient with a smile.

The 32-year-old mother of one said: "As an ambassador today, I believe that nurses contribute to something greater than themselves, and I want to spread the word far and wide."●

# Never too late for nursing

**DIONG NGUK SING**

Nurse Manager

St. Andrew's  
Community Hospital



**GROWING** up in rural Malaysia, Diong Nguk Sing was drawn to nursing. However, her family's financial circumstances and the lack of educational opportunities led her to administrative jobs in Malaysia and then Singapore.

"My family was very poor and we lived in a *kampong* (village) in a rural part of Malaysia. There were limited opportunities to study nursing there," she recalled.

After graduating in 2001, she joined a biochemical company here. Two years later, she heard about the Healthcare Professional Conversion Programme (PCP) for nurses – a two-year nursing programme offered by Workforce Singapore for mid-career switchers who wish to be nurses. Nguk Sing, who was 26 then, seized the opportunity and applied for it.

Her return to school to pursue a Diploma in Nursing at Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) was not entirely smooth sailing though. As English is not her first language, she struggled to keep up in class and had to retake her

biology module. "I had to study very hard to catch up, but I refused to give up," said the passionate lady, who used to cope with the stress by taking a bicycle out for a spin at East Coast Park.

Nguk Sing's dream finally materialised when she graduated as a Registered Nurse in 2005 and started work at St. Andrew's Community Hospital (SACH). The transition from an office job to nursing was initially challenging for her as she had to learn how to deal with patients' family members. Being patient and being able to listen were key, she said.

Since then, Nguk Sing has made great strides in the profession, both professionally and academically. Now a Nurse Manager at SACH, she received her Advanced Diploma in Gerontology from NYP in 2011 and a degree in nursing from Griffith University in 2013.

The culmination of all this hard work was the Nurses Merit Award in 2015, which she was gratified to receive. The award is given to nurses who have shown consistent and outstanding performance in their work, and have made contributions to promote the

*"I have no regrets being a nurse and I'm happy that people view nursing more positively today. To the team behind the campaign, don't stop what you're doing. And to those interested in the PCP, my advice is to give it a shot and not give up!"*

nursing profession.

Despite her success, this amiable lady remains humble and maintains that her biggest motivation comes from seeing her patients recover. She fondly remembers one

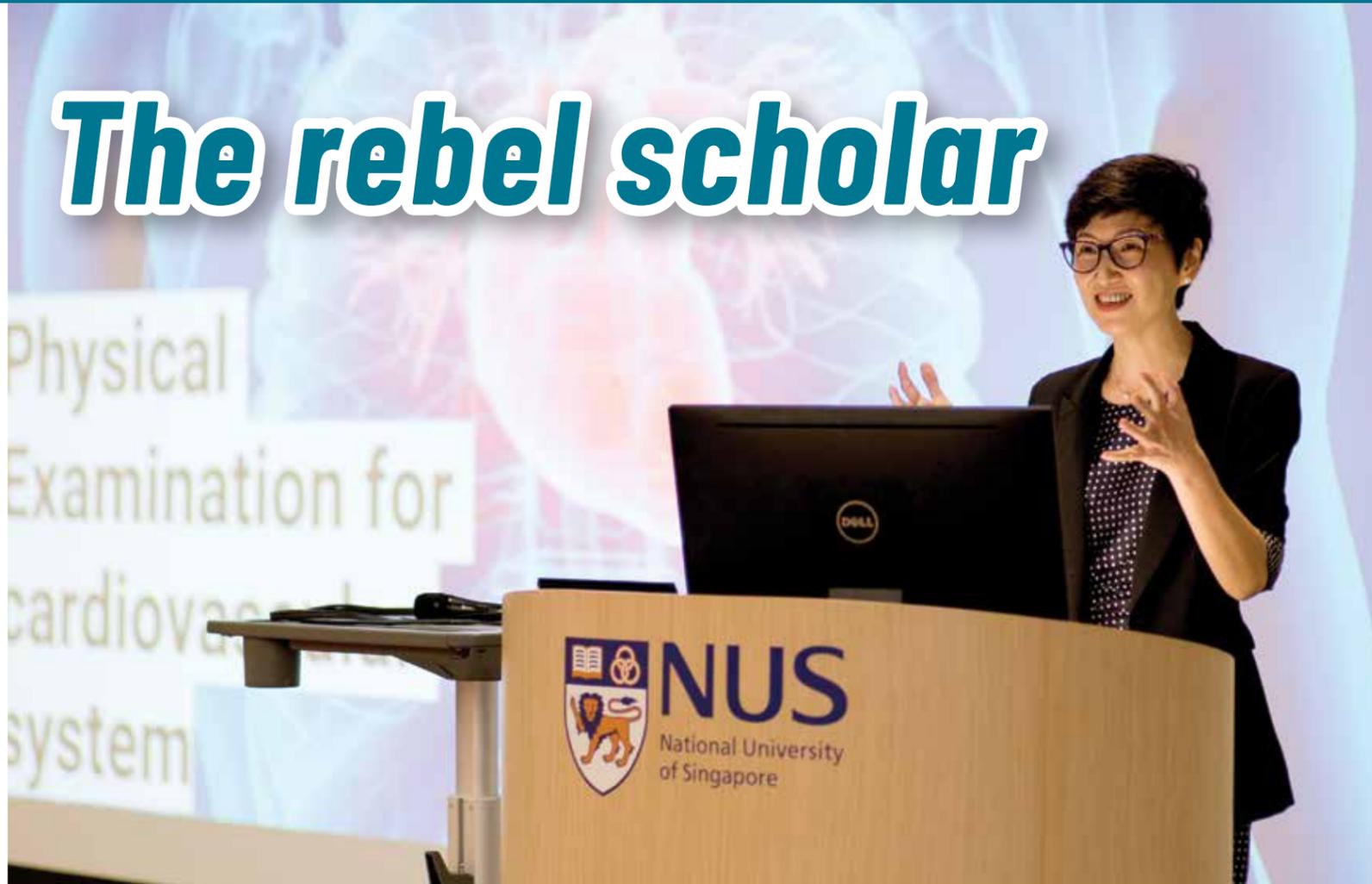
journey to work, where a former patient recognised her and called out to thank her for her care. "During her stay at SACH, she was very ill and could not eat or speak well. I was very happy to see her looking so healthy!" she recalled with a smile.

Now a Singapore citizen, Nguk Sing is also heartened by how the perception of nursing in Singapore has improved over the years from being considered a menial job to now where it is seen as a promising, fulfilling career. She gives part of the credit to the Care To Go Beyond branding campaign for nursing and allied health.

"I have no regrets being a nurse and I'm happy that people view nursing more positively today. To the team behind the campaign, don't stop what you're doing. And to those interested in the PCP, my advice is to give it a shot and not give up!" ●



# The rebel scholar



## ZHOU WENTAO

Senior Lecturer and Programme Director, Master of Nursing, Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies National University of Singapore

**AT 19,** Dr Zhou Wentao was a first-year student in Qingdao Medical College in China, following in her mother's

footsteps to be a doctor. A year later, driven by a desire to be independent and study overseas, she had signed up for the Asian Nursing Scholarship (ANS).

"I did not know much about the scholarship. All I knew was that they were having interviews at my school, so I decided to go with my roommate. I wanted to go overseas and be independent, away from my family. I'm a

rebel!" said Wentao, with a laugh.

Having qualified for the ANS, she convinced her parents that it was a genuine programme and they eventually supported her decision. Determined to not let them down, Wentao worked "thrice as hard", especially since English wasn't her first language. It took hours of practice and a "thick skin" for her to master the language.

*"I am very fortunate! Many people supported me, allowing me to get to where I am today as an APN and yet have the chance to teach. This is important as it is about training our future nurses."*

It all paid off when, armed with her Diploma in Nursing from Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), she started work at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in 1997. As she settled into life here – she became a Singapore citizen in 2002 – Wentao kept furthering her academic qualifications in nursing, with some financial assistance from her employer: an advanced diploma in neuroscience, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree and, by 2019, she achieved her PhD. It was during her PhD work at the National University of Singapore (NUS) when the school invited her to become a lecturer, a role she took up to give back to the school.

Now, this feisty 47-year-old lady is a Senior Lecturer and Director, Master of Nursing Programme at NUS Nursing where she teaches clinical reasoning and neuroscience-related topics.

Her teaching hours allow her to include clinical work as an Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) at the National

Neuroscience Institute (NNI). The dual role enables her to keep up to date with clinical changes, helping her to be more confident and for her teaching to remain relevant. Her clinical experience and sharing also help students embrace new technology and better transit from students in the Master of Nursing programme to APN interns. As a qualified collaborative prescribing practitioner, she contributes to better patient care as she is able to order tests and prescribe medications.

"I am very fortunate! Many people supported me, allowing me to get to where I am today as an APN and also have the chance to teach. This is important as it is about training our

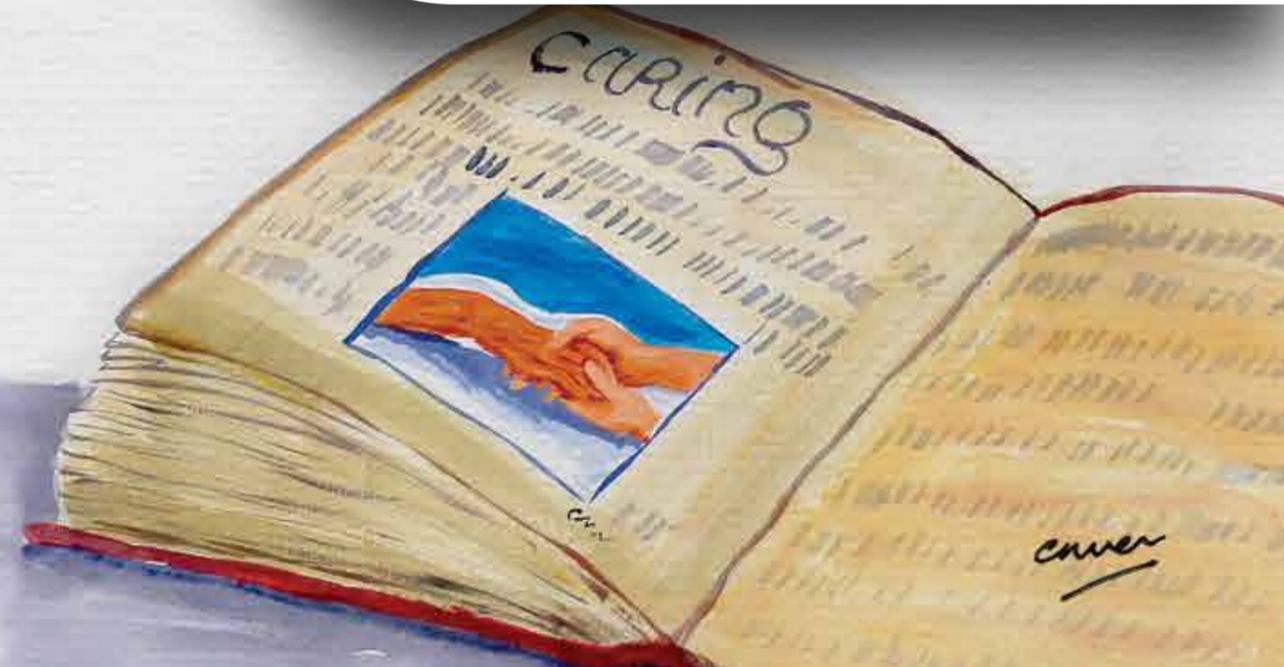
future nurses," said the mother of two boys, who enjoys visiting art exhibitions, painting and spending time with her family.

As for the big decision she made all those years ago, Wentao has no regrets becoming a nurse instead of a doctor: "Healthcare is 30 per cent treatment and 70 per cent care, where nurses play a big part. Nursing is a humble profession and, if we work hard together, we will be able to lead Singapore into the next era of healthcare." ●





**2** *Teaching to Care,  
Caring to Teach*



# The accidental educator

## EMILY ANG

Head, Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies  
National University of Singapore

Group Chief Nurse  
National University Health System

**THERE** are days when being called professor still bemuses Emily Ang, Head of Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS Nursing).

As a young student, she expected to be working in the ward as a “regular” nurse. However, as fate would have it, being one of the top nurses in her hospital earned Emily a scholarship to study oncology in the United Kingdom. On her return in the late 1980s, she was tasked to conceptualise and launch the Certificate in Oncology Nursing at the School of Nursing to advance oncology care in Singapore. When the School of Nursing closed its doors in 2000, Emily – by now, referred to proudly as “Prof Emily” by the nursing community – went on to Nanyang Polytechnic to set up the Advanced Diploma in Nursing (Oncology).

Even after Emily returned to the clinical setting, academia



kept knocking on her door. In 2014, it came in the form of an offer to head NUS Nursing. Her response: “Being a senior nurse, how could I simply watch from the sidelines and not extend a helping hand?”

Together with her team, the 2012 President’s Award for Nurses recipient developed the part-time Bachelor of

**Not only are they given opportunities to showcase their knowledge, but they also move up the career ladder quickly. My dream is that the school continues to attract talented students and be seen as a world leader in nursing education.**

Science (Nursing Practice) as well as the degree programme for the Professional Conversion Programme for Registered Nurses and the Graduate Diploma in Community Health Nursing. NUS Nursing also offers a PhD programme for budding nurse researchers.

In 2018, the school had its largest intake for the nursing degree programme, with 313 students comprising

school leavers and mid-career professionals.

Now, this veteran nurse, who is also the Group Chief Nurse of the National University Health System, finds joy in inspiring students and influencing care at the bedside. Even as she finds herself implementing new pedagogies and developing curriculum, the self-described “perfectionist” believes in staying relevant in the clinical setting. After all, that is what nursing is all about. As she puts it: “My colleagues work in the

hospital one day a week. This way, students can benefit from their lecturers’ insights from the clinical setting too.”

Emily finds it gratifying to see that many NUS Nursing students are considered leaders in their fields and acknowledged for their work with accolades like the Nurses’ Merit Award. “Not only are they given opportunities to showcase their knowledge, but they also move up the career ladder quickly. My dream is that the school continues to attract talented students and be seen as a world leader in nursing education,” she added.

With her time stretched as much as it is, this cheerful lady decompresses by whipping up scrumptious Peranakan dishes such as ayam buah keluak for her family. “Nothing makes me happier than seeing the satisfied smiles on the faces of my family after they taste the dishes,” she said.

And then, with a grin, she added: “With the exception of nursing, of course!” ●



# An eye for education

## CHITRA VALLEI GOVINDASAMY

Assistant Director of Nursing

Singapore National Eye Centre

**CHITRA** Vallei Govindasamy's first job as a school clerk left her wanting more. "Instead of poring over papers, I wanted to show care to those in need. Nursing was the first profession that came to mind and I dived in head first, without even doing any research," recalled the unassuming Assistant Director of Nursing (ADN) with a laugh.

She entered the School of Nursing in 1986 and joined National University Hospital when she graduated. In 1999, Chitra was in the pioneer batch of students taking an Advanced Diploma in Nursing (Ophthalmology) at Nanyang Polytechnic. During her time as a Senior Staff Nurse at Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC), she was concerned about the course being scrapped in 2012 due to a low intake. "Without a post-graduate education



programme, nurses could not progress, and these were excellent nurses. I felt that I had to do something," she explained.

By 2016, she had done something about it. Chitra co-founded the Education Development Unit in SNEC, working towards having a graduate certificate in ophthalmic nursing in collaboration with Curtin University in Australia.

"Together with an education consultant, I developed the curriculum and this was all very new to me. What gives me the most satisfaction is that the course intake, though small, is slowly increasing. All the students who have completed the programme so far have done well and are now eye-trained. They can finally move on to do their master's and PhDs," said Chitra.

The hard work has paid off; not just for the nurses, but also for patients and doctors. In the past, only doctors could administer an intra-vitreous injection at the

**“What gives me the most satisfaction is that the course intake, though small, is slowly increasing. All the students who have completed the programme so far have done well and are now eye-trained.”**

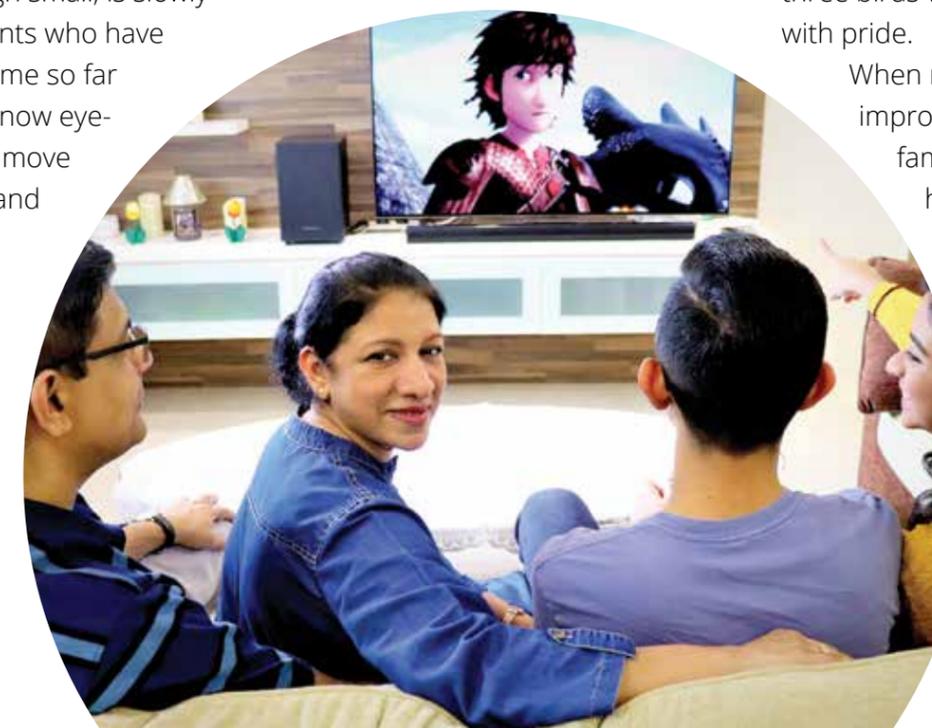
SNEC clinics. With the introduction of the Intra-vitreous Injection by Registered Nurses module in the graduate programme, more nurses have gained competency in the skill. The outcome was double-edged though; the Registered Nurses were stretched as they also had to perform ophthalmic procedures such as post-operation eye

dressing, lacrimal syringing and many more!

Again, Chitra took the opportunity to come up with an in-house programme, the Senior Enrolled Nurse Development Programme (Ophthalmology), to train Enrolled Nurses to take

on these tasks. "Now, I'm sure you can guess with Enrolled Nurses taking on the work of the Registered Nurses, who would take on what the Enrolled Nurses used to do? We trained ophthalmic assistants to take on their job scope, of course! The payoff? The doctors are less stressed, patients are happier and the nurses are upskilled! I call that killing three birds with one stone," she said, with pride.

When not thinking about how to improve her nurses' skills, her family takes up the rest of the headspace of this chatty 57-year-old mother of two. She spends her free time watching Hollywood blockbusters like Star Wars and Avengers with her family – "basically whatever my teenagers want to watch". ●



**TAY WEI SERN**

Deputy Director, Health Sciences  
and Course Manager, Allied Health  
Institute of Technical Education

# Nurturing tomorrow's nurses

**AT EVERY** step of Tay Wei Sern's journey in nursing, there was always a nudge.

The first came from his father, who encouraged the then 18-year-old to join nursing after seeing Wei Sern's two aunts and a cousin carve out successful careers in the profession.

The second nudge came about five years into his nursing career, when he was working as a Staff Nurse at Singapore General Hospital after graduating from the School of Nursing in 1985. He took the leap in 1990 to work for two years in a government hospital in Saudi Arabia where he realised most of his colleagues had a nursing degree.

That led to the third nudge: the desire to upskill himself. "At the time there was no nursing degree in Singapore. You

had to go overseas to upgrade your skills," said Wei Sern, who saved up for a degree course in nursing at the University of Newcastle in 1993. He eventually got a master's degree from the same university.

That experience convinced him that he could contribute to nursing in more ways than caring for patients. On his return to Singapore in the late 1990s, he became a Nurse Educator in a private hospital.

In 2000, Wei Sern joined the Institute of Technical Education's (ITE) nursing programme as a lecturer. His timing could not have been better. The School of Nursing closed that year and its programme was folded into the ITE's Nitec in Nursing course. The first intake had two classes, with 80 students.

Fast forward 20 years, and the Nitec in Nursing course has grown to 22 classes with about 500 students each year. And Wei Sern is now the Deputy Director, Health Sciences and Course Manager, Allied Health at ITE's School of Applied & Health Sciences. His team has trained over 6,700 Enrolled Nurses so far.

"This is a significant achievement... many of our students have upgraded and become Staff Nurses and Nurse Managers," said Wei Sern, 55, with some measure of pride.

The nudges hadn't ended though. The next one came in 2005, when the nursing course moved to ITE College East. Wei Sern and his team were asked by the then principal Tan Seng Hwa and



the school's director Ang Kiam Wee – men he described as "visionary" – to set up a healthcare simulation centre.

Wanting a training centre that guided students in real-life scenarios, the team consulted experts from the United States and Australia.

Said Wei Sern: "At the time it was innovative. We called it a SPRING model. You spring from classroom to reality. It allows students to learn...

and make mistakes, in a safe and risk-free environment. To give that sense of realism, the

centre has manikins (anatomical human models used in education) that have physiological changes like a human being; they can breathe and have a heartbeat. Students can insert an intravenous cannula (a tube that can be inserted into the body) into the manikin's arm while the teacher can simulate vital signs and create scenarios."

In 2013, to align with the Singapore Nursing Board's core competencies, the school developed a critical thinking module. Now an aspirational model for many nursing schools, with many visits from overseas visitors, the centre's nudge is towards artificial intelligence and augmented reality.

