

ASPAC NEWS

VOL 3

July - December 2016

VISION

“DO EVERYTHING FOR LOVE EVEN THE MOST ORDINARY THINGS.”

With support from our community we will provide the best in compassionate, competent and loving care to all those who suffer from life threatening illnesses.

MISSION

To empower people to live with dignity and hope whilst coping with illness and loss by providing quality medical care, spiritual and psychosocial support to patients and their families.

CORE VALUES

HONOUR AND RESPECT THE WISHES OF OUR PATIENTS

EXCELLENCE OF CARE

TO ALWAYS SERVE WITH COMPASSION AND LOVE

Editorial Team

Dr Lalitha Jeyasingam
Datin Sivamani Rasiah
Maggie Chung
Boey Tyng Fang

Printer
Bunting Max.com.my

Publisher

Assisi Palliative Care Bhd (AsPaC)
32, Jalan 1/12
46000 Petaling Jaya
Selangor
Tel: 03-77838833
Fax: 03-77838899
Email: info@aspac.my
Facebook: ASPAC – Assisi Palliative Care

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EDITORIAL

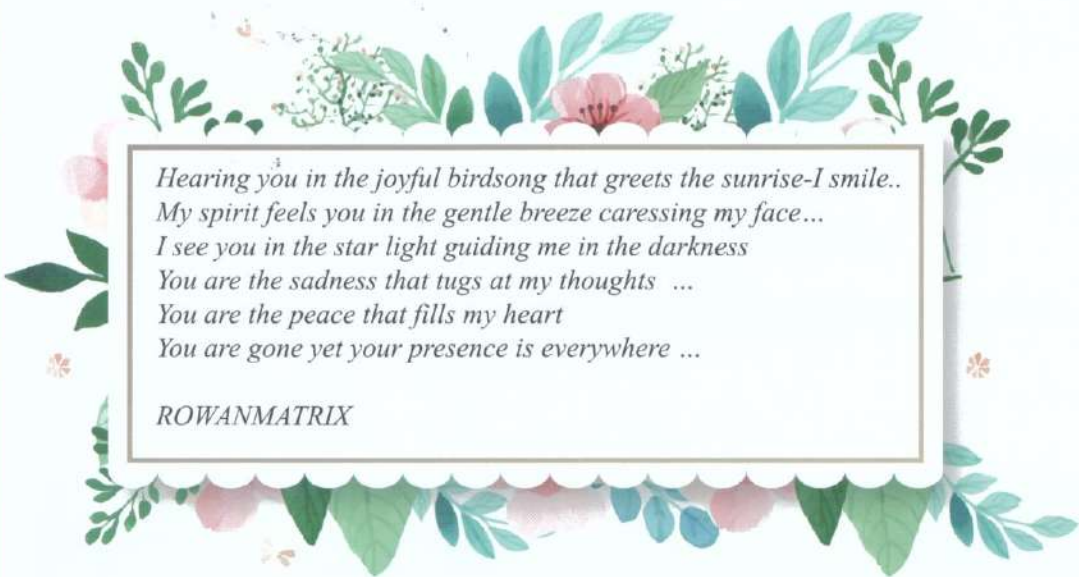
On 27th October 2016, we lost a well liked friend and Board Director of ASPAC to cancer. Mrs Linda Phang was a passionate advocate of palliative and hospice care throughout her long and illustrious nursing career. She was instrumental in raising a substantial amount of money during our fund raising dinner event this year. It was her last wish and final pledge to ASPAC and she saw her dream come true before she left us. She confided that she was relieved and happy to know that we would now be more stable financially and able to fund more staff and activities. We would like to pay tribute to her constant support and encouragement, her friendliness and empathy towards the staff and volunteers of ASPAC.

Inside the pages of this newsletter you will find an article about Linda written by one of her oldest friends, together with several pictures of her.

Many generous Malaysians from all walks of life responded to our appeal for help. Thanks to Nanyang Foundation, we now have two 10 liter oxygen concentrators which we can loan out to patients on high flow oxygen at home. We have been able to invest in more medical equipment and medications which patients require but are unable to afford to buy. We have recruited more nurses and hope to meet the increasing demand for high quality home care services.