That said, Wei Sern – who received the 2019 President's Award for Nurses – believes the human touch is still the most important skill for a nurse.

The movie buff who loves to listen to classical music adds: "Empathy, compassion, care... however far we go technologically, we as nurses must not lose sight of what is the heart of nursing." ●

**Empathy, compassion, care... however far we go technologically, we as nurses must not lose sight of what is the heart of nursing.**

LAU MENG ER

Nurse Educator

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital

# Better nurses,



**WHEN** you first meet Lau Meng Er, she may remind you of your favourite school teacher; warm, encouraging, patient, and always with a smile on her face. Not surprising, given that she is a Nurse

Educator at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital (NTFGH).

While the 33-year-old is passionate about training the next generation of nurses, she is equally passionate about

using technology on this journey. In fact, one of Meng Er's proudest moments was being part of the team that developed JurongHealth Virtual Nurse, a mobile training application for nurses

# thanks to 'Virtual Nurse'

**The future of nursing will change, as we attract a new generation of nurses, including myself, who are digital natives. We need to embrace technology to be better in our work.**

that uses 3-D gaming technology.

"The app is designed to facilitate learning for nurses through practice and simulation; they can play the scenarios over and over again on their phones," said the mother of two, who had her first taste of nursing education as a Clinical Instructor at the National University Hospital's Emergency Medicine Department.

The Virtual Nurse comprises three phases, each containing different episodes or

scenarios. Nurses have to complete all the episodes in each phase before going to the next level. More than 90 percent of the NTFGH nurses have used the app and feedback has been positive.

Meng Er, who attended a three-month course on basic gaming with her team so they could communicate better with the app developers, feels a great deal of satisfaction that this app helps nurses improve their clinical skills and prepares them for scenarios that they may encounter.

"Nurses are very busy. This app allows them to use it anywhere, any time; after their shift or on their way to work or home," said Meng Er who joined NTFGH (now a part of the National

University Health System) in 2013.

Over her six years at NTFGH, she has learnt how to create lesson plans, develop a curriculum and even embarked on a postgraduate diploma in higher education from the National Institute of Education. The focus on education is reflective of her passion for helping others that was sparked in her teenage years. Learning first aid skills in the St John Ambulance Brigade during her secondary school days, she enjoyed sharing that knowledge with her juniors.

Now, Meng Er hopes she and her team can come up with more training apps for nurses, as she sees them as the way of the future: "Learning is constantly evolving, not just in healthcare or nursing. We must embrace new methods of learning and be open to new ideas that are effective and relevant.

"The future of nursing will change, as we attract a new generation of nurses, including myself, who are digital natives. We need to embrace technology to be better in our work." ●



# Giving wings to wound care

## SUSIE GOH

Master Trainer

St Luke's Eldercare

**MOST** nurses focus their attention on caring for people. Susie Goh took it one step further: she has tended to a feathered "patient" too.

It happened in 1998, when an eagle landed on the floor of Ward 21 at St Luke's Hospital. While her colleagues panicked, wondering how to deal with the bird, the no-nonsense Susie was unperturbed. Noticing a large gash on its beak, she calmly held the eagle down and actually told it sternly: "Don't move, I am going to dress your wound!"

Her colleagues were amazed. The eagle, probably grateful, was returned to the Jurong Bird Park, thanks to an identity tag on its leg. And Susie got the

inspiration to make a crucial decision – taking up wound care as a speciality. The move was key in having her efforts recognised with the President's Award for Nurses in 2011, making her the first nurse from a community hospital to get that award.

Now a Master Trainer at St Luke's Eldercare (SLE) Learning Hub – she stepped down from her role as Executive Director at St Luke's Community Wound Centre (St Luke's Hospital) on 31 December 2019 – Susie emphasises that wound care is not just about using the best dressing – a perception that many people have of the speciality.

"Assessing the wound and knowing exactly what to do thereafter are more important. Above all, our patients must not be in any pain as far as possible," added the nurse who joined the profession in 1977.

The St Luke's Community Wound Centre (St Luke's Hospital), a project Susie spearheaded in 2017, offers basic to intermediate courses which teach healthcare workers how to better tend to their patients' wounds and thereby improve their quality of life. As the nation ages and many will rehabilitate



*"I came up with a tiered system to ensure that all wounds will be cared for by a team of trained nurses. At the most basic tier, nurses who have undergone the basic wound course can manage simple wound cases."*

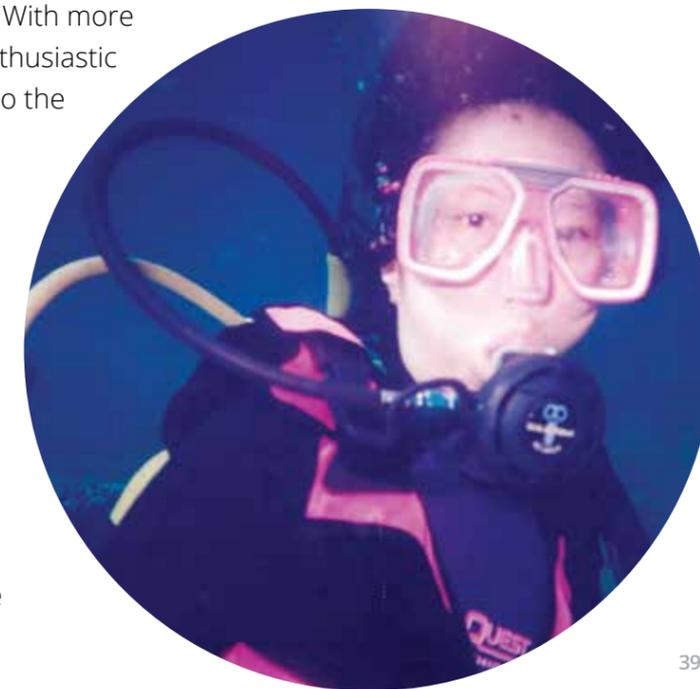
for by a team of trained nurses. At the most basic tier, nurses who have undergone the basic wound course can manage simple wound cases. With more experience and, if they are enthusiastic enough, they can progress into the second and, eventually, third tiers. By then, they are able to manage more complex wound cases."

As for her new role, Susie added: "My next phase of life is to reach out to the community and boost the capabilities of nursing homes and home care nurses to provide better wound care to patients and the elderly in the

community"

This mother of two brings the same vigour to her personal life as she does to her professional one. She is an avid diver (below), a hobby she picked up to bond with her son (now 34). When she needs to slow down, she turns to her crochet hooks, painting brushes and knitting needles.

As for that feathered patient, she claims the encounter inspires her to this day: "My dream, which began in 1998, of expanding our wound management capabilities was met with opposing views. It frustrates me at times, but when I think about that eagle, I bounce right back up."●



# Inspired to teach

## EVANGELINE TAN

Staff Nurse

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

**THANKS** to a visit to Nanyang Polytechnic's open house in 2013, Evangeline Tan fell in love... with nursing.

Like most visitors to these annual affairs, she was keeping her options open. As a single-pointer O-level student, she could have taken her pick from any of the courses available at the school but she felt drawn to nursing.

She was almost convinced after a chat with the lecturers and seeing the facilities. What sealed the deal was realising how nursing knowledge could be useful in her personal life.

That affirmation came soon enough, when her grandmother suffered a heart failure and had to be hospitalised.

It was only natural for the filial granddaughter, by then in the final year of her diploma studies, to care for the elderly lady using her nursing knowledge to the full. Providing the best bedside care she could deliver in those trying moments ended any doubts Evangeline may have had about having



made the right career choice.

Her hard work in those three years paid off when she emerged as the Tay Eng Soon Health Sciences Award Gold winner (given to the top nursing graduate of the cohort). The cherry on the cake was clinching a Healthcare Scholarship Award from MOH Holdings to pursue her nursing degree at the Singapore Institute of Technology. Again, she graduated first in her class!

**“Nursing grants you access to a large knowledge bank and it is indeed very useful... I want to train future generations of nurses and get them inspired too. What makes nursing unique is the heartwork we (nurses) put in.”**

Now 22, Evangeline is close to completing her first year as a renal ward nurse in Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. Transitioning from a student nurse to a professional one was challenging as she had to learn to think fast on her feet and respond to her patients' needs.

Seeing the complexity of some of her cases has made her realise the

importance of continuous learning and training to keep up with the advancements in healthcare to be a better nurse.

So this young woman has set her sights higher; she wants to pursue her master's degree, and hopes to be a nurse educator.

“Nursing grants you access to a large knowledge bank and it is indeed very useful... I want to train future generations of nurses and get them inspired too. What makes nursing

unique is the heartwork we (nurses) put in,” said the talented pianist who has been tinkling the ivories since her primary school days.

Evangeline attributes her successes to her family's support and she is grateful for their small acts of love. She still remembers nights during her overseas exchange programmes when her mum often stayed up past 3am (Singapore time) to ensure she was back safe in the hostel. Or her dad ironing her nursing uniform and preparing supper so that she can rest after an afternoon shift. He still irons her uniforms for her.

“My parents never imposed any expectations except to do something I like. This way, the learning process becomes more enjoyable,” she said.

“When my *didi* (younger brother) wanted to join nursing, they had no objections... he is now on his way to becoming a nurse too! It feels really great to have another nurse in the family, we can always check on one another and exchange patient stories,” added the chirpy *missy*. ●





**3** *Breaking New  
Ground, Creating  
a Better Tomorrow*

niotesm

# The right dose of care

**OW YONG LAI CHAN**

*Principal Assistant Nurse*

Institute of Mental Health

**FORTY** years ago, Ow Yong Lai Chan watched with awe as her adoptive mother and aunt cared for their eldest sister who struggled with depression. That appreciation matured into a desire to help others and, soon, the teenaged Lai Chan was en route to becoming a nurse.

Having qualified as an Enrolled Nurse in 1985, her ingrained passion to help people with mental health issues saw her join the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) right away. Now, 34 years on, she is still with IMH and, as a Principal Assistant Nurse (PAN), relishes the opportunity to care for long-stay patients in the hospital.

“Over the years, my patients have come to trust me,” said Lai Chan, 58, who has known most of her patients for years. The desire to do more for these recipients of long-term care at IMH also led to the shy mother of three girls upgrading her skills by attending a series of training programmes on using the ConviDose system. Introduced by IMH in 2015 for long-stay wards to improve productivity and medication safety, the



system’s impact on patient care really captured her attention.

“The ConviDose system allows pre-packed, patient-specific medication to be administered to patients at the right time and in the right dose. This personalised management system helps us nurses keep track of our patients’ multiple medicines and when they should get it,” explained Lai Chan.

It gives her great pride to be part of a team of PANs trained to administer medications through the ConviDose system which was previously the responsibility of the Registered

**Being empowered to take on more responsibilities displays the confidence that our leaders have in us. This gives me immense satisfaction as a psychiatric nurse.**



Nurses. Trained PANs can administer medicines using the machine under the supervision of Registered Nurses and the scheme has since been extended to Senior Assistant Nurses too. Not only has this resulted in less waiting time for patients, it eases the nurses’ workload in packing the medications. It means PANs can spend more time providing better care for their patients. It has also increased Lai Chan’s confidence as a nurse.

“Being empowered to take on more responsibilities displays the confidence that our leaders have in us. This gives me immense satisfaction as a psychiatric nurse,” said the soft-spoken woman who received the Pingat Bakti Setia (Long Service Medal) as part of the 2016 National Day Awards for her dedication and care.

As an avid baker, she also gets satisfaction from teaching her patients how to bake and seeing them munch happily on the cookies and cakes they make together. Calling it her form of stress relief, Lai Chan’s baking skills (above) obviously are appreciated by family, friends, colleagues and patients.

In fact, her grateful patients have an affectionate name for her. They call her “mum”. ●

# With a steady hand and heart

## JEDIDAH LIEOW

Advanced Practice Nurse

National University Hospital

**JEDIDAH** Lieow is an Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) who specialises in Haematopoietic Progenitor Cell Transplant and Cellular Therapy. She is also the first APN to lead the Femoral Central Venous Catheter Insertion service in the National Cancer Institute Singapore, located at the National University Hospital (NUH).

Yes, that is indeed in her job description.

The energetic 40-year-old cares for patients with blood cancers and other blood disorders. What she does is delicate, high-risk, requires a steady hand and nerves of steel.

With the aid of an ultrasound machine, she inserts a catheter through

the femoral vein (main deep vein of the thigh). These flexible tubes are inserted into the vein to draw blood samples, inject fluids such as medicines and perform blood exchange transfusions. If it goes a millimetre too deep, it may puncture the patient's vital artery, resulting in severe blood loss or, worse, the loss of a limb.

Currently she is the only APN in Singapore credentialed to do this procedure, which has been performed over 200 times at NUH's High Dependency Unit as of 2019. The nicknames her colleagues give her – Sister Jedi or Master Yoda (clearly they are Star Wars fans) – suit her well: She is calm, patient and focused.



“Now that I can independently lead some of these processes, the total time needed is reduced. My patients can even be discharged in time to have an early dinner.”

When Jedidah did her first catheter insertion, she got it right in one attempt. She credits her successful debut to one of several mentors – Dr Yap Eng Soo, her department's consultant who trained her to make every puncture hit its mark, with no blood spilling on the gauze.

The Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies graduate explained that before each stem cell or bone marrow transplant, the team conducts tests to ensure that the stem cells are suitable for 'harvest', which can take almost an entire day.

“Patients would have to wait for the doctor to insert the line (catheter) before the apheresis unit can harvest the stem cells. Six hours later, we send it for further analysis in the lab. Now that I can independently lead some of these processes, the total time needed is reduced. My patients can even be discharged in time to have an early dinner,” added Jedidah.

Besides performing patient assessments and managing sick patients in the ward, she runs one of the four transplant clinics twice a week and sees about nine patients per session. They include post-transplant patients or even those suffering from severe graft-versus-host disease (a medical condition that arises after a bone marrow or stem cell transplant).

When she is not seeing patients, this trance music fan is either whizzing around the floorball court with her colleagues or attending a Pilates session. But her patients are never far from her thoughts.

Said Jedidah: “I have deepened my love for oncology nursing thanks to the time spent with my patients. Some are like my *da ge* (elder brother) or *da jie* (elder sister)... I can be a *jie jie* to my younger patients too. When any of my patients pass on, I try to attend their wake. This way, I hope to also provide some closure to their families.” ●



**GAN PEI YING**

Advanced Practice Nurse

Changi General Hospital

# The neighbourhood



**NOTICING** that elderly patients were constantly being readmitted at Changi General Hospital (CGH), Advanced Practice Nurse Gan Pei Ying always wondered what could be done to prevent this trend. The answer came in the form of the Community Nursing Department set up in CGH in 2017.

In sync with the Ministry of Health's "Beyond Hospital to Community" strategy, CGH's model aims to keep patients healthy in the community and thereby reduce their visits to the hospital. "I thought it was a no-brainer for me to join this team as, during my two years at the geriatric ward, I always pondered over solutions to help seniors age healthily," recalled the poised 35-year-old whose dream was to find a career that challenges her and allows her to help those in need.

Nursing was a natural fit, something her Buddhist parents encouraged as it allows her to do good. By 2004, Pei Ying had a diploma in nursing from Nanyang Polytechnic under her belt, before joining CGH. She added a nursing degree from the University of Sydney

# 'Missy' post

**//** *I thought it was a no-brainer for me to join this team as, during my two years at the geriatric ward, I always pondered over solutions to help seniors age healthily.*

three years later. By 2013, she received a master's degree from New York University.

Pei Ying is part of the Community Nurse Posts (CNP) set up by SingHealth in December 2017. They are located in senior activity centres, faith-based organisations and community centres to provide healthcare to vulnerable elderly with multiple chronic diseases in the neighbourhood.

Comparing the CNPs to the Neighbourhood Police Posts, Pei Ying said: "If seniors run into trouble with their health, they can get professional assistance easily."

She uses the example of a gruff 80-year-old patient to show the value of the CNPs. Overweight, suffering from bad headaches as well as the flu and sceptical about the value of healthcare,

he told the nurses his only goal in life was to live for another 10 years to care for his daughter who was still in primary school.

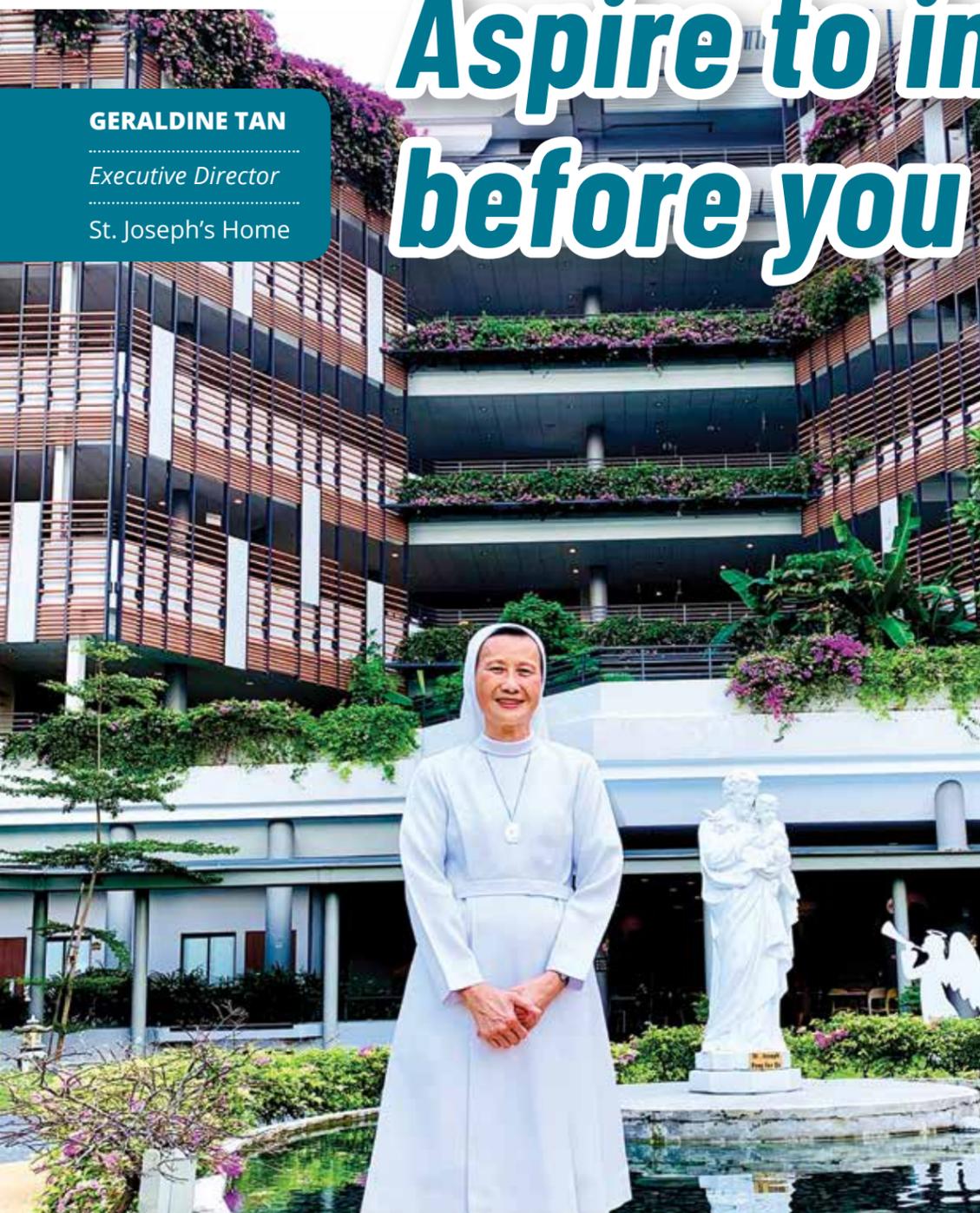
Thanks to the efforts of Pei Ying and her colleagues, who patiently allayed his fears and taught him simple things to improve his quality of life, such as dietary changes, his health improved and he looked like he lost a lot of weight in a month.

"Now, he visits the post with his daughter to say hello and even pays it forward by relating his success story to other seniors!" she said.

The ability to improve patients' lives in the community has brought Pei Ying joy. "Often, it can be something as simple as connecting them to the right service provider in the community," she said with pride.



When the work gets tough, she turns to baking to "de-stress" and makes cupcakes and cookies for her colleagues. However, she confessed that she has had less time to bake since she joined community nursing: "I'm just too busy now! But I've never been happier doing what I love!" ●



**GERALDINE TAN**  
Executive Director  
St. Joseph's Home

# Aspire to inspire before you expire

**THAT** headline (a quote from entrepreneur and author Eugene Bell Jr) is Sister Geraldine Tan's personal motto. The inspiration started at age five, after seeing her grandmother in pain while receiving an antibiotic injection. In that moment, she wanted to be a nurse and give her Ah Ma (grandmother) a painless injection. Her grandmother told little Geraldine that nursing is about treating everyone with love and not just about treating her family. That was six decades ago.

After graduating from the School of Nursing in 1975, Sister Geraldine worked at the outpatient clinics in Paya Lebar and MacPherson as well as the Singapore General Hospital before going to England to study oncology nursing and palliative care in 1980. Two years later, she joined the Canossian Daughters of Charity as a nun and, by 1985, moved to St. Joseph's Home where she became the Administrator/Executive Director (ED) in 2007.

The dual role of nurse and nun combined with the ED job brings its fair share of challenges, especially if she has to turn away patients who have the means to hire caregivers and recuperate at home.

"They come to me saying 'you are a nun... how can you turn someone away'. But we have to make decisions like these for the Home, as there are limited resources," said Sister Geraldine who runs the 412-bed Home in Jurong West, with her team of nuns, dedicated staff and volunteers. It was a big jump from the 112 beds it had in the 1970s at Gek Poh Road.

What has also changed is the type of residents they serve at the Home and how they serve them. When the Home was set up more than 40 years ago by the Catholic Welfare Services, it was to provide "shelter, care and love" for the aged and the destitute.

While the Home continues to offer nursing and hospice services, its current location has more facilities to meet the changing demographics of Singapore's ageing population, such as an indoor pool for hydrotherapy, introduced as part of its rehabilitation programmes. Other facilities include a unit for residents living with dementia who are still mobile. It allows them to go about their regular activities just like they

**Having an infant and childcare centre within the Home reminds us of the purpose of life and of the importance of play and simplicity... everyone can find a place to co-exist.**

would at home.

The Home also has a childcare centre and an intergenerational playground, giving the elderly residents and young children an opportunity to interact with each other through play and curated activities.

"Having an infant and childcare centre within the Home reminds us of the purpose of life and of the importance of play and simplicity... everyone can find a place to co-exist," said Sister Geraldine.

Calling community care crucial to deal with our nation's ageing population, the soft-spoken 65-year-old nun sees nurses playing a very important role in the delivery of care to the elderly: "Nursing evolves with the society. As a nurse today, you need to be very sharp to navigate the system and know

the big picture in order to bring health to someone."

She added that as more trust is placed on today's nurses, they can take the lead in the long-term care sector, being agile to meet the constant changes in healthcare, and be an advocate for those under their care.

"Nurses will have to think about how to serve a population where there are smaller families or people not getting married at all. How will they want to age and live? You have to adjust your ministry according to the science of times," said Sister Geraldine.

She added that she has experienced a great deal as a nurse. "You learn a lot in nursing; the rough, the tough and the love. The Home that you build must give life to people who live in it and it has to be a blessing to people in society."●



# Building from the heart



**YOU** have seen nurses at polyclinics and hospitals, but have you seen nurses with helmets and boots at construction sites? Now, that's an unusual sight.

For nurse Low Beng Hoi, 67, inspecting a construction site was all in a day's work over a decade ago. Back in 2004, the Government had just started building more hospitals for our ageing population, and Beng Hoi accepted the challenging task of planning for the construction of Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH)

**LOW BENG HOI**

*Director of Nursing,  
Population Health and  
Community Transformation*

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

**KUTTIAMMAL SUNDARASAN**

*Chief Nurse*  
Ng Teng Fong General Hospital

**CHRISTINA LIM**

*Chief Nurse*  
Sengkang General Hospital

with her colleagues. At the time she was the Director of Nursing at KTPH. She said: "We wanted our patients to feel calm, so we designed KTPH to be garden-like and filled with lush greenery."

As it was her first foray into building hospitals, Beng Hoi had to learn to read maps and interpret complicated construction drawings. The ardent traveller also remembers getting on the floor and measuring the hospital wards' entrances to ensure the beds could be wheeled through easily!

Designing a hospital with patients in mind was also the 2017 President's Award winner Kuttiammal Sundarasan's goal when she joined the planning and construction team for Ng Teng Fong General Hospital (NTFGH) in 2009. For the 59-year-old Chief Nurse, better known as Kutti among her peers, patients are at the heart of what she does. This was why she pushed for the 'window for every patient' concept at NTFGH. "The windows allow patients to enjoy natural ventilation and a view of the greenery," said the Tamil literature lover.

Like Beng Hoi and Kutti, Christina Lim had her first taste of designing a hospital when she was part of the team that planned for the construction of Sengkang General Hospital (SKH) in 2012. Knowing that patients value their privacy, the SKH Chief Nurse included discussion spaces in the hospital's wards for medical professionals to discuss patients' conditions. This prevented other patients and visitors from overhearing their conversations thus maintaining patients' confidentiality. Christina, 50, an amateur music composer, said: "Nurses are always on the ground and understand patients' needs. This helped us to better design SKH for our patients."

Building a hospital is no mean feat. Despite the tight deadlines and stress, these three 'nurse-architects' look back on their journey fondly. Kutti nicely summarises their experiences: "We put our heart and soul into the projects. That sense of achievement when we finally saw the completed hospital was priceless!" ●



# Prescription for success

**LIAU WEI FONG**

*Advanced Practice Nurse*

National University Polyclinics

**THANKS** to the stethoscope draped around her neck, Liau Wei Fong is often called “missy-doctor” by many patients who step into her outpatient clinic at the bustling Bukit Batok Polyclinic. By

the time they step out, not only have they been prescribed the appropriate medication by this Advanced Practice Nurse (APN), they also have a new-found respect for nurses in general.

The cheerful 44-year-old lady is one of three APN Collaborative Prescribers in the National University Polyclinics (NUP) team. Having completed her Master of Nursing from the National University of Singapore in 2007, and the three-month National Collaborative Prescribing Programme in 2018, she is credentialed to prescribe 14 categories of medication for most of her patients without needing a doctor’s stamp of approval.

“Since becoming a Collaborative Prescriber (CP) in March 2019, my scope has greatly expanded – it is a good thing! Whether it is for routine check-ups to get their medication refilled or to seek treatment for the common flu bug, my patients are spared the wait for a doctor to countersign on the prescription order. With more than 1,200 patients walking through the doors of our polyclinic daily, it is also timely that I earned this privilege to prescribe medication... it helps to ease the load a little,” said Wei Fong, who almost didn’t become a nurse.

Her mother wanted the 17-year-old Wei Fong to do a business course. Despite her desire to be a nurse and having zero interest in business studies, the filial

**With more than 1,200 patients walking through the doors of our polyclinic daily, it is also timely that I earned this privilege to prescribe medication... it helps to ease the load a little.**

girl applied for and was accepted into a diploma in business.

Then her father intervened. About to retire from the police force, he spotted a list of bursaries and sponsorships available for nursing studies and



asked her if she was keen. “Everything happened so quickly! Next thing, I was perched on my dad’s motorbike, on my way to grab my second shot at nursing. Voila! Look at where I am now, almost 30 years in nursing!” said Wei Fong.

It wasn’t a completely smooth ride though. In 2007, as she was doing her master’s degree, her father fell seriously ill. Despite the trying circumstances – juggling her studies and the frequent trips to hospital to care for her father – Wei Fong’s commitment to nursing remained steadfast, and she is forever grateful to her husband for encouraging her and managing the household during that time.

The payoff for that period is that she can now provide “more complete care” to the patients she sees – about 20 a day. “Yes, I have to be accountable for my decisions because their safety is my greatest concern but, hey, with greater autonomy comes greater responsibility, right?” said Wei Fong.

In fact, she applies the same zeal to her favourite pastime of bread making. When asked what makes her famed focaccia so special, the affable nurse said: “A touch of love, a dash of passion and a whole lot of heartwork!” The very same recipe she uses when caring for her patients. ●



*Pushing Frontiers,  
Improving Patient Care*

A handwritten signature in black ink, located in the bottom right corner of the illustration.

**K. TAMILARACI**

*Nurse Clinician*

KK Women's and Children's Hospital



# Making small miracles

**ASA** teenager, K. Tamararaci desperately wanted to help her father deal with his kidney problems and urinary tract infection. She didn't know how to do it. On the day that he passed away alone in a hospital ward, she decided to be a nurse.

In 1983, aged 22, she joined the School of Nursing. After graduating as an Enrolled Nurse, she worked at several public

hospitals and by 1999, she was at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH).

That was when the mother of two, who loves watching culinary shows on the internet and cooking for her family, found the time and energy to upgrade her skills. "I was quite settled by then and had a helper at home. My supervisors saw the potential in me and told me I should further my studies.

I was quite afraid but they encouraged me," said Tamararaci.

By 2005, she had completed her nursing diploma at Nanyang Polytechnic. Two years later, she had earned her nursing degree from Curtin University. In 2009, at the age of 48, she also had an Advanced Diploma in Paediatrics under her belt. Now, at 59, she works as a Nurse Clinician in KKH's Children's Intensive Care Unit (CICU) where she handles the Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO)

**Being part of the programme makes me feel very empowered and confident in managing my patients on ECMO.**

machine, which is another opportunity to upgrade her skills.

Once a specialised role only performed by perfusionists, who use the machine to maintain patients' physiological conditions during cardiac surgery and other surgeries that require cardiopulmonary

assistance, it evolved to be a key speciality role for KKH nurses since the ECMO programme's inception in 2011.

Tamararaci was part of the pioneer batch of six nurses trained at Duke University (United States) in the same year for six weeks. On their return to Singapore, perfusionists from the National Heart Centre Singapore assisted them to gain confidence and competency with the ECMO machine. "We have to sit by the machine 24/7 as it literally is the patient's artificial heart and lungs, and we have to keep it working with specific calculations and titrations. Being part of the programme makes me feel very empowered and confident in managing my patients on ECMO," she said.

That was put to the test in 2018 when a four-year-old patient fell unconscious and could not breathe on her own. Tamararaci was part of the team that kept the child on the ECMO machine for 90 days, the longest in KKH history. They knew the risk: the longer a patient is on the machine, the lower the chance of survival.

"We had a fear that she would not make it out alive, but she did. Slowly but surely, through a lot of rehab, the patient regained her health. She sat up, sang and did simple activities on her own. The day she walked out of the hospital, everyone in the team cried," she recalled, with a touch of emotion.

"She proved to everyone that miracles do happen. That's what keeps me going as an ECMO nurse – knowing that I'm making small miracles happen every single day."●





# Garang for the

**WHEN** Agnes Chong and Ahmad Shufi started out in nursing, they were told what to do by doctors. Today, it is different. Senior nurses now lead services in specialist out-patient centres and, more importantly, are advocates for their patients.

The Nurse Clinician, who has just completed 17 years at the National Skin Centre (NSC), recalls her early days in nursing: "It was my first job and, as a junior nurse, I just did what the doctors and supervisors told me to... no questions asked. We were afraid of talking back to them, especially the more *garang*

(gung-ho) ones."

## AGNES CHONG

Nurse Clinician  
National Skin Centre

Today, the 38-year-old mother of three oversees a team of eight nurses at NSC's Photo Dermatology Clinic – the only one in Asia that is equipped to manage a wide spectrum of dermatology cases; from determining the doses of light patients require during phototherapy

treatments to providing consultation services for follow-up patients.

Agnes is now more confident and, if it helps her patients, will speak with doctors about their treatment plans. "Doctors map out the treatment but it is up to us nurses to assess the patient's condition throughout their treatment. At times, I get to override my doctors' orders if I sense something is amiss... but only when necessary, *lah!*" she said.

When her patients are not improving or if the treatment gets too intense for them, the bubbly lady brings it to the doctors' attention and makes recommendations on adjusting their treatment. As she puts it: "Naysayers may doubt you at first but when they realise that you are right, they'll learn to trust you eventually."

Senior Staff Nurse Shufi, on the other hand, had to learn how to be *garang*

# right reasons

when he speaks to patients about their condition. He had to prove to them over and over again that a nurse could take charge of their care and he didn't need to consult a doctor. Over his five years at the NSC's Department of Sexually Transmitted Infections Control Clinic, which sees about 150 patients every day, he has developed a confidence that helps him engage the patients in a manner that makes them trust nurses.

"We run the TAG (Test & Go) service for asymptomatic male patients who would like to get tested for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) like HIV, syphilis or gonorrhoea. Patients will be seen by nurses, unless further examinations by doctors are required," said the 35-year-old father of three who feels such nurse-led processes ultimately save patients' time.

"I constantly remind my nurses to pay extra attention to details; avoid missing anything during the pre-screening checks. Some may call me *ngiao* (picky) but we must always be professional and not be deemed as incompetent by anyone. Some patients want to be tested for all the STIs but, after the pre-screening checks, I realise they may not need to do all of it. It can be hard to dissuade them at first, since they think I'm just a nurse."

That's when his experience comes into play. He builds a rapport with the patients, eventually getting them to realise that "I am there to help, not to judge".

Both Agnes and Shufi continue to encourage their junior nurses to be the voice of their patients; to not be afraid to share their knowledge and training to deliver better care. And the former has these words of advice for those entering the profession: "As nurses, we know our patients best, so just be firm if you believe that you are right." ●

## AHMAD SHUFI

Senior Staff Nurse  
National Skin Centre



# A gentle touch to test for jaundice



**JEANNETTE WONG**  
Senior Staff Nurse  
National University Polyclinics

**AS SOMEONE** who has worked with babies for most of her career, Jeannette Wong is well aware of their reaction to pain. So, when her supervisor invited her to join a team to pilot a new and painless jaundice test for babies at National University Polyclinics (NUP) in March 2018, she readily agreed.

The 32-year-old Senior Staff Nurse works at Jurong Polyclinic where she

tends to patients with acute conditions and conducts developmental checks on newborns and toddlers to ensure they are growing well. Her job also requires her to test for jaundice in babies two weeks old or younger. Jaundice is caused by excess bilirubin – a yellow waste material produced by the body – in the blood, causing the skin and whites of the eyes to turn yellow.

“Traditionally, bilirubin levels were measured via a heel prick test where a small needle is used to draw a blood sample from the heel,” Jeannette explained. On the other hand, the Transcutaneous Bilirubinometry (TcB) measurement – the process piloted by Jeannette and team – involves touching the baby’s chest with a small device. It is cheaper than the heel prick test, painless and provides a good gauge of whether the babies need a blood test.

The TcB measurement proved popular, but this nurse’s connection to it wasn’t over. Her next assignment was to redesign the workflow for jaundice tests at polyclinics, present it to the nursing administrators and train other nurses to use the TcB device. “I didn’t think I would be so invested in the process,” she confessed.

The team’s efforts paid off. In

**This journey has empowered me as a nurse and enlarged the nurses’ role in jaundice screening.**



May 2018, TcB measurement was implemented across all six polyclinics under NUP. As the other healthcare clusters were interested to adopt the TcB measurement too, NUP shared its workflows and protocols, paving the way for other polyclinics across Singapore to adopt it by the end of the year.

Jeannette said: “This journey has empowered me as a nurse and enlarged the nurses’ role in jaundice screening.” The heel pricks were done by lab technicians in a lab but the TcB measurement allows nurses to screen patients, manage the results and make appropriate referrals.

The bubbly lady’s appetite for learning hasn’t diminished. She recently completed her Advanced Diploma in Nursing at her alma mater, Nanyang Polytechnic. It was a challenging period – she confessed that she goes for runs to de-stress – but she was determined to excel and prove herself.

After all, nursing is a career that has provided her some unexpected twists and turns so far. Right from the time she opted for nursing studies to the TcB journey that has brought her such professional satisfaction. No wonder Jeannette said: “I did not choose nursing... nursing found me instead!” ●

# Taking a breather



**DIANA MOHAMED YUSOFF**

Senior Staff Nurse

SingHealth Polyclinics

**WHEN** Senior Staff Nurse Diana Mohamed Yusoff needs to unwind after a hard day at work, she turns to an unusual outlet: scrapbooking! The mother of two enjoys bonding with her children over the arts and crafts activity that lets them display their creativity.

"I guess it's how I take a breather!" she said, with a laugh.

You get her humour when you realise Diana works with patients with poorly controlled asthma. In her 12 years of nursing, all at Pasir Ris Polyclinic, she had seen many patients struggling to breathe while they were registered, assessed and eventually seen by a doctor.

All that changed when the Nurse Intervention for Breathless Patient Protocol (NIBPP) was put in place. Developed to equip Registered Nurses with the skills to initiate rescue therapy immediately, this nurse-led programme at the polyclinics relieves patients' distress and prevents the worsening of their condition. It involves nurses attending a skills enhancement programme in asthma education and management as well as a lung auscultation course.

NIBPP provides nurses with specialised knowledge on the anatomy and physiology of the respiratory system. To ensure they are proficient in handling emergency cases, they are required to perform 20 lung auscultations and are assessed on their skills in asthma management upon the completion of the course.

It means Diana and her NIBPP-trained nursing colleagues in community care can now provide adequate treatment for patients with poorly controlled asthma within the polyclinic setting.

As the 32-year-old soft-spoken nurse puts it: "I feel more empowered. Now, I have the confidence to provide urgent care and reassurance to patients in distress. It is satisfying to see the patient's distress slip away with each inhalation.

*"I feel more empowered. Now, I have the confidence to provide urgent care and reassurance to patients in distress. It is satisfying to see the patient's distress slip away with each inhalation."*

As patients are able to receive care in the community, it also keeps them from having to go to an emergency department in a general hospital."

Not a bad outcome for someone who, inspired by her mother who was a nurse for 30 years, decided at age 13 that she wanted to be part of

this noble profession. Like her mother who spent close to 20 years at Marine Parade Polyclinic, Diana knew primary care was where she wanted to do her duty. And she's now ensuring that her patients get even better care. ●



# Heart beats for her patients



**TEO LEE WAH**  
*Advanced Practice Nurse*  
 National Heart Centre Singapore

**THE** year was 2010. Dr Teo Lee Wah was driving home after work when her phone buzzed – one of the patients she was overseeing at the Heart Failure Ancillary Clinic in the National Heart

Centre Singapore (NHCS) had collapsed at home and the patient’s son was frantically calling her for help.

Not one to get unnerved easily, the 2015 President’s Award for Nurses

winner pulled over and calmly guided him over the phone to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on his mother while waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

Though the mother did not survive the ordeal, the son remained grateful for Lee Wah’s help. “He visited NHCS and gave me some flowers to convey his thanks,” recalled the Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) with a smile.

Such is the 54-year-old’s willingness to go the extra mile for her patients, it is no surprise that she was instrumental in setting up the Heart Failure Ancillary Clinic with a physician and a pharmacist in 2007. The clinic – run independently by Lee Wah, a fellow APN and a pharmacist – caters to heart failure patients whose conditions have stabilised and only require follow-up visits.

The APNs examine patients, order tests and interpret the results as well as teach patients to manage their heart condition, while also working with the pharmacist to adjust patients’ medication and monitor for any adverse reactions.

This helps the cardiologists at NHCS focus on patients who require complex care. Hospital re-admissions among heart failure patients and patients’

**“Nurses understand that it’s not easy to live with a heart condition. We want our patients to know that we are always here to help and lend them a listening ear.”**

waiting time at NHCS have also reduced, while patients’ quality of life has improved.

The Heart Failure Ancillary Clinic didn’t catch on with patients easily. Initially sceptical of being attended to by a nurse instead of a doctor, they were eventually won over by the nurses’ competence and empathy. Lee Wah explained: “Nurses understand that it’s not easy to live with a heart condition. We want our patients to know that we are always here to help and lend them a listening ear.”

With such a caring and empathetic nature, it is no wonder Lee Wah dreamt of being a teacher or nurse as a child. She eventually chose the latter after a friend, who was a nurse, helped her realise that “nursing is a challenging yet

noble profession where one can touch lives”.

While nursing has been her passion for the past 35 years, Lee Wah revealed that her other love is to travel around the world. “I enjoy planning for trips with my family to recharge. Europe is my favourite place to explore,” said the soft-spoken mother of three.

Then, after a small pause, she added: “I also enjoy training my competent team of nurses to co-manage the conditions of our heart failure patients. The enhanced care continues, even when I’m overseas!”

It is clear that her heart always beats for her patients. ●



**ANNA TAN**

Senior Nurse Clinician

KK Women's and Children's Hospital

# Labour of love



**SENIOR** Nurse Clinician Anna Tan is an enthusiastic baker who loves bringing smiles to colleagues' faces with the muffins she bakes. Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise then that the 43-year-old looks after "buns in the oven" at work too... yes, she cares for pregnant women and their babies!

Anna has been doing so for the past 22 years at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), which she joined right after graduating with a Diploma in Nursing from Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) in 1998. Posted to KKH's antenatal and postnatal wards, she took up an Advanced Diploma in Nursing

(Midwifery) at NYP in 2000. On completion of the diploma a year later, she was posted to the Delivery Suite.

"I decided on midwifery as getting married and giving birth are close to my heart as a woman," said Anna, adding with a laugh: "Being a midwife prepared me for the birth of my sons in 2004 and 2006!"

Since 2012, she has been part of a team of 11 midwifery-trained nurses who run KKH's midwife-led clinic. Initiated by then-Deputy Director of Nursing Paulin Koh (now Chief Nursing Officer at the Ministry of Health) and Assistant Director of Nursing Thilagamangai, the clinic was launched in March 2010 to give eligible subsidised patients the choice of holistic midwife-led care throughout their pregnancy, delivery and postpartum period.

The speciality-trained nurses manage healthy, low-risk pregnant women from 24 weeks of gestation and their newborns. "This allows obstetricians to focus on high-risk pregnancies such as twin pregnancies and patients with high blood pressure or high Body Mass Index," Anna explained.

Parents-to-be attend scheduled consultation sessions run by the experienced midwives, during which they are informed on signs and symptoms of

**Ultimately, we hope midwifery-trained nurses will be able to provide a positive and safe experience for women during pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care in the community.**

labour, the process of delivery including importance of skin-to-skin attachment, breastfeeding and postpartum care. The nurses who specialise in midwifery also check on the baby's heart rate,

interpret blood investigation results and scan reports, and order necessary treatment for the well-being of the mother and her foetus.

When patients arrive in labour at the Delivery Suite and no further obstetrical or medical management is required, the midwives conduct the vaginal delivery.

KKH's midwife-led clinic has managed about 11,000 births to date, with many patients returning for their next delivery.

Anna recalls one patient who returned to deliver in 2015 because she treasured the memory of her birthing experience the year before: "She said she pulled through her labour pain thanks to my soothing voice, calm manner and encouragement. She even shared that she was inspired to be a nurse!"

The soft-spoken yet bubbly lady appreciates that nurses have greater empowerment and autonomy today as they are trained for role expansions. However, her dream is that midwives can see mothers-to-be from the time they discover they are pregnant: "Ultimately, we hope midwifery-trained nurses will be able to provide a positive and safe experience for women during pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care in the community."●





*Healing Hands,  
Caring Heart*

*Yokteer  
040120*

# An infectious love for nursing

## MARGARET SOON

Director of Nursing  
National Centre for  
Infectious Diseases



**DR MARGARET** Soon's eldest child Jannelle likes to tell everyone that she is a SARS baby. That's because Margaret was five months pregnant with her when Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) struck Singapore in March 2003.