We thank all of you, individuals and corporations, who have assisted us to continue to provide palliative care services to the community free of charge.

This volume of ASPAC NEWS is dedicated to the memory of Mrs Linda Phang . May you rest in peace and may your family and friends continue to celebrate your life and cherish your memory always.



*Hearing you in the joyful birdsong that greets the sunrise-I smile..
My spirit feels you in the gentle breeze caressing my face...
I see you in the star light guiding me in the darkness
You are the sadness that tugs at my thoughts ...
You are the peace that fills my heart
You are gone yet your presence is everywhere ...*

ROWANMATRIX



Dr Lalitha Jeyasingam
Medical Director

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IN MEMORY OF MY BEST FRIEND

- LINDA PHANG (CHEAM SWEE LAN)

BY YONG SEW

Sixty years ago, two sixteen year old girls – Swee Lan from Kulim and Yong Sew from Kota Bharu- met in Penang. We both had the same aim of finding accommodation as we were going to study at Penang Chinese Girls' School.

Fate had brought us together. We shared a room and studied in the same class. During that period, we argued, we competed and we disagreed but we enjoyed doing things together whether it was going on outings or eating.

Penang food is so delicious that we spent lots of time eating out. Our favourite eating place was Gurney Drive with its endless choices of wonderful food! I also followed Swee Lan to her hometown during the school holidays where I enjoyed the cool fresh air and the carefree lifestyle in the village. Her family ran a Coffee shop and her father made very delicious "Pow". Until today, I can still remember savouring the delicious taste of morsels of barbecued pork enclosed in light airy buns that were steamed to perfection.



At nursing school in England – Dare to Dream ! Linda (second from right in the front row); Yong Sew 4th from right in the middle row.

After finishing school, we embarked on another long journey to England. This time, we decided to take up nursing. In those days there were not many flights available, so in order to be on time for the start of the nursing course- we sailed to England on a Dutch Cargo ship. An adventure of our lifetimes!

It was a long twenty one days at sea. We were violently sea sick the first few days until we discovered our "sea legs". There were not many passengers



*Linda on the left and Yong Sew (right)....
Best Friends Forever ...*

and we were the only two young girls on board. Loneliness made our friendship even stronger as we relied on each other for company and emotional support. Some of the Dutch sailors were nice –some days we even played table tennis with them!

It was past midnight when we finally arrived at our destination. We were freezing cold, tired and hungry. One of our friends- who had gone for the training before us- cooked porridge and salted fish for us. It was the best porridge I have ever tasted.

We found the training was tough as our command of English was not good, so we had to work very hard to improve our English. After lots of tears and laughter, we passed the examination.

Swee Lan returned to Malaysia as Mr. Phang (her sweetheart) was waiting for her. She joined Assunta Hospital to work as a Staff nurse and was later promoted to Ward Sister and then Operations Manager. After her retirement, she was invited to be one of the Board of Directors. While working in the hospital, she made lots of friends and many became trusted companions on her life journey.

I returned to Malaysia after my Midwifery Course and I joined Assunta as a staff nurse. Swee Lan always invited me for her family gatherings as she regarded me as one of the family.

During the Economic Crisis in 1985, her family business was badly affected. It was the darkest time of her life, but she never gave up hope. She struggled to make ends meet. With hard work, determination, and

besides her nursing duties, she ventured into direct selling and writing. She wrote for newspapers and magazines. The more she wrote, the more she enjoyed it and she touched many hearts and won many fans.

With the support of the whole family, their business was converted into a pharmacy. Over the years their pharmacy business became hugely successful.

In 2009, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Despite her illness, she never slowed down. She was involved with many charity organizations. One of the organizations she had helped to establish is ASPAC (Assisi Palliative Care).

She was a very filial daughter who took on the responsibility of caring for her aging mum. Although she herself was not in the best of health, she still tried her very best to ensure that her mum had the best of care.

For the last three months of Swee Lan's life, her three children together with her daughter-in-law took turns to be constantly by her bedside, day and night. She was reviewed by doctors, nurses and counsellors from ASPAC regularly. Dr. Lalitha Jeyasingam had become her constant advisor on her health and treatment. Dr. Violet How was a frequent presence and she also prepared the family emotionally to face the eventuality of Linda's approaching death. Sr Helena and several of the other nuns from FMM Petaling Jaya, together with a constant stream of friends also visited and provided support and help for the family to get over this difficult period.

When I looked at her, one day before her passing on, no words can describe my sadness. I could only pray that she should not suffer anymore. She had fulfilled her last two wishes. The first was that she had completed her duty to her Mum. The second wish was for ASPAC to receive one million ringgit in donations so that it could apply to become an organization with tax exempt status. She was present at the fund raising dinner on 24th September 2016 to witness her dream become a reality.

Good bye and thank you, Swee Lan. You are gone but you have left us with many beautiful memories.



Receiving a cheque from Penang Chinese Girls School for ASPAC in July 2016. Linda is second from the Right ...looking glamorous!



Article in newspapers about Linda in the last few months of her life

JAWAHIR'S BATTLE

I constantly had night sweats. Sometimes, I'd even doze off at traffic lights on the way to work. It could've been fatigue; I was overworked after all. Friends said "it's just symptoms of menopause.." So I shrugged it off for a while.

I was on vacation with my daughter when I started feeling tightness around my chest. But I wasn't worried. I was in good health and I went for medical check-up on a yearly basis. Surely there couldn't be anything wrong with me.

So on a clear, sunny day, I went to see a cardiologist. Having listened to my lungs, he quickly referred me to a chest specialist. Tests were done, x-rays were taken – there was fluid in my right lung. They quickly aspirated it, and decided to send me home with TB medications. I had Tuberculosis?! But I was feeling energetic again; all was good in the world.

But I was wrong.

Three weeks later, at age 50, I was diagnosed with end-stage lung cancer. Fluid extracted from my lung contained malignant cells. I was told to go home and discuss things with my family. How could I have cancer when I felt as healthy as a horse? I cried myself to sleep that night.

I went through the process of getting a CT scan and a bone scan– all of which showed that I indeed did have lung cancer. Doctors suggested I start chemotherapy immediately. But how could I have treatment when I still needed to work? My children were all studying and I needed to keep food on the table. So I decided not to have chemotherapy and kept myself busy with work.

One of the greatest gifts I have in life is a wonderful support system. My sisters persuaded me to seek treatment, my good friend made an appointment for me to seek a second opinion, my employer kept sending me articles on alternative medicine.... even my GP told me about an aunt who didn't go for chemotherapy and survived for more than 16 years! So many choices! I tried many things – a strict diet, many different herbs, juicing, went to see a Chinese

herbalist – all to keep myself healthy. All I needed was a few more years until my children graduated.

In 2013, a day after my daughter's wedding; my condition took a turn for the worse. I was breathless and couldn't even walk a short distance. My sister took me to the hospital, and I went home with a chest tube draining fluid from my lung. After 56 days, the tube was removed but a tumor had now started growing around the site. The pain was excruciating.

I was in and out of the hospital a lot, and by July 2015, I was referred to AsPaC by my primary healthcare provider. My lungs had collapsed and I needed supplemental oxygen at all times. Dr. Lalitha and her team constantly checked on me and provided me with care and moral support, all of which I am very grateful for.

In January 2016, I was hospitalized for almost a month. I was having breathing difficulties and chest tubes were inserted in both lungs. I was weak and helpless. Every day, I begged the doctors to let me come home. When I opted for palliative care, they relented. I came home the same day my daughter brought her baby home.



The Gift of Life – Jawahir enjoying time with her new grandchild

I'm home now, even if I have indwelling catheters in my lungs. My children learnt to flush the tubes, drain the fluid and change the dressing for my wound. Even my doctor lamented, "Wahh, very DIY..(do it yourself)!"

I was able to complete fasting during Ramadhan. I am able to cook light meals on the good days, and most importantly, I get to watch my little family grow. My children have been nothing but supportive of me. It's now six years since I was first diagnosed. I know there will always be trying times in life, especially with my condition. But whatever comes my way, I can handle it. My faith in God will see me through, bringing me both courage and healing.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Jawahir Tan Abdullah is a courageous woman with a beautiful soul. She continues to battle cancer and live her life as fully as possible.