Then a Senior Nursing Officer in infection control at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the designated screening and treatment centre for SARS, she found herself at the frontline of the fight against an unknown disease. Despite being given the choice

to be redeployed to a non-clinical setting as she was pregnant, she had a discussion with her husband and decided to stay as she believed in supporting and following through with her team's recommendations.

Margaret recalls: "We fought against time to ensure wards were ready for patients, conducted refresher training on the use of personal protective equipment and spent countless hours fit-testing healthcare workers' N95 masks."

All this, while battling physical exhaustion and fear as SARS infected 238 people and claimed 33 lives – including four healthcare workers – in Singapore.

Driven by the conviction that new infectious diseases can show up any time in an increasingly globalised world, she armed herself with a PhD in Nursing from Case Western Reserve University (Ohio) in 2012. Six years later, she took over as Director of Nursing at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID).

When COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) surfaced in Singapore in January 2020, Margaret was back in the thick of the action: She led her team of 300 nurses to prepare isolation rooms, adapted workflows to rapidly changing information about the disease, held townhalls to update the nurses and ensured they had an adequate supply of protective gowns and masks.

Despite clocking 14 to 18 exhausting hours at NCID daily, Margaret is grateful she can be part of patients' lives: "I was touched by how our COVID-19 patients were appreciative of us caring for them in spite of us wearing our personal protective equipment. It reminded me that they needed us nurses to stay

*"I was touched by how our COVID-19 patients were appreciative of us caring for them in spite of us wearing our personal protective equipment. It reminded me that they needed us nurses to stay strong."*

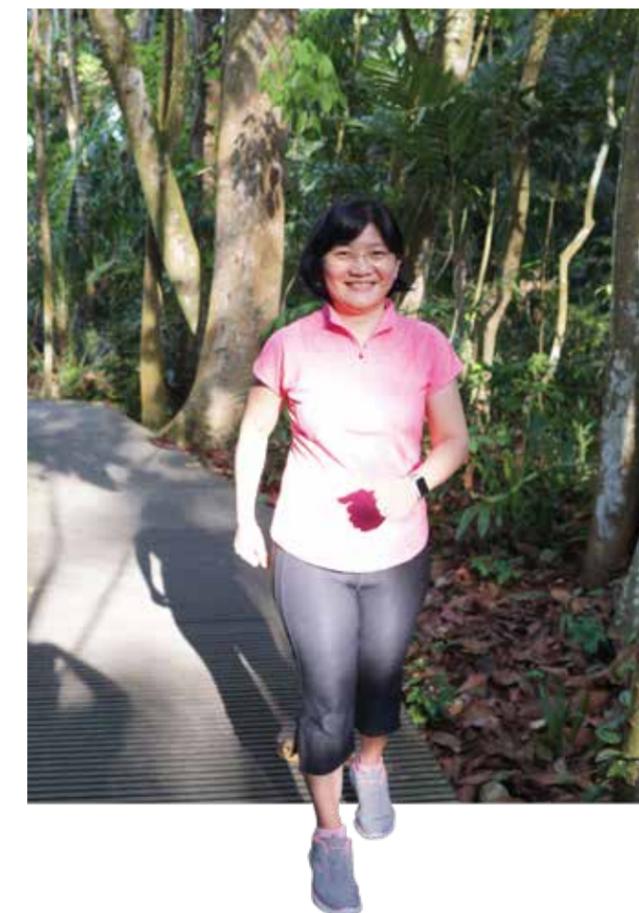
strong. What we do makes a difference in their recovery."

It has been a long and fruitful career for Margaret, one that has seen her win many accolades, the President's Award for Nurses in 2017 being the most cherished. Some might

find this surprising, considering this plucky lady joined the profession purely by accident – wanting to help her parents financially when she was 19, she flipped through the recruitment section of a newspaper and the first advertisement she spotted was for nursing.

The 49-year-old, who is always full of positivity, constantly pursues clinical knowledge to better care for patients. She encourages fellow nurses to do likewise: "Question what you do and advance yourself in a topical subject such as research or ethics... and pursue higher learning with a master's or doctoral degree!"

That said, she also encourages nurses to take moments for themselves, like she does with regular walks or jogs in any location which has wide open spaces and greenery. Margaret calls it "therapeutic", especially when done with family members. In particular, one 17-year-old who wears her "SARS baby" tag with pride! ●



# 'Rapid Response' helps save lives

## CLARICE WEE

Advanced Practice Nurse

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital

**ASK** Clarice Wee about her job at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Ng Teng Fong General Hospital (NTFGH), and she will tell you that every day is different.

That's not surprising, given that the Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) is a member of the hospital's 'Rapid Response' team where she assesses peri-arrest patients, a role once strictly handled by doctors.

The 35-year-old's role in a team of two APNs and about 20 to 30 senior nurses includes reviewing patients in the ICU, changing tubes for tracheostomy patients in cases where they need help to breathe, as well as training ward nurses on how to pick up signs in critically ill patients who may be on the verge of collapse.

She said: "Patients don't stay for long in ICU; they will be transferred to a general ward as soon they are ready for recovery. But they might become unstable and collapse in the ward."



In the past, the ICU team would come in to resuscitate patients if they collapse. Now, with nurses watching out for warning signals early and responding fast enough, these patients have a much better chance of recovery.

"This job keeps me on my toes at all times and I am constantly learning," said Clarice, who wanted to be part of the 'Rapid Response' team as it relies on the ICU nurses to be clinical experts at the bedside to assess a patient's condition after they leave the ICU. In a way she acts as a bridge between the ICU and ward nurses.

She said: "This role eases the load on doctors and benefits

patients. It cuts down on the delay in treatment as patients don't have to be transferred to different departments unnecessarily."

Clarice's passion for nursing could be traced back to the time she spent in hospital as a toddler, watching helplessly as her mother battled colon cancer. She can never forget the reassuring sight of nurses going in and out of the ward, caring for her mother who eventually succumbed to the disease.

She even overcame her family's objections to join the profession. "After O Levels, I took my parents to the Nanyang Polytechnic open house to look at the nursing course but they

**//** *This role eases the load on doctors and benefits patients. It cuts down on the delay in treatment as patients don't have to be transferred to different departments unnecessarily.*

were against it. So I went to a junior college to make them happy," she said.

Eventually, with her parents' blessing, she pursued her degree in nursing from La Trobe University in Melbourne, worked in several major public hospitals in Singapore and in 2010 took on a Master of Science in Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania.

When she is not thinking about her ICU patients or her nurses, Clarice is busy looking after her baby girl who was born in September 2019 and participating in activities at church where she plays the piano once a month as part of Sunday services.

"I also help out at any event when I can, especially if it is first aid coverage," she added with a laugh. That could be called "rapid response" at a social level! ●





# A score for nursing

**SHASHI CHANDRA SEGARAM**

*Nurse Clinician*

Singapore General Hospital

**SHASHI** Chandra Segaram loves the surge of adrenaline that courses through his body when he competes in a football match with his friends. Off the field, the Manchester United fan experienced a different kind of adrenaline rush – seeing the Nurse-Initiated Pain Management

Protocol (NIPP) that the Nurse Clinician helped conceptualise with a group of nurses and doctors take flight at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH).

Rolled out at SGH's Department of Emergency Medicine (DEM) in 2017, the NIPP enables triage nurses to assess a patient's pain and administer analgesics,

according to an established protocol, when it is necessary. This includes the administration of Pentrox, an inhaled anaesthetic to reduce pain.

Previously, patients with acute pain had to be examined by a doctor at the DEM for a painkiller to be prescribed. This often led to patients requesting the nurses to alleviate their pain while they waited to see the doctor. Shashi explained: "We desperately wanted to help, but there was not much we could do. It was very stressful for both the patients and nurses."

The NIPP has changed all that. Triage nurses at all hospitals now have the autonomy to provide faster care to patients in the DEM. Shashi said: "It took us years of intensive research and planning to ascertain that it's safe for triage nurses to initiate protocols to help reduce our patients' pain. I'm very proud of how the NIPP has empowered nurses."

With the constant changes in healthcare technology, Shashi believes there is potential to see how DEM nurses can use it in their day-to-day operations to better focus on patient care. One of his ideas is an app that will allow patients or caregivers to register before coming to the DEM.

"You can register before reaching the hospital so you just come in and receive

*It took us years of intensive research and planning to ascertain that it's safe for triage nurses to initiate protocols to help reduce our patients' pain. I'm very proud of how the NIPP has empowered nurses.*



treatment," he said. He admits it is idealistic but remains optimistic.

The adrenaline that Shashi gets from nursing never fizzles out. Working at the fast-paced DEM means he has to frequently think on his feet and deliver emergency care to patients who need it, in the quickest time possible. "At the DEM, time flies by and, the next thing I know, it's time for me to go home!" said the 33-year-old father of two children.

In fact, his passion for nursing continues when he gets home. The son of a nurse – his mother devoted over 30 years to the profession – grew up listening to nursing anecdotes. Fascinated by them, a young Shashi was inspired to follow his mother's footsteps and signed up for a nursing course at Nanyang Polytechnic after his O Levels in 2004, much to his parents' delight.

Now he does the same with his children, telling them about his work. And just like how Shashi has lent a hand in shaping the field of nursing in Singapore, the profession has also moulded his character. He shared that "nursing has definitely changed me. Now, I'm so much more patient and sensitive to people's feelings".

Then he added, with a laugh: "Not that I wasn't patient and sensitive to begin with!"

Good save, Shashi! ●

# Mums' support

**WHEN** new mums need help breastfeeding their newborns, they turn to nurses like Shamini Krishnan, Kang Phaik Gaik and Fonnie Lo for advice, comfort and answers in those first bewildering days of becoming a parent.

The three nurses – who work at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), Mount Alvernia Hospital (MAH) and Thomson Medical Centre (TMC) respectively – are internationally-certified lactation consultants who specialise in the clinical management of breastfeeding.

Shamini, one of the breastfeeding champions at KKH, the largest maternity hospital in Singapore to be accredited under the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), understands the challenges new mums face when it comes to breastfeeding. The 55-year-old mother of two said: "Mummies who can't breastfeed may feel bad, however they need to know that every mother and baby is different. Therefore, I customise my care to suit my patients' needs."

The BFHI is an effort by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure maternity hospitals meet best practices in supporting new mothers to breastfeed.

It requires hospitals to fulfil 10 steps to successful breastfeeding and comply with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes to promote safe



**SHAMINI KRISHNAN**

*Senior Staff Nurse*

KK Women's and Children's Hospital

infant nutrition. It also includes practices such as initiating immediate skin-to-skin contact after birth and ensuring staff – including doctors and allied health professionals – are trained to support new mothers in their breastfeeding journey.

Since its BFHI certification, KKH has seen an increase in new mothers exclusively breastfeeding their babies while in the hospital.

Phaik Gaik, or Sister Kang as she is affectionately known, also works hard to get better health outcomes for mothers and their babies.

The sprightly 69-year-old was highly regarded as a breastfeeding advocate at MAH where she spent 40 years, before retiring in 2020. During her time at MAH, she used to



**KANG PHAIK GAIK**

*Former Head of Parentcraft/Lactation*

Mount Alvernia Hospital

visit new mothers, ran antenatal classes and even visited the mums at home to provide one-to-one assistance.

Worried new parents even found her via the internet, like one anxious husband whose wife couldn't breastfeed their baby due to extremely sore nipples. Sister Kang said: "I taught her about food supplements and helped her learn to re-latch her baby. Within a month, she regained her milk supply and eventually breastfed her child till she was 2½ years old! I take great pride in helping breastfeeding mothers overcome their difficulties."

At TMC's Parentcraft Centre (Clinical), Fonnie has been instrumental in rolling out many services over the years to improve the well-being of her clients and their babies, like the



**FONNIE LO (centre)**

*Assistant Director*

Thomson Medical Centre

Thomson Confinement Food home delivery service in 2012.

The 59-year-old nurse said: "The idea came about when we received calls from mummies requesting for confinement nannies and some of them weren't able to find suitable ones. To alleviate the problem, we provided a food delivery service for recuperating mothers."

Fonnie worked with a nutritionist, a Traditional Chinese Medicine physician and two nurses to plan the menus and taste-test the food to ensure its quality and hygiene levels.

From building the babies' immunity, giving them a good head start for a healthier life to ensuring better bonding between mother and child and even lowering maternal stress, the power of breastfeeding is a win-win for everyone. ●

**AZIZ BIN AB HAMED**

Senior Nurse Clinician

Institute of Mental Health

# Helping patients



**NOT** many of us know this, but Institute of Mental Health (IMH) employees can pick up fresh baby spinach, xiao bai chai, chye sim or different types of lettuce at their workplace.

No, it's not some corporate deal with an online grocery firm. This is all thanks to the hospital's hydroponic farm.

Every week, up to 50kg of vegetables – enough to fill 10 to 15 big sacks – are harvested from this unique farm which is part of a rehabilitation programme. It aims to help long stayers at IMH with potential for rehabilitation improve their ability to reintegrate into the community.

The brains behind this project is Senior Nurse Clinician Aziz Bin AB Hamed. Having been with IMH for more than 20 years, the psychiatric nurse was thinking about how to help his patients rehabilitate and reintegrate into

# grow and heal

the community. A visit to a farm in Lim Chu Kang in 2016 inspired him with this idea.

He immediately asked his hospital's management if he could introduce hydroponic farming as a form of vocational activity. "The idea is to believe that people will recover, allowing them to stay functional in the community," said Aziz who refers to the patients working at the farm as "clients" as a form of respect and empowerment.

Starting off with a sponsorship from a bank in 2016, the farm initially had eight "clients" whose produce was sold to IMH staff. The revenue from the sales was used to buy seedlings and pay the "clients" a small allowance for their work. Now, the scale of operations has expanded with more than 30 "clients" involved in the farm.

The efforts by Aziz didn't go unnoticed. In 2018, he was

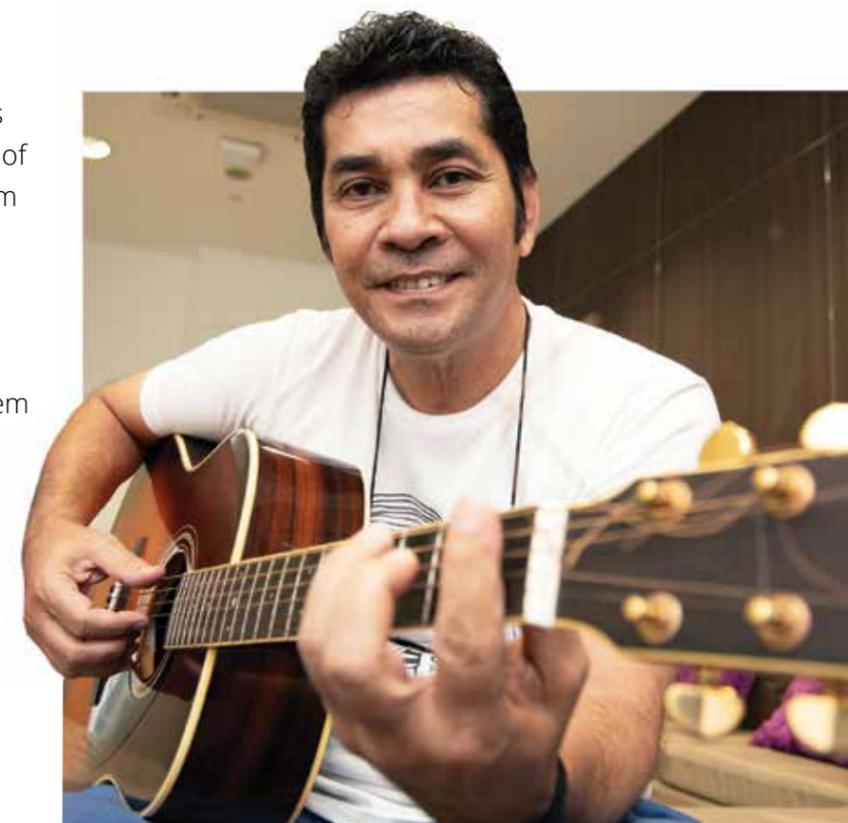
presented the Nightingale Award at the IMH Nurses' Day celebrations. An award that the 57-year-old man no doubt celebrated with a guitar-strumming sing-along session, which is his favourite pastime.

With 31 nurses under his charge to help with his rehabilitation programmes, this father of two has seen the role of a psychiatric nurse change; from a custodial one to that of a rehabilitator and mentor.

As he put it: "In the past, we took care of the basic needs of the patients. Now, we teach them skills to survive on their own, to find meaning in their lives."

Not bad for someone who almost didn't become a nurse. As a young man deciding on a career path, he applied to both nursing and the police force. The nursing offer came first and the rest, as they say, is history. ●

*The idea is to believe that people will recover, allowing them to stay functional in the community.*



# Providing post-op relief

## KALSOM AMIN

Assistant Nurse Clinician

Tan Tock Seng Hospital

**IN 1989**, Kalsom Amin joined National University Hospital (NUH) as a clerk in the Accident & Emergency (A&E) department. Two years later, inspired by the hardworking nurses around her, she enrolled in the then School of Nursing.

Now, 29 years later, she is an Assistant Nurse Clinician (ANC) at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

Having joined the hospital as a Staff Nurse in 1994, Kalsom did stints in the neurosurgery and medical wards before being posted to the Operating Theatre (OT) in 1997. Since then, she has been working closely with anaesthetists, surgeons and other nurses to care for patients undergoing surgeries.



*I love what I do and it's very close to my heart. When patients come in very sick and get better after surgery, I feel a great sense of satisfaction.*

"I love what I do and it's very close to my heart. When patients come in very sick and get better after surgery, I feel a great sense of satisfaction," said the cheerful lady.

Kalsom's interest to help surgical patients spurred her to join the hospital's Post-Anaesthesia Care Unit (PACU) in 2000. She wanted to give good post-operative care to patients recovering from the effects of anaesthesia – some of them experience pain, nausea and vomiting – especially when anaesthetists are busy in the OT and therefore unable to attend to such patients in the PACU.

The patient's experience has changed with Kalsom and the PACU nurses being empowered to administer a repeat dose of medication to relieve pain or vomiting. Kalsom explained: "If the anaesthetist has administered a first dose of painkillers like morphine or fentanyl during surgery, PACU nurses can proceed with subsequent doses when needed. It helps because when patients are in pain, they cannot wait."

This makes the time immediately after operations more bearable for patients. And it may not even be more painkillers they need. With good clinical assessment, nurses may opt for non-pharmaceutical interventions which may be just as effective.

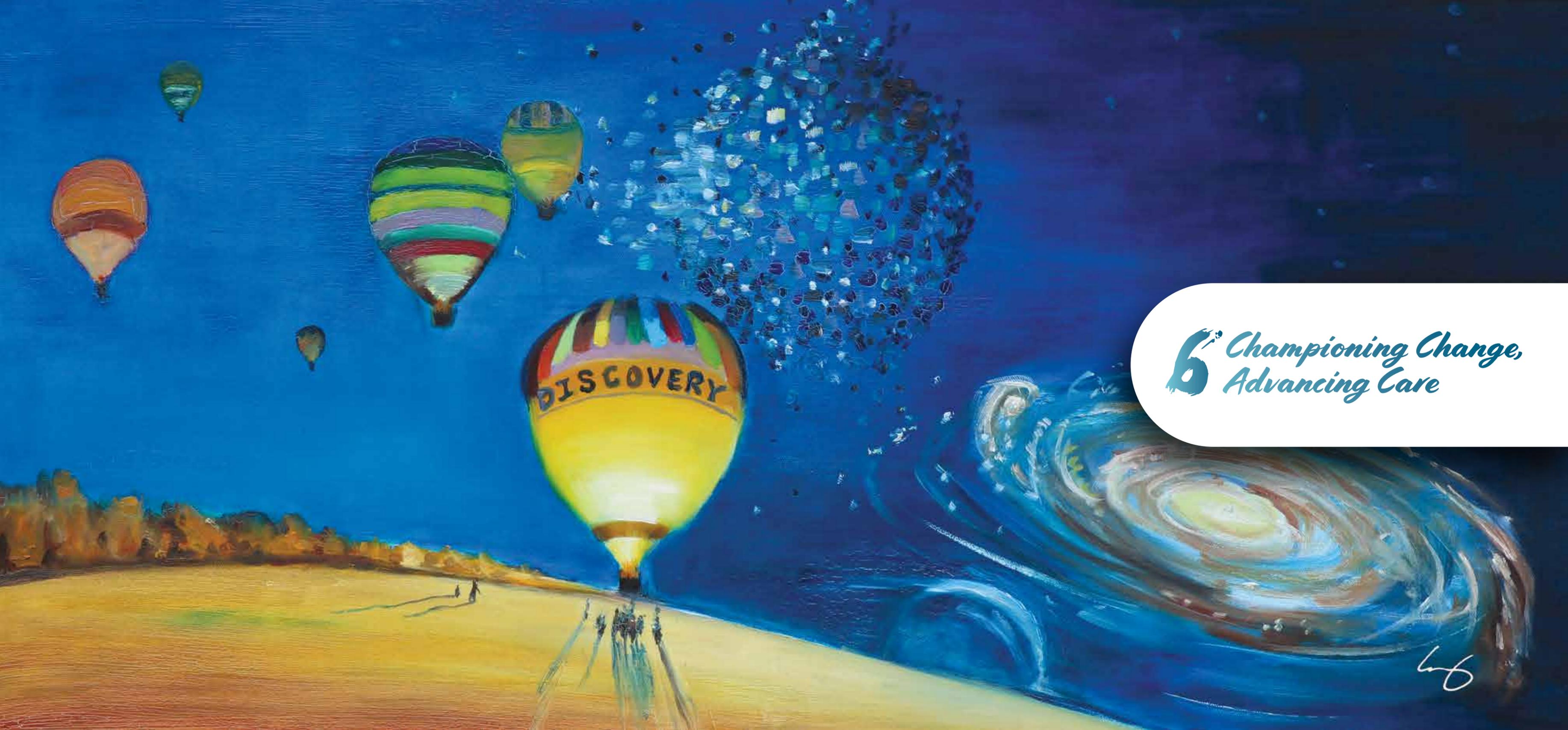
"For instance, I learnt that a tonsillectomy patient might be in pain due to the use of diathermy (electrically-induced heat) in surgery and an ice-cold gargle may be sufficient in removing blood clots and phlegm, as well as cooling the patient down."

Kalsom added that the role of PACU nurses has been enhanced over time. Today, with the use of the Post-Anaesthesia Discharge Scores (PADS), they can discharge patients from the PACU to the ward. This has improved the efficiency of the recovery room as patients do not need to wait to be reviewed by anaesthetists.

The 50-year-old mother of three, who remains a PACU nurse to this day because of the difference she can make to her patients' lives as they recover from surgery, now provides end-to-end care for patients requiring surgery, starting with pre-surgery assessment of the patient, assisting in complex surgical procedures and providing care after the operation.

The amiable nurse, who collects vintage flower-themed Pyrex kitchenware as her hobby, added: "I do my best as patients' lives are at stake. Seeing them return home safely with no complaints – that keeps me happy and in nursing." ●





**6** *Championing Change,  
Advancing Care*

*6*



**NG SOW CHUN**

*Deputy Director of Nursing*  
National University Hospital

**INNOVATION** and learning have been among the National University Hospital's (NUH) mantras ever since it opened in June 1985. As one of the hospitals that opened in the 1980s with modern facilities, it was also the principal teaching

hospital for the National University of Singapore's schools of medicine and dentistry.

When Ng Sow Chun joined NUH as a Staff Nurse after graduating from the former School of Nursing in 1985, she knew her job went beyond delivering great care to patients. Now a Deputy Director of Nursing at NUH, she is still looking for innovative ways to improve patient care and make nursing processes more efficient.

It could be as simple as coming up with a bed bumper for the hospital beds, which she and her team did several

*In the West, it had been around for 20 years. Even though the macerator involves the cost of consumables, the nursing team kept pushing for it. It is an example of believing in investing in a system that can help patients.*

years ago. "Beds sometimes bump into walls when being moved, leaving cracks and holes which had to be patched up. I thought about car bumpers and we worked with our operations support services team to come up with a design," she explained.

She feels innovation must make a positive impact on the lives of the patients and nurses. Like using the macerator, a machine that shreds and flushes away disposable bedpans, urinals and vomit bowls. Not only is it convenient, it is hygienic, saves water and energy as well as the nurses' time spent cleaning the equipment. Over the last decade a number of hospitals in Singapore have followed NUH's lead to use it.

Said the methodical Sow Chun: "In the West, it had been around for 20 years. Even though the macerator involves the cost of consumables, the nursing team kept pushing for it. It is an example of believing in investing in a system that can help patients."

Another innovation at NUH which was a collaboration between the nursing and pharmacy teams is the Closed Loop Medication Management System that ensures patients in wards get the right medicine from prescription to dispensation. The intelligent system incorporates the

hospital's electronic medication record systems to help nurses and pharmacists dispense the medicines correctly and efficiently. The result? Improved patient safety, reduced risk of errors and better productivity in providing care to the patients. NUH was the first hospital in the Asia-Pacific region to implement the system.

Sow Chun, 55, is not daunted by delays either, recalling that it took seven years to get an electric pill crusher at NUH. Till 2018, nurses were using the mortar and pestle to pound medication into powder for patients who couldn't swallow and had to be fed through nasogastric tubes. "The nurses knew there had to be a better way and it took that long because we were trying to see which technology was the best," she said.

The unassuming nursing veteran, who exercises regularly despite her hectic schedule, is proud of the innovations that she worked on with many stakeholders – especially since she believes that nurses are one of the drivers for a better healthcare system. It is a belief she has had since she was a sickly child who was frequently hospitalised. The nurses who cared for her left a deep impression on her and inspired her to don the nursing uniform. ●



# I speak with i-COMM

**WONG KOK CHEONG**

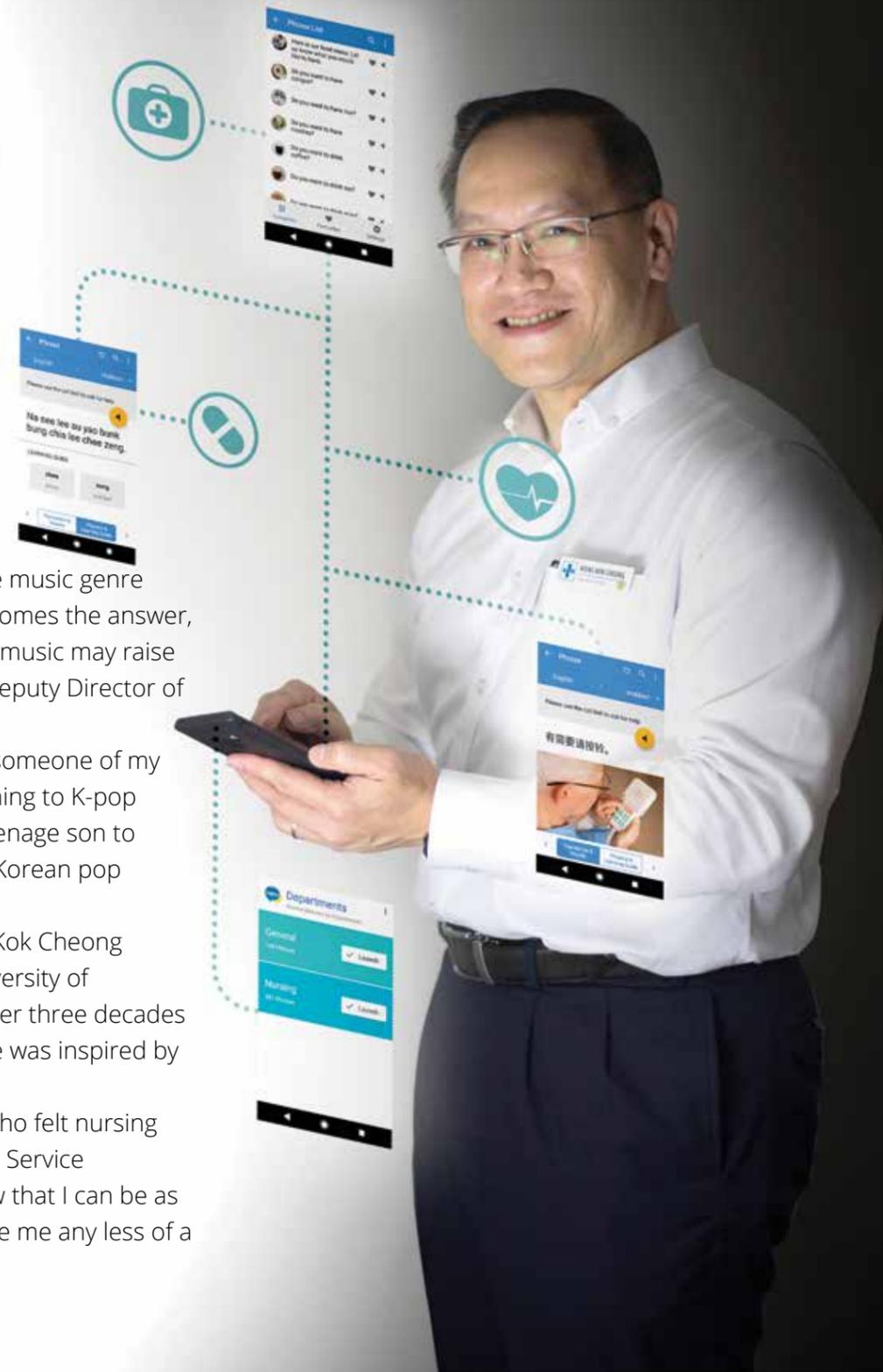
Deputy Director of Nursing  
Changi General Hospital

**ASK** 54-year-old Wong Kok Cheong for his favourite music genre and, chances are, his reply will shock you. “K-pop,” comes the answer, without missing a beat. His passion for Korean pop music may raise eyebrows, but the Changi General Hospital (CGH) Deputy Director of Nursing remains unfazed.

“People have commented that it’s quite odd for someone of my age to like K-pop, but I’m not offended. I enjoy listening to K-pop when I hit the gym and in fact, I’ve influenced my teenage son to enjoy it too!” said the cheerful man, who is a fan of Korean pop groups like Girls Generation and Big Bang.

It is this spirit of pushing boundaries that led to Kok Cheong abandoning his science studies at the National University of Singapore in the second year for nursing studies over three decades ago. A combat medic during his National Service, he was inspired by nurses who went the extra mile to help patients.

Despite objections from his friends and family, who felt nursing was for females, he successfully applied for a Public Service Commission nursing scholarship. “I wanted to show that I can be as good as a female nurse. Being a man does not make me any less of a



nurse,” he explained.

Today, Kok Cheong is expanding the frontiers in healthcare innovation and research. One example is i-COMM, a mobile application that helps nurses communicate better with patients who only speak Chinese dialects and Malay.

Short for ‘Integrated Healthcare Communicator’, i-COMM was developed by a group of 13 nurses, which included him, six other CGH staff and the hospital’s Office of Innovation in 2014, after it was noticed that some nurses were struggling to communicate with dialect-speaking elderly patients.

It is the first application in Singapore to include commonly used nursing phrases translated from English to Cantonese, Hokkien and Malay. Clicking on a phrase reveals a phonics guide and allows for audio playback while accompanying images reinforce the message.

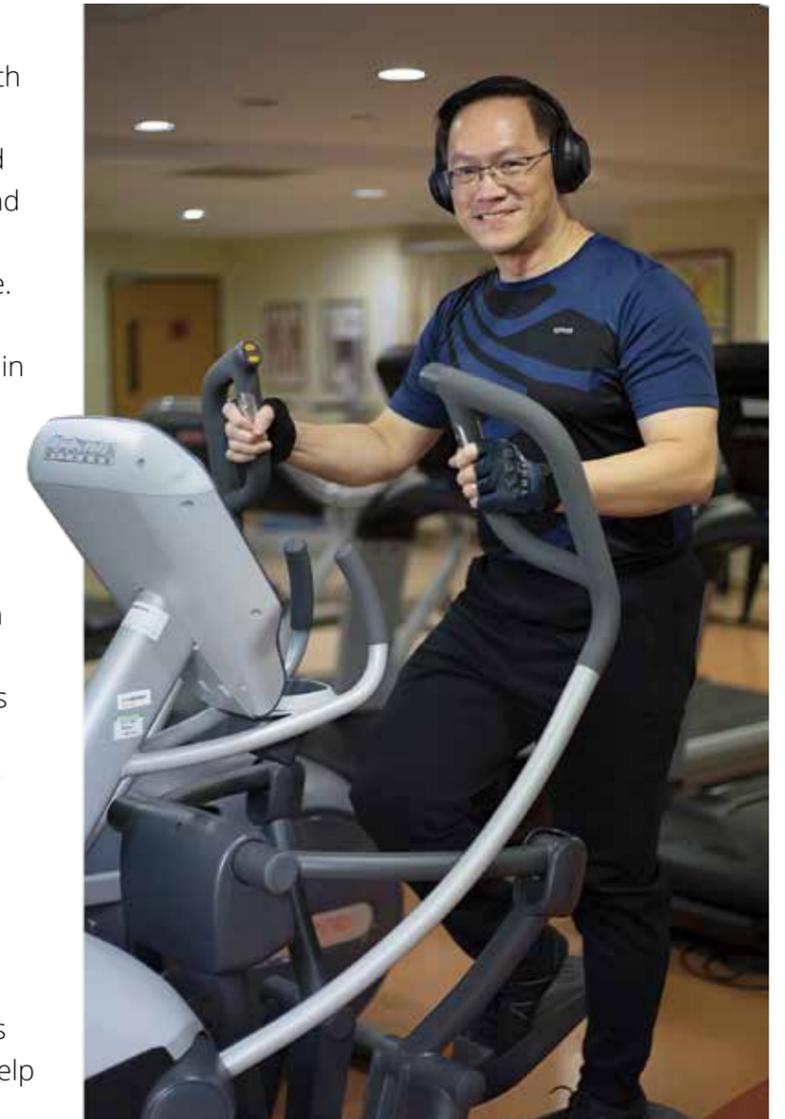
Developing i-COMM was challenging, but the nurses displayed ingenuity. For example, they created a makeshift recording studio in a cramped storeroom at CGH to record the audio translations.

“The nurses used whatever technological devices they had to record their voices and even turned the fans off to get a clear recording!” the 2017 recipient of the President’s Award for Nurses recalled with a laugh.

All that effort paid off when patients and nurses benefited from i-COMM and Health Minister Gan Kim Yong lauded it at a gala dinner held in conjunction with the International Council of Nurses Congress last year.

But Kok Cheong is not resting on his laurels. Heartened by how nurses play a “crucial role in healthcare innovation”, such as the Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) tags to track thousands of pieces of surgical equipment, a customised motorised trolley to carry up to 200kg of surgical instruments and real-time location system for central asset management, he is currently working on more innovations to benefit nurses in the future. For him, the sky’s the limit: “There are so many opportunities to use technology to help nurses do their jobs well!” ●

**“I wanted to show that I can be as good as a female nurse. Being a man does not make me any less of a nurse.”**



# Be an Angie

**TOH HAI MOY**

Advanced Practice Nurse  
Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

**NECESSITY**, as the saying goes, is the mother of invention. About eight years ago, Advanced Practice Nurse Toh Hai Moy at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital had a flash of inspiration: she wanted to give her patients, who all required a feeding tube or urine drainage bag, the dignity of going about their daily activities without inviting uncomfortable stares or questions.

And voila, the nursing veteran of 40 years invented a range of products that did just that. She named them under the brand Angie, a nickname a patient had bestowed on her.

To date, there are a total of four



Angie products that the soft-spoken mother of two has invented; the Angie Cargo Pants (comes with special pockets to hide urine drainage bags), the Angie Headband (to keep nasogastric feeding tubes tucked neatly along the hairline), the Angie Potty (a level up of the existing Witches Hat model to make collection of urine specimens even easier for patients) and the Angie Nasogastric Feeding Set (a toolkit to help caregivers feed patients through the same feeding tubes).

Hai Moy, 61, said: "As nurses, we are the eyes and ears of our patients, we know what their needs and challenges are. When we spot something that needs fixing, our challenge is to think out of the box and come up with

creative solutions to help them."

She added that the impact on her patients has been immense: "One elderly gentleman was so overjoyed when he bought the Angie Cargo Pants because he was no longer self-conscious about his catheter and could visit friends and relatives over Chinese New Year."

In addition to tinkering with patient-related gadgets and gizmos, Hai Moy also spends some time perfecting her harmonica skills which come in handy when she goes on her annual medical humanitarian trips to neighbouring countries with fellow nurses, doctors and dentists. Besides providing clinical care to the locals who come to their

nurses' station for health check-ups, she entertains them with her 43-year-old instrument.

Given her inquisitive nature, Hai Moy obviously has more ideas up her sleeve and is working on some new ideas that could boost the Angie range of products... all to help her patients.

As for the nickname, she thinks the patient probably thought it was easier to call her by that name but has now adopted it to mean something: "I always encourage my nurses to be an 'Angie'... learn to observe what goes on around them and see if they can come up with innovative solutions to help patients in their daily lives."

More likely, Angie is short for angel. ●

**As nurses, we are the eyes and ears of our patients, we know what their needs and challenges are. When we spot something that needs fixing, our challenge is to think out of the box and come up with creative solutions to help them.**



# Tech-ing care in the community

**LOW MUI LANG**

*Executive Director*

Peacehaven



**“Innovation is a must to meet the needs of an ageing population. Innovation with the use of IT and job re-design will enable us to do better.”**

make the transition back to home after being discharged from hospital and even includes a training programme for caregivers.

Pointing to the difficulty in recruiting manpower for the community care sector, Mui Lang said: “Innovation is a must to meet the needs of an ageing population. Innovation with the use of IT and job re-design will enable us to do better.”

No wonder she turns to jigsaw puzzles whenever she is stuck for an answer to a work-related problem or challenge. “It helps you to find the answers to some of the things you do in life,” said the enthusiastic lady whose largest jigsaw puzzle to date was 4,000 pieces. ●

**LOW** Mui Lang is 61 and has been a nurse for 43 years, the last 19 of them at Peacehaven, The Salvation Army’s nursing home in Changi, where she is the Executive Director. The length of service is no surprise when she tells you that from the tender age of 10, nursing was her dream job.

“I lost my younger brother to encephalitis when I was 10, maybe this could be part of my motivation to join nursing,” recalls the 2010 recipient of the President’s Award for Nurses, who graduated from the former School of Nursing in the late 1970s and has a master’s degree in Healthcare Management.

She is now using the vast experience garnered at various public and private healthcare institutions, a community hospital and nursing homes to improve the way she and her

Peacehaven team use technology and innovation to enhance the care they deliver to their residents.

For instance, to help residents who have dementia, the nursing home is modelled on a common HDB flat but with open-concept kitchens and cupboards without doors. This is to help residents see the things they need at one glance before they forget what they want to do.

Residents are also encouraged to take care of each other, where higher functioning residents help the rest. “Seeing the others do the activities, the lower-functioning ones will be prompted to do them too,” Mui Lang explained.

Technology has also been harnessed to help the nurses focus on their primary job of caring. For instance, the patient

lifting hoist introduced in 2015 helps residents with mobility issues attend their rehabilitation and exercise sessions without needing a wheelchair or a walking aid. The hoist also saves on manpower time, which allows nurses to focus more on their core work with the residents.

Another initiative, the IngoT system, by the Lien Foundation was introduced in 2013 and moved the home from a manual medical health record system to a digital one that is more secure and agile.

Peacehaven, which has two day centres for seniors in Bedok and Changi, uses an exercise programme called Gym Tonic to keep residents mobile and independent. It also has a short-term rehabilitation programme which helps patients



# Harnessing research for better patient care

**HERE** is a little-known fact about Florence Nightingale: In 1854, while at a British military camp in Turkey during the Crimean War, she observed the devastating effect the dirty environment had on the soldiers. She recorded the mortality rate in the hospital and found that for every 1,000 injured soldiers, 600 were dying because of communicable and infectious diseases.

Florence's interventions were simple; she and her team provided a clean environment, medical equipment, clean water and fruits. The result? A significant drop in the mortality rate. Florence's use of evidence-based practice saved lives.

Today, the three nurse-researchers featured in this article are embarking on the same mission: Using research data to improve clinical practices and standards of patient care. And they have to constantly explain what they do and why they do it, even to their own colleagues.

Dr Siti Zubaidah, Assistant Director of Nursing at the National University Hospital, said: "During my time as a Operating Theatre Nurse, nurses used



<p><b>SITI ZUBAIDAH</b> Assistant Director of Nursing National University Hospital</p>	<p><b>CHAN EE YUEE</b> Assistant Director of Nursing Tan Tock Seng Hospital</p>	<p><b>FAZILA ALOWENI</b> Nurse Clinician Singapore General Hospital</p>
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to ask me if my research work was like a 'CCA' (co-curricular activity) and why I would want to do research."

The 57-year-old, who has been a nurse for over 36 years, added that translating the research findings into solutions for better patient care is exciting. She is currently researching fall risks in patients, using an artificial intelligence (AI) predictive software

which does a large part of the assessment, and hopes it will take some pressure off the nurses' workload.

If successful, this will help identify and assess patients with a higher risk of falls. This will allow the nurses to provide timely interventions for the patients.

Over at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), Adjunct Assistant Professor Chan Ee Yuae is currently researching the

in the West are not catered for the local setting. This is where research findings help to adapt our current care model, which focuses largely on the patient, to a care model that looks after the entire family," explained Ee Yuae.

Having worked at TTSH for 29 years, the self-proclaimed fan of Florence Nightingale got into research work in 2005 when she was a Nurse Educator at the hospital. She believes it is important to push boundaries to find new solutions in patient care: "Nursing needs to be at the frontier of new clinical developments. If we never want to do something different, we will never improve."