ASPAC ACTIVITIES:

1. A craft and second hand goods sale was held by ASPAC at the premises of St John's Cathedral in Kuala Lumpur on 13th August 2016 . Volunteers and staff worked hard for many weeks before the event to collect second hand articles which were in good condition , made fabric bags and pouches from colourful remnant materials and got everything ready for the sale.

The sale went on from 9 am in the morning till 3 pm and we sold almost everything. Thank you dear volunteers and staff for your unflagging enthusiasm and commitment!



^ Maggie from Malaysia and Bernie from Japan Selling Japanese handcrafted flowers



^ Hand crafted bags for sale ! Made by ASPAC volunteers ...



^ Volunteers and staff preparing for the sale at St John Cathedral premises .

2. A talk on palliative care for the community was held at Kristus Aman Chapel in Taman Tun Dr Ismail on 21st August 2016 . About sixty people attended and some signed up as volunteers for ASPAC.

> Audience listening attentively to guest speaker
Dr Lalitha Jeyasingam



3. Asia Works Foundation held their annual blood donation campaign on 31st August in Petaling Jaya . ASPAC was invited to set up a booth to disseminate information on our activities and to enhance awareness about palliative care services available to the community . Thank you to our staff and volunteers who offered to give their time on a public holiday to help with this project .

< Staff nurse Ong manning the booth and answering questions from visitors.

4. A volunteer training program was conducted at ASPAC office premises on 5th September 2016. Some of the new recruits will follow the staff and Volunteer Coordinator on home visits after training is completed.

> Volunteer Coordinator
Molly Kok teaching a new volunteer the technique
of hand massage, whilst the son of the patient
watches.



5. A fund raising dinner event (ASPAC- A celebration of Life) was held on 24th September 2016. We sold more than 100 tables. This was made possible by many generous donors who believe in our cause . Thank you for your whole hearted support –we are overwhelmed and humbled by your kindness and confidence in us .



^ More than a thousand people turned up for the dinner and entertainment . The food was sumptuous and the show was world class !



^ Spectacular entertainment !



^ Volunteers in pink ...taking a break at the dinner event

6. A workshop was held at Maranatha ,Janda Baik in Pahang on 7th and 8th November 2016. Topics included 'Palliative Care for Cancer and Non Cancer illnesses'; An over view of Grief and Bereavement ' , 'Complicated Grief' , 'The spiritual dimensions of grieving ' . It was conducted by Sr Mary Kristen FMM and Dr Lalitha Jeyasingam .

7 A Memorial Service was held on November 26th to honour the memory of our patients who have passed on . Multi faith prayers were said followed by lighting of candles and flower tributes .Some family members shared their memories with the audience. A slide presentation of pictures of departed loved ones brought tears and also smiles as we remembered them one by one. Messages to loved ones were written and tied to helium balloons .These were released into the sky as a celebration of love and life . The ceremony closed amidst smiles, tears and hugs, followed by a delectable lunch spread.



^ Family and friends offering flower tributes



^ Dr Patricia Por (chairperson of ASPAC) lighting the first candle to start off the Memorial Service



^ Guests releasing their helium balloons with messages to their loved ones into the air . It was a beautiful sight to watch ...



^ Little girl lighting a candle in remembrance

COMPLAIN NOT

Dr Inthirani started serving as a volunteer doctor with ASPAC six months ago. She shares her perspective about her journey with hospice patients in this article.

In March 2016 I retired from Government service after thirty three years of service .Musing on what to do next I was excited when I received a call from Dr. Lalitha in mid April. “Hi, do you want to join ASPAC as a volunteer doctor?” It was totally unexpected and I had not heard of ASPAC until I was informed it was a hospice at home care program serving the community free of charge.

At the beginning I was so excited. My immediate response was - “Why not?!” At the same time deep within me I thought it was going to be so different from what I have been doing during most of my career as a Primary Health officer and a Public Health Officer. I had been talking everyday about Preventive Medicine and health promotion. We dealt mainly with acute problems and usually the patients were cured with our treatment. If the illness was beyond the scope of primary level care, the patients were referred to the secondary and tertiary care centers.