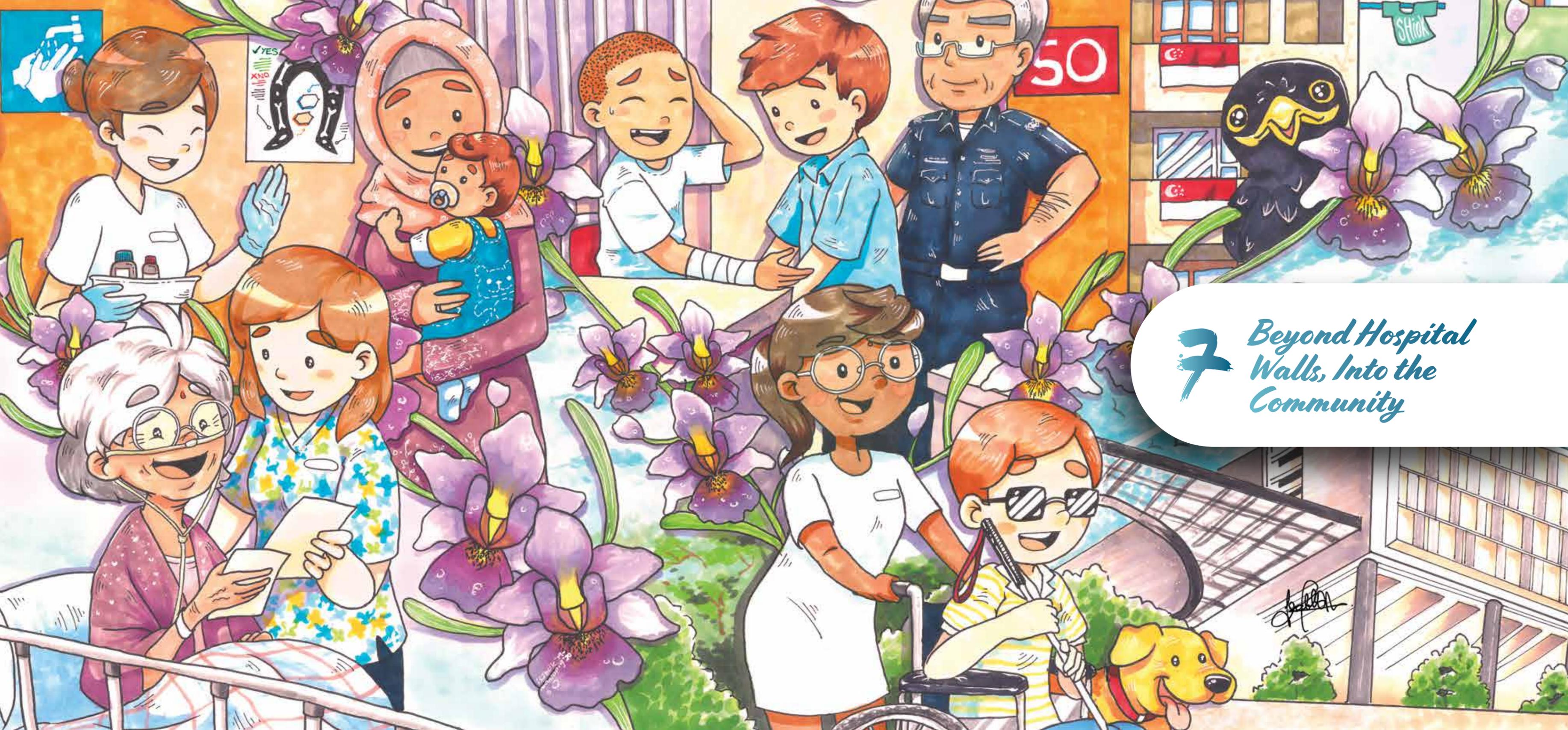
Nurse Clinician Fazila Aloweni was juggling research work and her nursing duties at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) for four years until she switched to full-time research two years ago. Among her research interests are informal caregiving and wound care, particularly pressure injuries. She and her team developed and published a study in 2018 on how to reduce the incidence of pressure injuries and identified eight significant risk factors.

This study was later developed into a tool called the Surgical Pressure Ulcer Risk Score (SPURS) used in SGH to identify and assess all high-risk patients undergoing surgery. They receive a SPURS wrist tag, a prophylactic foam dressing over bony prominences and an alternating pressure-relieving air mattress before the operation.

"Research helps to identify areas where we can channel resources," said the 40-year-old who has logged in 18 years at SGH.

Thanks to her familiarity with analytics and computer languages – she picked up those during a brief stint in a computer science diploma programme before she switched to nursing at Nanyang Polytechnic as she wanted more "human contact" – research was a natural progression for Fazila.

The three nurses hope to see more colleagues take on research work as the time spent at a patient's bedside and the desire for new knowledge and solutions make nurses good researchers. As Siti put it: "It is empowering to use our clinical experience to find better solutions for our patients." ●



7

*Beyond Hospital Walls, Into the Community*

**SYLVIA LEE**

Advanced Practice Nurse

Dover Park Hospice

**APN 00000001**

**IF IT** wasn't for an excited Singapore Nursing Board (SNB) employee, Sylvia Lee wouldn't have known that she was our nation's first Advanced Practice Nurse (APN).

She said: "When I collected my certification at SNB on 16 October 2006, the person in charge of my registration

asked chirpily if I knew I was the first APN to be registered. She pointed to the certificate and the number read 0000001!"

The unique number aside, it was the culmination of a long journey for Sylvia. Having graduated from Nanyang Polytechnic in 1992 as part of the first cohort of diploma

nursing students, she joined Singapore General Hospital (SGH) as a Registered Nurse.

However, the academic path kept beckoning, and she embarked on her degree in nursing at the University of Sydney (Australia) in 1997. "After my first work experience at SGH, I was convinced that I had to continue learning to provide better patient care," she explained. By 1999, she had added a master's degree from the same university to her resume.

After working at Dover Park Hospice for the next five years – where she provides and supports end-of-life care for patients – she got the management's support to pursue her post-master's qualifications in palliative care. Recalling that stage of her career, Sylvia said: "At that time, the APN role was just beginning to take root in Singapore and I was glad I could qualify as an APN when I returned. Thankfully, I passed!"

She confessed that being a pioneer APN was not easy: "I was charting my own path by casting my job description. As an APN, I saw the need to build and contribute meaningfully to the role."

Today, it is much better defined and while the primary task is to diagnose and manage patients' medical conditions, APNs like Sylvia also help their patients navigate the healthcare system.

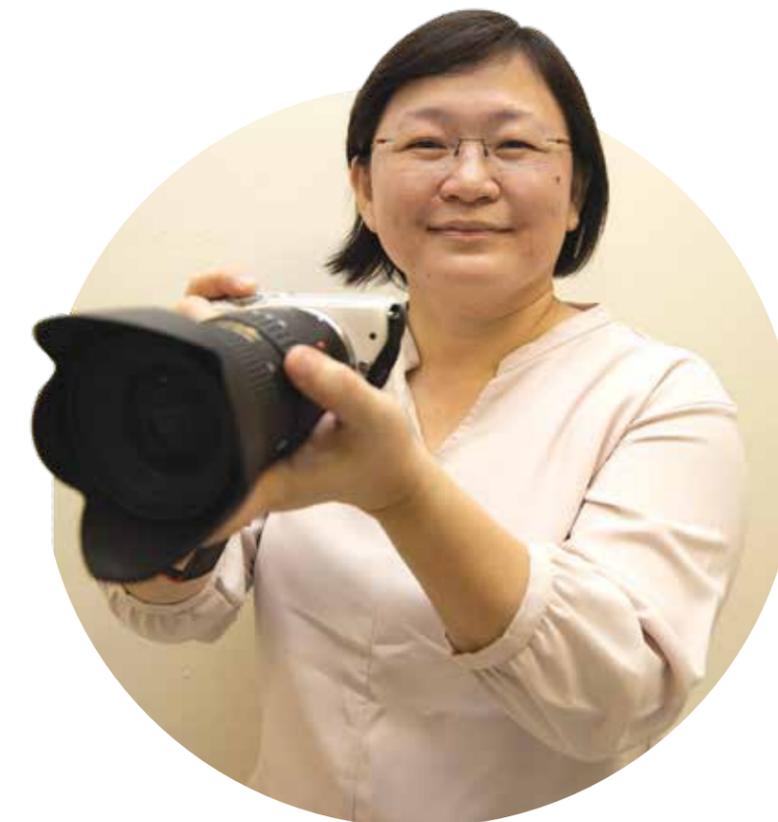
She said: "I had a patient who guarded his independence and wanted to die at home. To honour his wishes, I engaged a caregiver and mobilised community resources to care for him at home for as long as possible, till he was ready to be admitted to an in-patient hospice for terminal care."

To cope with the intensity of her job, Sylvia turns to

**For me, what matters most is being able to journey with the patients till the very end with dignity.**

her camera. Having picked up photography as a hobby in 2014, she said: "I recharge by taking solo holidays to photograph natural landscapes which allows me to leave my worldly worries behind."

While APN 0000001 has its own honour, what's more important to this 45-year-old nurse is her patients. The 2009 President's Award for Nurses recipient said: "For me, what matters most is being able to journey with the patients till the very end with dignity." ●



**YEO LOO SEE***Deputy Director of Nursing*

National Healthcare Group Polyclinics

# A friend, coach and counsellor

**WHEN** an elderly diabetic patient was reluctant to load his insulin injections himself, the nurses at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic wondered whether it was the unfamiliarity with the process that was stopping him. As the polyclinic is part of the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), the nurse clinician informed Yeo Loo See, Deputy Director of Nursing at NHGP, about the issue.

Loo See first checked with Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Diabetes Centre, which was managing the patient's case at that time, for the reason. Following her chat with a nurse from the Diabetes Centre, she got her polyclinic nurses to counsel the patient further. That was when they realised that

his reluctance stemmed from his poor eyesight.

Loo See recalled: "He couldn't see the syringe markings, so my colleagues purchased a pair of spectacles from Daiso for him. I was overjoyed when he successfully injected the insulin!"

This is just one of the ways NHGP nurses specialising in Chronic Disease Management – Care Managers as they're known – go the extra mile for patients. They also educate and treat patients with chronic diseases, understand their emotional and social wellbeing as well as create a care plan for them.

Chronic Disease Management gained prominence in 2000 when such medical conditions surfaced more frequently in Singapore. And Loo See was pivotal in driving it at NHGP. The 58-year-old said: "Chronic diseases like diabetes and the recovery from a stroke are lifelong, so nurses must be well trained in managing them."

She and her colleagues introduced a compulsory foundation course in Chronic Disease Management in 2014 for NHGP nurses who were specialising in co-managing such medical conditions. She also spent two years revising a competency assessment framework that moulds nurses into competent Care Managers.

Polyclinic nurses' roles in Chronic Disease Management



have since evolved. From focusing on patient education, they now work alongside doctors in NHGP's care teams, also known as teamlets. Under this model, patients with chronic diseases can see the same team of doctors and Care Managers for polyclinic consultations. Besides that, nurses also partner General Practitioners (GPs) to care for patients with chronic diseases at GP clinics under the Primary Care Network.

Loo See, feels a sense of satisfaction because Care Managers "enjoy greater autonomy today". In fact, after 34 years in the profession, she describes nursing as an intricate juggling act of being a patient's friend, coach and counsellor.

The greatest challenge? "Empowering patients to change behaviours," added

the affable nurse, who was drawn to the profession in her late teens to fulfil her late mother's wish to have a nurse in the family.

When work gets stressful, she tunes in to her favourite Korean and Hong Kong dramas on weekends. Like these dramas, Loo See's nursing story has its ups and downs, but

earning her patients' trust motivates her. She said: "Going forward, we need to train nurses to gain greater autonomy by working with doctors on more complicated cases so that we can continue to win our patients' trust."●

**Chronic diseases like diabetes and the recovery from a stroke are lifelong, so nurses must be well trained in managing them.**

# Care across the borders

## NUR JELITA REMIE

Assistant Nurse Clinician

National University Hospital

**WHEN** Nur Jelita Remie was in her mid-20s, she joined a humanitarian mission to a village in Vietnam. That trip led to the event manager deciding to change professions. Inspired by the nurses caring for the villagers, she wanted to be a nurse too. "I wanted to do more. Nursing is not just needed in hospitals. It takes me to other places

too," she explained.

Now 41, Jelita is an Assistant Nurse Clinician at National University Hospital (NUH), and very happy with what she's doing. But it didn't come easy. It took five tries for her to be accepted into the Professional Conversion Programme, where she took on the accelerated Diploma in Nursing at Nanyang

Polytechnic in 2007 and joined the emergency department at NUH in 2009.

She later completed the Advanced Diploma in Nursing (Emergency) from the same polytechnic thanks to a sponsorship from NUH and, in 2016, followed up with a nursing degree with honours awarded by University of Manchester via the Singapore Institute

of Technology.

Through all this, Jelita's spirit of volunteerism remained strong and, with her growing nursing skills, she embarked on more medical-humanitarian missions.

In 2015, she joined non-government organisation Crisis Relief Singapore and Singapore Red Cross on their relief mission in Nepal, following an earthquake there. She stayed for eight weeks, much to her husband's chagrin.

"He didn't want me to go initially, but I insisted. As there were no means of communication, I just told him that no news is good news," she said with a laugh.

Staying with villagers on the outskirts of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, which occasionally experienced after-shocks that followed the 7.8 magnitude earthquake, Jelita provided care to the villagers in the mobile clinic, while also engaging with the local children.

"I remember giving a set of colour pencils to a girl after she won an impromptu colouring competition. To my surprise, instead of keeping it all to herself, she gave each friend a colour pencil," said the mother of two, recalling

*I am inspired by the survivors (of natural disasters), their resilience and grit. I want my children to see the world as I do; that we can help and care for people who need it the most.*

the memory with a teary smile.

Jelita has also joined a local Christian organisation – she was one of the few Muslims in the group – on a mission to a village in Surabaya to build public toilets. As part of a small

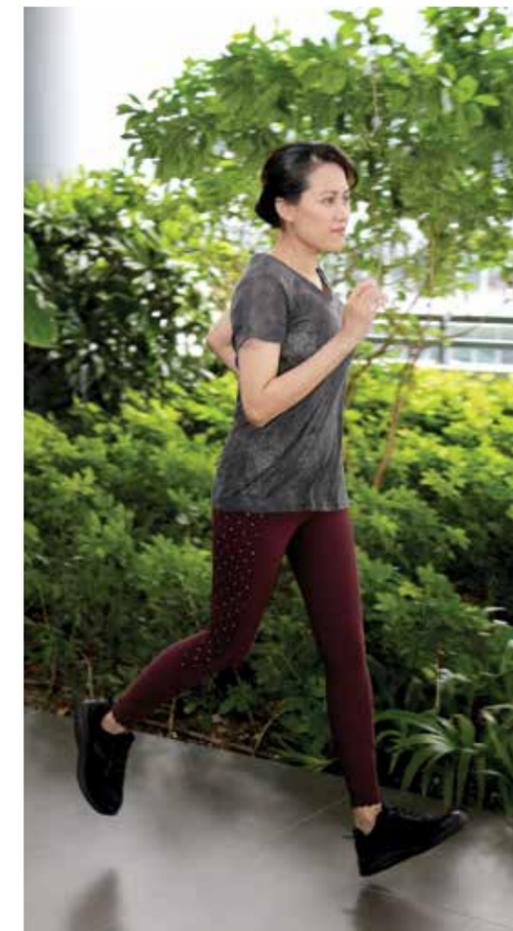
group of medical professionals who offered health screenings as well, she found it "interesting to see people of different professions and religions coming together to help the locals".

These days, work and raising her young children keep her very busy, putting overseas missions and her love for running on hold for now.

In the meantime, she volunteers locally, helping out during health screenings at the local mosques. When her children are older, she hopes to resume medical mission work and even take them with her.

"I am inspired by the survivors (of natural disasters), their resilience and grit. I want my children to see the world as I do; that we can help and care for people who need it the most," she said.

In recognition of her effort, Jelita received the Healthcare Humanity Award in 2014. ●



**NOOR HAFIZ BIN HASSAN**

Senior Staff Nurse

Parkway Pantai

# Showing care, even behind bars

**NOOR** Hafiz bin Hassan enjoys long rides on his Suzuki Hayabusa motorcycle, cruising down the highway with the wind caressing his face. It is his way of unwinding from the pressures of his job as a Senior Staff Nurse. Of course, given that he works at Changi Prison, he does care for a unique group of patients.

Asked what it's like to work within a prison, he said: "I didn't know what to expect when I started but, after six years of working in prisons, it has been a great and rewarding experience."

Changi Prison has 14 blocks and each block has a clinic. Five of these are 24-hour medical centres, similar to the

ones in army camps with sick bay beds for patients. The rest operate from 8am to 5.30pm, just like outpatient clinics. Hafiz, who is part of a team of 180 nurses from Parkway Pantai which provides medical service to Singapore's prisons, has worked in both settings.

The 36-year-old nurse said he feels very safe within the prison complex: "The inmates are always accompanied by prison officers who will manage them, even for basic needs like showering, and we don't see them alone."

That said, the cheerful Nanyang Polytechnic graduate, who also has a nursing degree from the University of Sunderland, doesn't differentiate the care he gives his



patients, whether in a hospital or in the prison.

"We perform what we are trained to do – caring for the patient; it's only more controlled in the prison environment. We also emphasise the patient's mental well-being and try to divert their attention from their situation as being in jail is a stressful experience," said Hafiz, who was inspired by an older cousin and role model in nursing, to take up nursing studies in 2003.

As for fellow nurses who may be keen to work in the prison, his advice is take time to get used to the environment and don't give up so fast.

He said: "There are many security protocols. We have to surrender our phones and electronic devices, and pass through many security checkpoints whenever we enter.

It took me two years to adapt. However, it has been very fulfilling. At the end of the day, inmates deserve the same amount of respect as any other patient." ●

**There are many security protocols. We have to surrender our phones and electronic devices, and pass through many security checkpoints whenever we enter. It took me two years to adapt. However, it has been very fulfilling. At the end of the day, inmates are patients and deserve the same amount of respect as any other patient.**



# Renal nurses do more than dialysis

**LAI CHOOI NGOH**

Senior Clinical Nurse Manager

The National Kidney Foundation



**WHEN** Lai Chooi Ngoh was pondering her next step in life as a young woman, she wanted to have a career that was fulfilling, noble and stable.

Nursing ticked all of those boxes and still does even after close to 40 years of service! Chooi Ngoh, 66, is now a Senior Clinical Nurse Manager at The National Kidney Foundation (NKF).

Having received her training in the United Kingdom, which included stints in two hospitals, she returned to Singapore in 1982 where she joined Mount Elizabeth Hospital as a Staff Nurse. That's where she got to know more about renal care and eventually made it her speciality. She received the Post-Basic Certificate in Renal Nursing from the then School of Nursing.

In 1990, after spending eight years in Mount Elizabeth, she moved to NKF.

Said Chooi Ngoh: "We (renal nurses) do more than just oversee the patients' dialysis; we educate them on vascular access care, diet fluid control and administer medication for the patients."

The nurses also follow-up on the patients' medications and assess the patients. This includes measuring their 'wet' (before dialysis) and 'dry' (after dialysis) weights.

"We ensure that they do not get complications from fluid overload and administer a erythropoietin injection to

stimulate the blood cells and increase haemoglobin," she said.

She added that since doctors are not in NKF dialysis centres all the time, nurses take the lead in assessing the patients' progress as well as planning their dialysis schedules and processes.

"The nurses will plan the duration accordingly, such as if the patients need a longer or shorter period and make sure they have adequate dialysis sessions," said Chooi Ngoh.

She pointed out that NKF nurses are also seeing more elderly patients with kidney failure as a result of diabetes, so they have to include diabetic foot screening and gerontology assessment... and be prepared for emergencies.

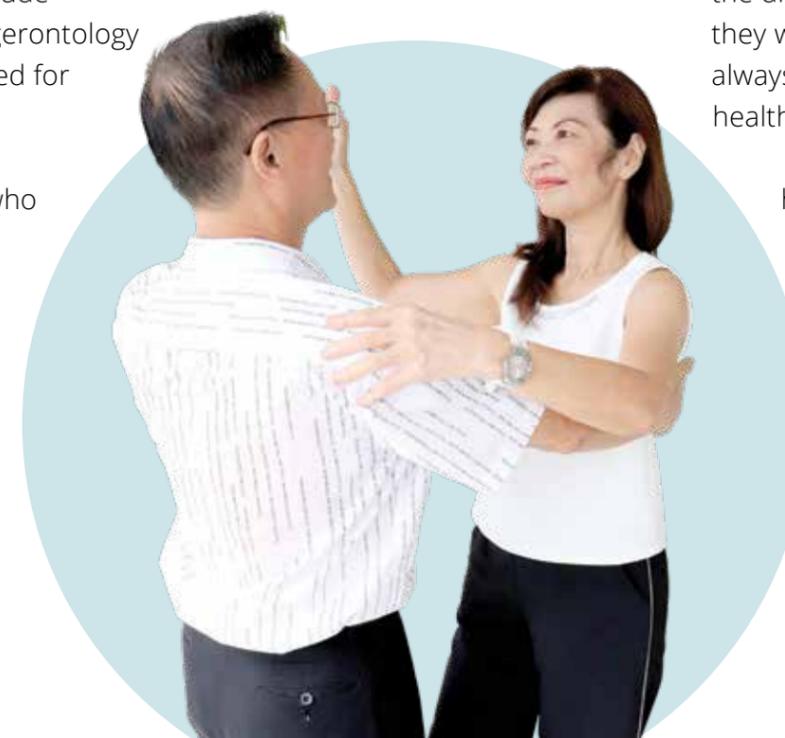
The mother of two remembered a 70-year-old who came in for his dialysis as usual but complained about not feeling well.

"I noticed that he was perspiring profusely and seeing that this was not normal for him, we decided to call for an ambulance. Initially his family insisted on

**// We (renal nurses) do more than just oversee the patients' dialysis; we educate them on vascular access care, diet fluid control and administer medication for the patients.**

taking him to hospital on their own but we convinced them that it was urgent and they might not be able to handle the situation by themselves," said Chooi Ngoh.

While the patient eventually didn't make it and passed on, the family was still grateful to the nursing team for making the right call for their father.



While this situation is not that common at the dialysis centres, NKF nurses have to stay vigilant and make quick decisions for the well-being of their patients.

In addition, much has changed in the area of renal nursing, particularly due to the changing demographics of dialysis patients and the

evolution of technology.

"When I started, setting up the dialysis process was manual. Now the machines do most of the work and I see more advanced machines being developed," said Chooi Ngoh.

She believes the NKF nurses of the future will be able to focus more on the increasingly complex cases at the dialysis centres. This means they would have to ensure they are always up-to-date on the changes in healthcare.

While retirement is on the horizon for Chooi Ngoh – she dances (left, with her husband) twice a week to keep her mind active – she hopes to see the next generation of nurses keep up with the training as healthcare needs evolve.

She said: "Nurses have to be ready to take on new challenges as they come." ●

# Healthy journey starts from young

**MAGESWARI AMADERLINGAM**

Senior Staff Nurse

Health Promotion Board

**REMEMBER** immunisation shots from a nurse at school? Most of us do, yet many of us are unaware that nurses are the backbone of Singapore's School Health Services (SHS). In fact, you may be pleasantly surprised to also know that the SHS has been around since 1921.