After pondering for two days I decided to venture into this new world of medicine. Its been six months down the lane since that decision was made! I now realize there is so much of worry and anxiety in each and every case which causes so much of adjustment in the family dynamics. Every time that I visited a patient at his or her home it urged me to find out the Absolute. I saw people suffer terribly from advanced disease and the families in such dilemmas. Sometimes there is so much of emotion but it is so difficult to understand why. It has made me stop and reflect more deeply about Life, pain and pleasure and the reason why we are here on this Earth and why each one of us has to go through so many different experiences and struggles. I felt these terms were inseparable.

I used to go back so drained after seeing just three to four patients and reflected how I used to see 80-100 patients daily at the out patient department previously. There were days that I could not sleep thinking about the suffering I had witnessed. In spite of all this there was a tremendous amount of gratitude, warmth and sense of satisfaction. I felt that I was doing an even a greater service to Mankind than in the past. This work has made me learn the simplicity, the harshness and

the grandeur of life .It has taught me to serve and love all those who are sick and suffering before it is too late.

There is happiness while helping those in sorrow and distress. It’s made me realise the need to be tactful in dealing with the feelings of others in a sweet and harmonious manner and also master situations without causing undue disruption or disturbance. The ASPAC group of volunteers are always so cheerful and ready to radiate brightness to all around them. This contributes to the peace of mind and strengthens the hearts of the sick. Cheerfulness and laughter therapy is contagious. It changes depression into brightness and sickness to health.

To do this kind of work I realized one should possess physical strength, mental fortitude and spiritual courage at all times. Teamwork is of dire importance. There were times when I wondered whether I should quit till I came across this verse by Swami Sivananda (a Hindu saint from Rishikesh, North India)

Complain Not

*Do not attempt to run away from surroundings that
are not to your liking.
God has placed you there to make you grow quickly.
If you get all your desired comforts
in a particular place you will not grow strong.
Triumph over all our difficulties with courage.*

Dr Inthirani Sivarajah



Dr Inthirani examining a patient during a home visit .

FULFILLING SMALL WISHES

Sylvia Monica has battled cancer for several years and was referred to ASPAC a year ago .As the disease progressed,one of her dearest wishes was to go back to Malacca (her home town)for a holiday with her husband Anthony. *Australian Friends of ASPAC* (a group of ladies in Melbourne) contributed 400 ringgit to make her dream come true .

> *"It was a lovely holiday in Malacca .."* Sylvia in high spirits waving from her hospital bed ,with husband Anthony at her side .



Deepavali is a time of giving and sharing for the Indian community . ASPAC brought hope and happiness to this patient with a gift of 200/= ringgit .She was delighted that she could buy some traditional sweets and clothes for her family members .

< *Happy Deepavali ! Sr Kristin (ASPAC Counselor) with patient .*

> *ASPAC Volunteer Philip Wong visiting a needy patient to hand over food provisions (provided by the Mother Theresa BEC of Petaling Jaya)*



NEW STAFF AT ASPAC

We welcome two new nurses who recently joined the ASPAC team. Masita is a senior staff nurse with more than ten years of experience working overseas before making a decision to come back to settle in Malaysia. Satwin obtained her Diploma in nursing from Sime Darby Nursing and Health Sciences College and worked in a local hospital in the medical ward where she gained valuable experience. Both nurses hold full registration with the Nursing Board of Malaysia .



MASITA BT TAN



SATWIN KAUR

*Some of you say "Joy is greater than sorrow",
and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."
But I say unto you, they are inseperable.
Together they come , and when one sits alone with you at your board ,
remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.*

KAHLIL GIBRAN

DONATIONS ARE APPRECIATED!

Be A Friend Of ASPAC

*We depend entirely on the generous hearts of benefactors to sustain us financially.
Please help us help others. Be a Friend of ASPAC*

Name: _____

Address: _____

Mobile: _____ Email: _____

Please accept my contribution of : RM _____

A. By cheque attached (No. _____)
*Please make cheque payable to ASSISI PALLIATIVE CARE BHD
Cheque to be posted to 32, Jalan 1/12, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.*

B. Via direct remittance to ASSISI PALLIATIVE CARE BHD
(Public Bank A/C No: 3-1968057-28)
*To receive an Official Receipt, please fax or scan the bank-in slip or IBG transaction receipt to Fax
No: 03-77838899 or Email: info@aspac.my with details such as name of donor and mailing address.*