Mageswari Amaderlingam is part of the special group of nurses who have kept generations of our students healthy for 99 years, giving them life-saving immunisations and providing crucial health check-ups in school campuses.

She said: "When people ask where

I work, I say we are engaged in the schools. Normally they are surprised, so I explain that we collaborate with schools and conduct activities with the students to encourage them to be healthy."

Mageswari, who is called Mages by colleagues, started her nursing



*As we don't wear our nurse uniform in the school, the students tend to call us 'teacher'; it makes me feel that we are one of the educators too.*

career as a nursing aide at Thomson Medical Centre in 1993. Two years later, encouraged by her nursing officer and supported by her mother, she signed up for a programme then offered by the Ministry of Health to become an Enrolled Nurse.

Following her certification in 1997, she joined the Institute of Health's School Health Services and is still with the unit – which is now part of Health Promotion Board (HPB) since 2001.

"I was in the school health screening team where I administered vaccinations and conducted vision checks for school children. I also worked in HPB's Student Health Centre where I performed clinical duties such as ear syringing procedures and assisted doctors," said Mages, who was sponsored by HPB for her Diploma in Nursing at Nanyang Polytechnic in 2002.

Now she is a Student Health Advisor

too, promoting healthy living to students and collaborating with schools on programmes to encourage healthy eating.

Added Mages: "As we don't wear our nurse uniform in the school, the students tend to call us 'teacher'; it makes me feel that we are one of the educators too."

Her challenges are time and apathy. She has to organise the activities around the students' busy schedules, sometimes during recess or Physical Education lessons, and deal with apathetic parents. She is grateful for the support from the teachers at Ang Mo Kio Primary School who work with her to encourage their students to be active and healthy.

Another challenge was keeping track of the children's immunisations with the health booklet. That has since changed.

Mages, who does yoga in her free time, feels technology has helped the work of the school nurse a great deal with digital records of immunisations and scans on HealthHub. She added: "We can do more data analysis on the health of the student population using the information stored online."

That said, the 44-year-old unassuming lady still wants to engage more with the students' parents through home visits or via apps: "We

can keep them updated on their child's situation. We need parents to be more involved in the development of their children's health and have better conversations about healthy eating." ●



# Taking care to homes



## RENUKA NAGALINGHAM

Assistant Nurse Clinician

Home Nursing Foundation

**LIKE** most of us, Renuka Nagalingham despises cockroaches. However, when it comes to her job, she has the mental fortitude to focus on her task and ignore the ugly pests. She proved that when, during her time as a Senior Staff

Nurse at the Home Nursing Foundation (HNF), she shrugged off an unpleasant encounter during a visit to a patient's home.

"I remember visiting a patient whose flat was infested with cockroaches.

I am so scared of the pests but had to focus on attending to the patient while hoping that I won't have 'surprises' from the roaches," said Renuka who is now an Assistant Nurse Clinician at HNF. She immediately followed up with a social worker to seek the town council's assistance with cleaning the flat.

Having joined the profession in 1996, following her Diploma in Nursing from Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), Renuka spent 12 years at National University Hospital. During this time, she always wondered how her patients coped at home when they were discharged from the hospital.

"You can teach the patients how to care for themselves and the caregivers on giving the care, but when they go home, it could be another story," she said.

This concern stayed with her even when she took a short break from nursing to focus on raising her two sons. Not surprisingly, it was HNF that she headed to when she decided to resume her career in 2009.

When she started at the foundation, Renuka visited about five to six patients a day. Now, the 44-year-old manages the home visit schedules for the western

*I remember visiting a patient whose flat was infested with cockroaches. I am so scared of the pests but had to focus on attending to the patient while hoping that I won't have 'surprises' from the roaches.*

region as well as the after-hours services duty schedule and handles new referrals and complex cases.

She also works closely with medical social workers, community service providers and caregivers to help patients with social issues that impact their health.

To upgrade her skills, the effervescent nurse completed the Advanced Diploma in Nursing (Gerontology) at NYP in 2014 – to give her an edge in providing better care for her older patients – and is currently studying part-time for a degree in nursing from Griffith University (Australia).

Her hope is that community care nurses embrace technology to better care for their patients and more volunteer befrienders can be incorporated into the HNF network.

"I would like to see nurses use tele-monitoring for our patients in the future so our follow-ups can be better especially with wound care, diabetic care and management of medication.

It will also empower them to take better charge of their care.

Having befrienders for lonely elderly patients will be good too as they can be the eyes and ears on the ground," added Renuka. ●



# Banking on blood

## ANG YI LIN

Senior Staff Nurse  
Bloodbank@HSA

**WHEN** Senior Staff Nurse Ang Yi Lin looks at a bag of blood, she is constantly reminded that it can save three lives. That statistic has been drilled into her as part of her work at the blood bank at Health Sciences Authority (HSA) or as it is known, Bloodbank@HSA.

“Many people don’t know that there are nurses at HSA,” said Yi Lin, adding that it included members of her family. Having been with HSA for five years, she always takes time to explain that she and her team collect and maintain the nation’s blood supply for patients, especially in times of crisis.

HSA nurses have been there for

national emergencies like the collapse of Hotel New World in 1986 and the Spyros accident in 1978 which saw many casualties following an explosion on the Greek oil tanker docked in Singapore waters. Nurses worked around the clock, collecting blood from donors to ensure there was sufficient supply for the injured.

The 38-year-old nurse, who was drawn to the profession thanks to her aunt who was a nurse, says her team works hard to ensure the blood bank maintains a six-day blood stock at all times. To ensure they do not drop under required stock levels, Yi Lin and her fellow nurses do their best to ensure the donors have a positive experience at blood donation drives and at the four blood banks.

She revealed that her regular donors keep coming back to Bloodbank@HSA

even though they live closer to the satellite blood banks around the island, attributing it to the friendships the HSA nurses have developed with them. “The donors’ appreciation and their smiles mean a lot to us,” added the mother of two who started her nursing career at the National Heart Centre, Singapore after completing her nursing diploma at Nanyang Polytechnic in 2002.

In 2003, she headed to the University of Wollongong (Australia) for her degree in nursing and followed it up with a



“Nursing at HSA has progressed quite a bit and we are currently training the nurses to be able to handle screenings prior to blood donations (a role presently handled by doctors). I hope to see nurses handling the whole process, from start to finish.”

is how she prefers to enjoy her free time – to help out at other blood bank branches if they are short-handed.

She has one unfulfilled aspiration though: To see nurses handle the entire blood donation process.

“Before, we didn’t have sophisticated machines, so nurses had to keep monitoring the (blood collection) process. It was a manual hook-on mechanism and so they had to make sure the anti-coagulator and blood in the bag were mixed well,” she said.

Today’s machines are more advanced, letting the nurses do their jobs better and helping them focus on the donor experience.

Yi Lin added: “Nursing at HSA has progressed quite

a bit and we are currently training the nurses to be able to handle screenings prior to blood donations (a role presently handled by doctors). I hope to see nurses handling the whole process, from start to finish.” ●





*Celebrating  
Achievements, Inspiring  
Future Generations*

*Lautman*



# Striving for excellence

## TRACY CAROL AYRE

Group Chief Nurse  
SingHealth

Chief Nurse  
Singapore General Hospital

**IT WAS** a single moment of tragedy in Adjunct Associate Professor Tracy Carol Ayre's life at age 14 that determined her life's path as a nurse. Her beloved maternal grandmother died due to pulmonary edema – a condition caused by excess fluid in the lungs.

Tracy, now 53, can still vividly recall that moment: "She collapsed at night and we took her to a hospital. Mum and I were left waiting in the corridor. Nobody came out to update us and we didn't know what was going on. And then this person came out and told us 'your grandmother has passed away'."

Five years later, she enrolled in the then School of Nursing and worked at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) after graduation, eventually specialising in critical care nursing. Now, after 34 years with SGH, Tracy has 12,000 nurses under her care as Group Chief Nurse, SingHealth and has been Chief Nurse of SGH since 2012.

It gave her great pride when Newsweek ranked SGH the world's third best hospital in March 2019 (after

the Mayo Clinic and Cleveland Clinic, top medical facilities in the United States), citing its clinical research and "outstanding nursing". The magazine also noted that SGH was the first hospital in Asia to be awarded the Magnet designation in 2010 – the highest accolade for nursing excellence – by the American Nurses Credentialing Centre.

Yet, like her SingHealth colleagues, she remained humble about it. "I think we must keep aspiring to be better. I've always told my nurses I am very proud of them and of their dedication and commitment. SGH is very complex and they are busy every hour, every day, yet their love for their patients and work is evident," added Tracy.

The 2007 President's Award for Nurses recipient, who completed her PhD in 2009, would like nurses to be nimble and adaptable change makers, challenging the current way of doing things to deliver the best patient experience and quality care.

"Over the last 30 years, nursing has already moved up many notches. We used to be, for lack of a better word, doctors' handmaidens. Now, we have greater autonomy and independence, new technology, robotics and automation that relieve us of mundane tasks and add value to what we do,"

**Over the last 30 years, nursing has already moved up many notches. We used to be, for lack of a better word, doctors' handmaidens. Now, we have greater autonomy and independence, new technology, robotics and automation that relieve us of mundane tasks and add value to what we do.**

Tracy observed.

Her aspiration is for future nurses to be "intelligent, resilient and equal players at the policy table, while maintaining compassion and humanity for patients".

"I hope they will go the extra mile, whether it's for a new process, a new skill or a new way of doing things," she added. "We always have to be one step ahead, otherwise we will lose our relevance in this changing world."

To nursing leaders, she has this to say: "It's very important to know your nurses, engage and always be there for them. If they feel happy, they will do good work; patients will be happy and outcomes will be good."

When she is not strategising on nurse staffing challenges, talent retention and development across SingHealth, Tracy relaxes by reading, gardening, baking and cooking for her daughter. "My 11-year-old daughter has a varied palate, so I have to vary my cooking style. I am adept at cooking Malay, Indian, Chinese and Western food!" the cheerful lady revealed with a laugh. ●



# Nurses... at the heart of everything she does



## LIM SWEE HIA

Senior Director  
SingHealth Alice Lee Institute  
of Advanced Nursing

President  
Singapore Nurses Association  
(April 2012 – June 2020)

**NOT** all heroes wear capes. Some wear batik, like Associate Professor (Dr) Lim Swee Hia who loves the prints for their versatility. In sync with the intricate batik prints of her favourite tops, Swee Hia's nursing career is colourful and varied, which is no surprise given how

she spent the past 49 years fighting tirelessly to strengthen the nursing fabric and raise the profile of the nursing profession in Singapore.

The 70-year-old, who was drawn to nursing after volunteering with the Red Cross during her teenage years,

spearheaded training modules at SingHealth in 2003 to give nurses opportunities to expand their roles. She also introduced skills upgrading programmes in 2005 for Enrolled Nurses, giving them a chance to assist doctors and take on jobs such as conducting bladder scans.

Together with Dr Della Lee, Chairman of the DS Lee Foundation, Swee Hia co-founded the Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award, a national award for outstanding Enrolled Nurses. She also helped establish the SingHealth Alice Lee Institute of Advanced Nursing (IAN) in 2015, which offers affordable nursing specialisation programmes and practice-based training for nurses in Singapore.

"About 14,000 nurses across Singapore are trained at the IAN yearly," said Swee Hia, a 2002 President's Award for Nurses winner, who is Senior Director of SingHealth Alice Lee IAN and President of the Singapore Nurses Association (SNA).

The institute is the first in Asia to be accredited by the American Nurses Credentialing Centre which, she added, is a great morale booster as it benchmarks Singapore nurses to international standards.

Her interest in nursing education

**As a leader, you must empower and support the nurses. I am not afraid to speak up for them, because if we don't, who will?**

stems from her childhood. Growing up in austere living conditions and being the eldest of five siblings meant she had to make many sacrifices, such as leaving school after her O levels to earn a living and help finance their education.

"I only got my nursing degree when I was 48 due to financial constraints. I treat nurses like my children, and this is why I want to help them pursue their dreams and receive a proper education without worrying about the cost," said



the handicraft lover, who enjoys making paper lanterns.

The quietly confident woman received the Her World Woman of the Year award (2012-2013). The award recognises women with outstanding achievements, but Swee Hia is quick to downplay her accomplishments. "No lah, there are many other nurses who deserve the award," she said bashfully.

One thing she is immensely proud of is SNA successfully hosting the International Council of Nurses Congress 2019 in Singapore. The biennial event is an opportunity for nurses from all over the world, international healthcare policy makers and professionals to congregate and exchange healthcare knowledge. Swee Hia said: "We are so proud to have hosted more than 5,000 delegates from over 140 countries and put our nursing profession in the spotlight!"

She is also heartened by how perceptions towards nursing have improved over the years. She said: "Today, I see nurses embracing their profession with pride."

Then she added with conviction: "As a leader, you must empower and support the nurses. I am not afraid to speak up for them, because if we don't, who will?"

Truly, this is a nursing hero. ●

# Nurse, leader, scholar, teacher, mentor

## PREMARANI KANNUSAMY

Principal Lecturer (Industry)

Republic Polytechnic

**AFTER** 10 years as an Intensive Care Unit nurse, Dr Premarani Kannusamy made a life-changing decision: She accepted a scholarship from the World Health Organization in 1990 to further her nursing studies at the La Trobe University in Melbourne (Australia).

This led the way to more academic achievements like completing her Masters and PhD in the early 2000s. Her stellar resume lists appointments like Deputy Chief Nursing Officer at the Ministry of Health (MOH), Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Chief Executive Officer of Assisi Hospice.

In 1999, she established the Singapore Nursing Board as a Statutory Board which oversees the registration and enrolment of nurses, the registration of midwives as well as the certification of Advanced Practice Nurses (APN).

Prema was also the founding president of the Upsilon Eta Chapter of

the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing in 2007, a non-profit international organisation that supports the professional development of nurses globally.

She had a hand in establishing the JBI-IMH (Singapore) Centre for Evidence-Based Practices in Mental Health Care when she was the Director of Nursing at the Institute of Mental Health in 2010.

**“Nursing gave me a solid foundation; I had the skills and the tools to work in areas like education, research, strategic planning, administration and management.”**

A collaboration with the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), an internationally recognised leader in evidence-based healthcare practices, this initiative allowed clinical, nursing and allied health professionals research and develop evidence-based mental healthcare for better patient outcomes.

“Nursing gave me a solid foundation; I had the skills and the tools to work in areas like education, research, strategic planning, administration and

management,” said the affable lady, whose two older sisters are nurses as well.

While she was with MOH, working with the then Chief Nursing Officer Ang Beng Choo, Prema was instrumental in developing the degree and master’s programmes at the NUS Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies. The Master of Nursing programme started in 2003, allowing senior nurses to skill-up academically to take on the APN role, which offered them a clinical career path and prepared them to serve an ageing population with greater healthcare needs.

It is no surprise then that Prema has received many awards and accolades over her 42-year career, most notably the Nurses’ Merit Award (1993) and the President’s Award for Nurses (2004).

“I didn’t achieve all these alone. It was a lot of teamwork and collaboration with local as well as international nursing leaders,” recalled Prema, currently a Principal Lecturer (Industry) at Republic Polytechnic.

She is convinced that innovation is key to providing better care to the community, which is why she stays up-to-date with the latest trends in society by delving into topics such as augmented and virtual reality as well as artificial intelligence. In fact, she has issued a challenge for all nurses: Start

innovating nursing practices.

“Nurses are cognisant of the unprecedented challenges in healthcare. With their strong clinical and operational expertise, they can be the catalyst to facilitate innovation and digitalisation... nurses need to take up the challenge to be clinician-innovators to improve nursing practices,” explained Prema.

At the age of 61, retirement is not



on the cards for this bookworm. She said with a laugh: “I have a Type A personality; always full of beans and ideas. And I never want to stop learning, teaching and innovating.”

That said, the go-getter confesses she is not all about her academic journals: “I also know some BlackPink (Korean girl band) songs... my god-daughter taught me those *lah*. She rejuvenates me and makes me feel young.” ●

# A nurse's teacher

**PUA LAY HOON**

Chief Nurse

Woodlands Health Campus

**WHENEVER** Pua Lay Hoon faces a challenge at work, she glances at a small black-and-white photo that sits in a frame on her desk. It is a photograph of her paternal grandfather who passed away 33 years ago, and it obviously has a special place in the Woodlands Health Campus (WHC) Chief Nurse's heart.

Lay Hoon, who received the President's Award for Nurses in 2015 primarily for her contributions to nursing education, has a reason for that habit: "One of his last pieces of advice for me was to choose something to do and do it well; that turned out to be nursing."

The President's Award for Nurses is a national recognition of nurses who have made a significant contribution to the profession and the community, while demonstrating outstanding leadership, innovation and competence. It is Singapore's pinnacle award in nursing.

If Grandpa Pua was still around today, he would



be immensely proud of his granddaughter's many achievements.

A Nurse Educator since 2001 after completing her Master of Nursing (Education) at the University of Sydney, she was the Deputy Director of Nursing (Education and Practice) at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) where she set up the Department of Clinical Instructors in 2006 to promote clinical education standards in TTSH.

She also developed a structured pre-registration clinical education training programme for nursing students. Six years later, with a group of passionate educators from the medical, nursing, allied health and pharmacy teams, the Pre-professional Education Office was set up to promote and enhance excellence in clinical education at TTSH.

In 2017, after 25 years at TTSH, Lay Hoon took on the Chief Nurse role for WHC, which is slated to open progressively from 2022.

Though her work now centres on infrastructure planning, clinical services development, manpower planning, staff training and development, and nursing service organisation for WHC, she insists she is still very much a Nurse



Educator, "teaching and learning with nurses every day".

In fact, the outspoken lady who enjoys whipping up dishes such as braised duck, mee hoon kueh and pig's trotters for her family and colleagues, said: "The President's Award is a constant reminder of my duty to inspire and teach younger nurses. I tell myself that I need to be where I was or better, and fulfil my responsibility as a role model."

To this end, she continues to work alongside fellow nurses, caring for patients in the wards of Yishun Community Hospital (where her office is located for now).

Lay Hoon hopes to see the profession grow from strength to strength with nurses finding meaning in what they do, contributing and impacting healthcare and health beyond the hospital, and excelling and starting more nurse-led services.

She also looks forward to more nurses being celebrated and recognised, and making their families proud.

"It takes courage, perseverance and heart to help people at their most vulnerable and deal with life and death," Lay Hoon, 50, said with a smile.

"The work that nurses do goes beyond, and should be acknowledged. I love my nurses." ●

**The President's Award is a constant reminder of my duty to inspire and teach younger nurses. I tell myself that I need to be where I was or better, and fulfil my responsibility as a role model.**

*It is a recognition of your hard work, dedication and perseverance... It means a lot to any nurse to receive the Nurses' Merit Award.*

# Community

# care champion



**NELSON CORONADO ROSALES**

*Nurse Manager*

Ren Ci @ Bukit Batok St. 52

**NELSON** Coronado Rosales did not choose nursing. It was chosen for him... by his older sister.

Nelson, now a Nurse Manager at Ren Ci @ Bukit Batok St. 52, recalls how it happened. When he was just 17, his 20-year-old sister told him to be a nurse and told his twin brother to be an accountant. Being filial brothers – she was their main caregiver as their mother worked in another town to support the family after their father died – they agreed.

It turned out to be the right path for Nelson, a Singapore permanent resident who has been working at the Ren Ci nursing homes for the past 14 years, since moving here from the Philippines to seek better opportunities for himself to support his four daughters.

In 2017, his diligent work earned him the Nurses' Merit Award, given to nurses who have demonstrated consistent and outstanding performance, participated in

professional development and made contributions to promote the nursing profession.

"It is a recognition of your hard work, dedication and perseverance. Not every nurse can be nominated for the award. I am lucky that my supervisors recognise my work. It means a lot to any nurse to receive the Nurses' Merit Award," he said.

The cheerful 49-year-old man credits Ren Ci's Chief Executive Officer, his nursing leaders and his colleagues for their guidance and support as well as appreciating his hard work: "In 2015, I was Acting Nurse Manager and in 2017, they promoted me to Nurse Manager – the same time I was nominated for the merit award. I felt so blessed and, since then, my luck has been good."

The awards didn't stop. In 2018 and 2019, he received the Singapore Health Quality Service Award, presented annually by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medical Centre, for his

outstanding performance as a nurse.

For Nelson, the awards are an acknowledgement of his commitment to the community care sector. He hopes that it will help to dispel the misconception that nursing in care homes only involves assisting elderly residents and changing their diapers.

"Nurses in community care need to be able to make a good assessment of the elderly residents and initiate activities to provide them with the quality of life. It is providing patient-centred care," he added.

The energetic man, who plays table tennis, jogs and watches movies or documentaries in his free time, isn't done yet. His wish for the future is that nurses in the community care sector get more recognition for the good work they do.

He said: "Nurses in community care are well-trained and knowledgeable. They should be seen as experts in their area of practice." ●



# Hat trick of awards

## NASAH SOHOR

Principal Enrolled Nurse

Singapore General Hospital

**IF YOU** think getting one award is a big deal, Principal Enrolled Nurse (PEN) Nasah Sohor, 54, experienced triple joy in 2016. She received three awards that year: The Nurses' Merit Award, the National Day Award and the Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award, of which Nasah was the overall champion.

Organised by the Singapore Nurses Association, the Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Award recognises promising and talented enrolled nurses who have exhibited excellence and dedication in the nursing profession.

"I was very honoured to receive these awards. It made a difference to me as it gave me the opportunity to grow and move forward. I was inspired to keep performing at my best and



lead my juniors well," said the vivacious mother of three who recognised her calling to the profession 45 years ago when her father was warded at the Singapore General Hospital's (SGH) Bowyer Block.

Seeing him hooked up to machines and not being able to take care of him made the 11-year-old Nasah realise the value of nurses. Coincidentally, when she went through her training at SGH in 1982, it was at Bowyer Block. Much to her sadness, part of it was later demolished to make way for the new SGH buildings.

Nasah was also part of a team of nurses and doctors who provided medical assistance on-site when the Hotel New World collapsed in 1986. While her job was to relay updates about casualties to the command centre post, she described it as an intense experience, which taught her how to react in a national emergency situation.

She joined the Department of Emergency Medicine (DEM) after she became a PEN in 1984. She and her team also developed the Patient Journey Map to help patients navigate the DEM.

Said Nasah: "Sometimes after

**"I was very honoured to receive these awards. It made a difference to me as it gave me the opportunity to grow and move forward. I was inspired to keep performing at my best and lead my juniors well."**

the patients come for screening and triaging, they do not know where to go. The main thing is to tell the patient about the estimated waiting time to see the doctor and help them find their way around the hospital."

She is very proud of the work she did with the map and the many improvements since it was launched 10 years ago as it made the patient



experience at SGH better and more efficient.

Her passion for nursing is so infectious that her eldest daughter Nur Ramah Fatin (facing page, with Nasah) and niece Nozean Mohd Ali have become nurses too. Other family members also work in

SGH, in non-healthcare areas.

Fatin is a Staff Nurse in SGH's diagnostic radiology department and Nozean is a Nurse Clinician in SGH.

Fatin, 31, calls her mum her role model: "How she makes an impact in others' lives inspired me to become a nurse. I wanted to save lives like her." They enjoy a close relationship and share a passion for reading – Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a favourite – and watching Korean dramas.

Nasah hopes that Enrolled Nurses can embrace technology to improve their patients' healthcare experiences, particularly in accident and emergency situations, as well as be ready to take on different roles in healthcare when the opportunities arise.

She said: "We are comforters, advocates and caregivers to our patients. We should keep abreast of medical and nursing advances... and always try to do more for our patients." ●

# A glittering career

**HARBHAJAN SINGH**

*Emeritus Fellow and Senior Nurse Manager*

Tan Tock Seng Hospital



**MOST** people consider their 60th birthday a momentous occasion. But what about a 60th work anniversary? Now, that's something really special, given that careers usually span 45 to 50 years at best.

Harbhajan Singh is one of the few people in Singapore who

has celebrated his 60th work anniversary. And every one of those 60 years was as a nurse!

He joined the profession way back in 1959. Here's how he remembers that time: "I was fresh out of school after my O levels. As my family did not have the means to pay for

*I will continue to do my best to inspire the younger nurses. All they have to do in return is to teach this lao ren (old man) new computer tricks; I learnt how to create PowerPoint presentations and Word documents from them!*

further studies, my priority was to get a job and support my family. I chanced upon the Public Service Commission's circular of available jobs at the ministries. My first choice was to be a teacher, but they asked me if I would like to consider nursing. And here I am today!"

Harbhajan, who was one of the nominees for The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year 2018 title, can still recall his early days in a female-dominated workforce. "I had to always bring my A-game to gain the trust of my supervisors, female colleagues as well as patients and their families," he said, adding that the gender gap in the profession started narrowing by the 1970s, thanks to efforts by the Health Ministry.

The Emeritus Fellow and Senior Nurse Manager has seen the nursing profession evolve, noting with pride that the pay is better and younger colleagues are entrusted with managerial and leadership roles. He is especially proud to see nurses receiving awards in recognition of their work. His personal tally includes the Pingat Bakti Masyarakat (Public Service Medal) for his active grassroots and community work, Pingat Kepujian (Commendation Medal) for staying strong in the battle against

SARS, and Pingat Bakti Setia (Long Service Award) for his time in healthcare.

Now 79, this veteran, who has been bitten by the travel bug, hopes to continue working as long as he is physically and mentally fit. As he says: "I will continue to do my best to inspire the younger nurses. All they have to do in return is teach this lao ren (old man) new computer tricks; I learnt how to create PowerPoint presentations and Word documents from them!" ●



# CARE TO GO BEYOND

## Boosting the nursing population

**ALMOST** a decade ago, spurred by the desire to provide better healthcare to Singapore's rapidly ageing population, the Ministry of Health (MOH) decided it was time to boost the number of nurses here. While the ministry worked on enhancing the professional aspects of the job, the corporate communications team at MOH Holdings was given the task of launching a branding campaign to enhance the image of the profession and draw more locals into the workforce.



Taking guidance from the relevant divisions at MOH – Chief Nursing Officer's Office, Manpower Planning & Strategy and Corporate Communications – the team launched the Care To Go Beyond (CTGB) campaign in early 2013.

Initially, the campaign took a double-barrelled view of the target audience: Students, who could form the next wave of local nurses; and influencers (parents, family members, teachers etc) who could nudge a youngster on career choices. The platforms used comprised a mix of online and traditional media, with print advertising and a television commercial to spread the message about nursing. Over time, adapting to evolving communication patterns, the campaign zeroed in on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as the primary channels to reach the target



### ON DISPLAY

MRT platform screen doors (below), buses and brochures are used to showcase the CTGB messages and help the public understand more about the diversity of the nursing profession.



### ON AIR

TV commercials (right), a nursing drama series with Mediacorp (far right), a nursing anthem with local music duo Jack & Rai (below) and a National Day music video by eight nurses (below, right) have been produced to help spread the campaign's messages. The nursing anthem has crossed 2.7 million views as of end April 2020 while the National Day music video was screened at the pre-show segment of the National Day Parade in 2019.



### ON THE GROUND

The Healthcare Bus (above and left) and the Health And Life-skills Outreach (below, left) exhibition engage secondary students with interactive game stations and career talks. The CTGB team also participates in outreach events at the community level (far left).



### ONLINE

Social media is a big part of CTGB's connection to the target audience. Regular posts comprising articles, videos and GIFs on the CTGB website, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube pages have garnered more than 39,000 followers.



audience. One thing stays, though – the campaign takes great pride in using real nurses, every time.

As the campaign matured, retention became a major focus too. Buoyed by the great efforts of the Chief Nursing Officer and her team to improve the profession from within, the CTGB team dived into work that appreciated the diligent professionalism by our existing cohort of nurses. The celebration of Nurses' Day on a national level was one such mega effort (see right). Other efforts included year-end parties to boost the morale of nurses who were working over the festive period.

Star power was recruited too, in the bid to better embed the profession in the public's mind. The CTGB team linked up with Mediacorp's Channel 8 to produce a nursing drama series titled "You Can Be An Angel Too". Starring big names like Zoe Tay, Bryan Wong and Rebecca Lim, it drew enough viewers to merit three 20-episode seasons. A fourth season focusing on nursing and allied health in the community is in the pipeline.



There was also on-the-ground engagement reach out to secondary school students and to get them to think about nursing and allied health as a career as early as possible. The campaign therefore introduced the HALO (Health And Life-skills Outreach) exhibition and the Healthcare Bus – both featuring interactive elements that engage students and teach them about nursing and allied health professions.

The ministry's drive to attract more students to join nursing is gradually showing results. In 2019, 332 students joined the Bachelor of Science (Nursing) programme at the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies in the National University of Singapore, more than double its intake of 155 students in 2016. At Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Nanyang Polytechnic, intake numbers for the Diploma in Nursing course climbed by 13% between 2016 and 2018. At the same time, enrolment figures for nursing studies at the Institute of Technical Education increased by 6%.

The work continues.



## Celebrating Nurses' Day

**DID** you know that Singapore is the only country to celebrate Nurses' Day on 1 August? The rest of the world uses Florence Nightingale's birthday – 12 May – as their special date for the profession.

The decision to use 1 August here harks way back to that very day in 1885 when some French nuns stationed in Singapore left their convent to nurse the sick at the General Hospital at the Sepoy Lines.

While their employers celebrate the nurses' special day at the respective healthcare institutions, the Care To Go Beyond team has been coordinating a national celebration of Nurses' Day since 2013. Our President and Prime Minister join fellow Singapore residents in acknowledging the hard work by nurses throughout the year.

This annual effort includes a double-spread advertisement in The Straits Times (some are displayed on the right) and other local media platforms. Nurses are also given a simple CTGB gift every year – flowers, paper windmills, balloons, tote bags, coffee mugs so far – while generous sponsors have stepped up to offer special deals for nurses.

It is our nation's way of saying thank you to our nurses.



## 1 LEA E. TANDOC-NUÑEZ

Staff Nurse at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital  
**Medium: Acrylic paint and String gel**

I am proud to be part of this book. For Chapter 8, I visualised a nurse saving thousands of lives. The hearts represent the people healed by the caring hands of nurses. But the artwork became more personal because of COVID-19: I was caring for a COVID-19 patient when I too became a patient in NCID as a suspected case. Luckily I tested negative but this painting has a deeper meaning for me now. It is more than just helping sick people. It shows that a nurse has all kinds of hearts to give. A heart of courage and bravery; a responsible heart; a heart full of passion; a heart of selflessness and sacrifice; and a heart of inspiration and unsung heroes.

## 2 YANG LI PING

Nurse Clinician at National Heart Centre Singapore  
**Medium: Oil paint**

It was challenging yet exciting to do the artwork for Chapter 6. Working closely with the book's designer, I produced this diffused oil painting of hot air balloons that signal pushing boundaries and exploration. I really enjoyed this assignment and hope you will enjoy the book as well.

## 1 SIM PEIZHEN

Advanced Practice Nurse at National University Hospital  
**Camera: Canon D60**

Working on this book gave me the opportunity to interact with several nursing leaders. It is an honour indeed, and I am inspired by their candidness and professionalism despite their huge responsibilities at the workplace.

## 2 NURAIDAH M.NASIR

Senior Enrolled Nurse at Health Promotion Board  
**Camera: Olympus E-M10 Mark II**

It was an honour to be one of the photographers who bring this book to life with images that capture a moment in nursing history for future generations. It made me realise that there is more to photography than just taking pictures.

## 3 CHOCK HUAY CHING

Senior Staff Nurse at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital  
**Camera: iPhoneXS**

I'm really grateful to be part of this book. Of course, we faced time challenges (we nurses do shift work, remember?) but we made it happen. There is so much captured in a single photograph – the emotions of a person, the stories they tell and the moments that stand still against the passing of time.

## 4 WANG JIAXIN

Senior Staff Nurse at Changi General Hospital  
**Camera: Sony A7II**

I feel so proud to be part of this book, and enjoyed the great team-work with the project team. The three interviewees I photographed reminded me that nurses can do more than just clinical work to contribute to patient care. I was also inspired by their passion for their nursing careers.

## 5 FARIDAH FADILAH ABU BAKAR

Lecturer at Nanyang Polytechnic (School of Health and Social Sciences)  
**Camera: Sony a6000**

I feel honoured to have participated in this project which is a gift to my fellow nursing comrades. Many of the nurses I photographed have a wealth of knowledge and experiences. They are all truly inspirational.

## 6 LIM VOON HOOI

Deputy Director of Nursing at the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics  
**Camera: Canon EOS 7D Mark II**

This assignment allowed me to meet some of my amazing fellow nurses. Hearing what they have achieved is inspirational. It may have taken a while to get them to smile and be comfortable in front of the camera, but it has been a rewarding experience.

## 7 CHARLY MAGNE PANAGUITON TRONCO

Senior Staff Nurse at Changi General Hospital  
**Camera: Nikon D750**

Although I was hesitant at first, I am really thankful to be part of this project. It wasn't really difficult to convey the nurses' stories and emotions through my photos as these nurses were just so natural and real in their comfort zones.

## 8 LIM MARK ANTHONY PAMINTUAN

Enrolled Nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital  
**Camera: Canon EOS R**

Even though I had to sacrifice some personal time for photo shoots, I am truly excited to see everyone's hard work in this nursing book. Not only did I learn a lot by helping with this book, I was reminded that nursing is truly a noble profession and I will always be proud of it.

## 3 MA ISABELLE KAGAWAN MANLAPIG

Staff Nurse at KK Women's and Children's Hospital  
**Medium: Copic Markers and Multiliner**

For someone who has always worked in the hospital setting, it was enlightening to see the profession from a different perspective. My inspiration for Chapter 7's artwork is the multi-faceted nature of community nursing, which is colourful in its diversity and uniqueness.

## 4 NOORLEEYAHITI BINTE RAMJUDI

Senior Staff Nurse at National University Hospital  
**Medium: Acrylic paint**

I was excited and nervous at the same time when chosen to be part of this project. For Chapter 5, I used splatter painting which is a lot harder than it looks... and very messy! I wanted to show a person with many hidden talents on the move, using colours to represent our various healthcare institutions. I had the added privilege of doing the caricatures on these pages.

## 5 MOHAMMED KAMAL

Staff Nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital  
**Medium: Oil paint**

My artwork for Chapter 1 gives an ideation of the struggles faced by our nursing pioneers. The vessel represents their perseverance and guidance, the waves show new heights and opportunities while the dolphins are the new generations of healthcare providers. It all blends to complete a scene depicting teamwork.

## 6 BIBI WONG

Senior Staff Nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital  
**Medium: Procreate (iPad)**

What an honour to join this project and work with other nurses! It was a memorable experience. My artwork for Chapter 4 shows that nursing is a journey. Every step you take and everything you see, be it success or failure, will be the milestone for a better tomorrow.

## 7 CHEAH MEE WEN

Senior Nurse Educator at Sengkang General Hospital  
**Medium: Acrylic paint**

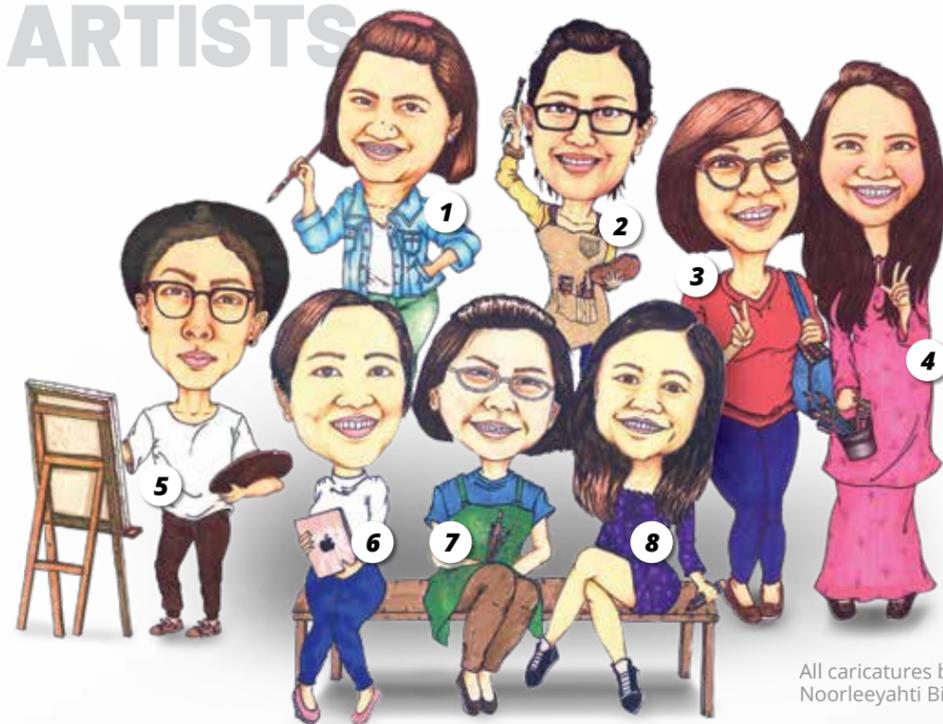
This project has renewed my interest in art. Juggling work and this art assignment was challenging, fun and de-stressing at the same time. I used acrylic paint to capture the theme of Chapter 2, books to signify education, progressing to the electronic pad, with caring from the heart.

## 8 NICOLE SIM

Staff Nurse at Sengkang General Hospital  
**Medium: Pencil**

Working on an artwork for this book was a novel and challenging experience. My pencil sketch for Chapter 3 showcases plants like the Birds of Paradise which symbolise success and overcoming obstacles while the small plants and spade reflect breaking new ground.

# ARTISTS



All caricatures by Noorleeyahiti Binte Ramjudi

# PHOTOGRAPHERS



## 12 MARIA BAGUITA BOEY SOH QI

Senior Staff Nurse at KK Women's and Children's Hospital  
**Camera: Sony A6300**

It was exciting to be part of this project, which has definitely expanded my photography skills. I appreciate Edmund for being very patient and sharing different ideas and concepts. It gave me the chance to explore different photography angles, while retaining my own photography style.

## 11 WONG YU RUI

Senior Staff Nurse at National Heart Centre Singapore  
**Camera: Canon 800D**

It was an honour to contribute my little strength to this big project. I enjoyed working with the editorial team and even learnt some photography skills in the process. Also, it was very motivating to have some of my super seniors in nursing encouraging me.

## 10 SUHAIMI BIN KASMON

Senior Staff Nurse at Singapore General Hospital  
**Camera: Nikon D750**

It was a rare opportunity to capture photos of a prison nurse in his element, to see the depth of meaning behind his every expression. It reminded me that every photo tells a story. Nursing and photography will remain my lifelong passions.

## 9 PHOON KUM KIN

Senior Staff Nurse at Sengkang General Hospital  
**Camera: Canon 5D Mark 3**

I enjoyed this assignment. Not only did I have fun doing the photoshoots with nurses, I also got the opportunity to visit various healthcare institutions.

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Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Ministry of Communications and Information

Ministry of Health

MOH Holdings

Mount Alvernia Hospital

Nanyang Polytechnic

National Centre for Infectious Diseases

National Healthcare Group

National Healthcare Group Polyclinics

National Heart Centre Singapore

National Skin Centre

National University Health System

National University Hospital

National University Polyclinics

National University of Singapore –

Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital

Parkway Pantai

Peacehaven

Ren Ci Nursing Home

Republic Polytechnic

The National Kidney Foundation

Sengkang General Hospital

Singapore General Hospital

Singapore Prison Service

Singapore Medical Council

Singapore National Eye Centre

SingHealth

SingHealth Polyclinics

St. Andrew's Community Hospital

St. Joseph's Home

St Luke's Hospital

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# Thank you, nurses!

Hey nurses, your jobs aren't easy and this is why I have so much respect for each and every one of you. Keep up the good work and know that many of us appreciate what you do and are silently cheering you on!

Nicolas Goh  
University student, 22

The nurses who took care of my grandmother at the hospital were very kind and meticulous.

Sharon Michelle Anne  
ITE student, 17

We appreciate you for all your hard work and dedication in caring for Singaporeans. You have such noble jobs!

Lum Fook Lim  
Part-timer, 66

Hello nurses!  
Thank you for keeping us safe and putting our health & wellbeing as your greatest priority.

Joelle Teo  
Polytechnic student, 18

I really appreciate nurses. Their jobs are very good because they are saving lives. Nurses gave me tips on how to take care of the elderly, for example my husband, when he had dialysis and heart attack. I'm really very thankful to them. They are the top in Singapore; their work is very good. They are serving the country, the people and saving lives.

Aisah bte A Wahid  
Retiree, 68

Thank you, Nurses, for your strength and dedication in the profession you have chosen.

Leonard Lee  
Engineer, 42

I would like to thank all nurses, especially during the period of COVID-19, for their effort and support of the patients who are ill and having the courage to care for them despite being vulnerable to the virus.

Jeevaneesh Soundararajah  
Engineer, 27

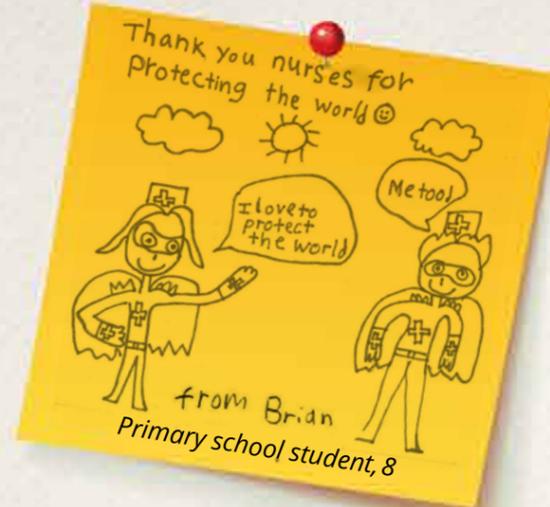
Dear Nurses  
Thank you for your dedication in caring for us in times of need.



Sufia Alesya Najib  
Primary school student, 10

To all the nurses, thank you for the dedication and hard work that each one of you put in to ensure the recovery of our patients.

Crystalline Poh  
Respiratory Therapist, 26



Thank you nurses, for your selfless dedication and round-the-clock care for those who need it the most.

Philip Thomas Kaniyanthara  
Full-time national serviceman, 20

I want to let you know how grateful we are during trying periods. You make us feel confident that we are in good hands.

Marilyn Patricia David  
Warrant Officer, 37

They are the garb that shields us and provides comfort during our healing. They are made of Kevlar in attitude in times of adversity. They are our Mother Teresa, they are the NURSES.

Ashari bin Ali  
Social enterprise owner, 58

Thank you all so much for taking care of the patients in the hospital. You are all heroes in each and every one of your unique ways.

Marcus Ong  
Polytechnic student, 17

Dear nurses, thank you for all your hard work! Your selflessness is an inspiration to us all! Keep up the good work!

Love  
Farah Syazana  
Education Executive, 25

The true backbones of every large healthcare setup and organisation... Thank You Nurses for all you have done!

Seishen Gerard  
Exercise Physiologist, 33

Thank you nurses for the help and kindness 😊

Brayden Khoo  
Primary school student, 8

Hello nurses of Singapore, thank you for your continued hard work & serving the country well. Without you, we'd be nothing!

Nayli Qistina  
Polytechnic student, 18



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**  
SINGAPORE