

Fighting the Good Fight:

Paediatric Brain Tumour Awareness Day 2017

Text by Vanessa Lim and Tan Si Qi

"I am brave because..."

He paused for a long time, marker in one hand, balloon animal in the other. Our young patient was asked to share something that he was proud of for our "Hey Little Fighter!" photo montage. "Come on, tell them that you returned to school and recently passed your Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE)!" His mother beamed at him, radiating a warm sense of pride.

This child, along with 38 other brave paediatric brain tumour survivors, was part of a special group of children who took part in the third annual Paediatric Brain Tumour Awareness (PBTA) Day, held on 19 February 2017 at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). Launched in 2014, PBTA Day is an annual event organised by a team of Duke-NUS Medical School (Duke-NUS) students, to provide support for the affected patients and families, and also to raise public awareness about paediatric brain tumours.

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Photo: Denise Lee



In Singapore, brain tumour is the second most common childhood tumour, with over 40 young patients undergoing treatment in public hospitals every year. Moreover, paediatric brain tumours are different from adult brain tumours because childhood cancer tissues grow more rapidly, together with the fast-growing tissues of the child. In addition, brain tumours and its treatments are associated with long-term effects of growth and neurological development. Some children also face side effects, such as scars or hair loss, that they carry with them on their journey. It is thus essential to increase public awareness on the severity and prevalence of paediatric brain tumours.

Community education programme

This year, we expanded our pre-event publicity efforts through social media campaigns, paediatric brain tumour trivia games, and educational talks for our volunteers and performers. We hoped that with a better understanding of the kids that they would be interacting with in the event, stronger rapport and longer-lasting bonds will be made.

Educational Speaker Series

PBTA Day 2017 started off with a series of educational talks on paediatric brain tumours. While these talks have previously been geared towards parents of paediatric patients, the Educational Speaker Series was open to the public this year. The various speakers offered insights from different areas of expertise, ranging from neurosurgery and oncology to psychology. Nashrul Rasman, a 20-year-old paediatric brain tumour survivor, also shared his personal story, where he discarded the



prepared script midway and spoke from his heart instead. It was heartening to see our audience taking photos of the informative presentation slides prepared by the doctors, as well as the waves of emotions that were displayed throughout these talks – an important reminder to us that science, medicine and humanity all go hand-in-hand.

Performances for children

Running concurrently with the talks were the music performances for children, which included "Let It Go" from *Frozen*, pop songs by Duke-NUS Jam Band, pieces by the East Coast Choir and last but not least, the Mascot Dance, all in an enclosed, balloon-filled auditorium. It was heart-warming to see the children singing along to the performances, and the mascot dance finale saw many children going up on stage, with many more within the audience, dancing enthusiastically.

Interactive booths and mascots

Laughter filled the air as children raced their toy boats in the inflatable pool, challenged themselves to memory card games, attempted puzzles and questions, and knocked down bowling pins. In addition, they claimed their free ice cream from Stickhouse's ice cream station, tried their hands at the interactive booth set up by Science Centre Singapore, and requested for various balloon swords, flowers and animals from our friendly balloon sculptors. To create cute mementos of

the event, children adorned themselves with accessories and took photos with their families at the photo booth. Buzz Lightyear, Woody and Jessie joined in the fun as well! The children subsequently visited the arts-and-crafts station to decorate their photos in pretty customisable frames to take home. Over the span of the day, the children also filled their booklets with stamps, which could be used to claim exciting prizes.

"Hey Little Fighter" photo montage

We wanted to empower the voices and self-confidence of our little heroes by creating a "Hey Little Fighter" photo montage, allowing them to fill in the blanks "I am brave because..." Throughout the course of their illness, many children lose confidence in their abilities. Yet, we wish to see them acknowledge their struggles and realise their strengths. It was a celebration of hope as each of them held their markers deep in thought.

Porsche joy car ride

At 1 pm, shiny Porsche cars made a grand appearance as they filled up the entire driveway of KKH's Women's Tower, much to the excitement of the crowd. One could not help but notice the heart-warming interactions between the drivers and their assigned child passengers as they mingled at the booths, taking pictures and exchanging conversation. One driver-child pair even planned to head over to McDonalds after the event! The Guest of Honour, Member of Parliament, A/Prof Fatimah binte

Abdul Lateef, gave a meaningful speech sharing her belief in the strength of our little fighters. All eyes were on the thirty Porsche cars as the air horn sounded brightly for the flag-off.

The event ended on a gleeful note as the cars zoomed off with the excited children passengers. It was indeed a fun-filled day of laughter and love.

He peeked at us with a shy smile. This is a special boy who has been through more than anything his peers have experienced. Returning back to school, and passing his PSLE exams. Standing tall, fit and happy may seem trivial to others, but are incredible milestones for little fighters like him.

He wrote, with some slight hesitation: "I am brave because... I put in effort".

Once again, these kids continue to inspire us. Through love and support for each other, let us continue this spirit of PBTA Day 2017, celebrate the strength of our little fighters and make each day more meaningful than the last.

Our thanks

We would like to thank our mentor, Dr David Low, and our various partners and sponsors from Duke-NUS, KKH, SMA Charity Fund, VIVA Foundation, Brain Tumour Society (Singapore), Science Centre Singapore, Porsche Club Singapore, The Cocoa Trees, Exquisite Technique Singapore and Stickhouse for making PBTA Day 2017 possible.

You can find out more about PBTA Day at our website, <http://pedsbta.wix.com/pbta>, or our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pedsbta>. ♦

Photo: Bryan Chen Xiangdian



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Legend

1. 20-year-old Nashrul Rasman, a paediatric brain tumour survivor, shares his inspiring journey at the Educational Speaker Series
2. A participant posing with Toy Story Mascots from Duke-NUS Medical School
3. Porsche cars line up outside KKH for the joy ride with children with paediatric brain tumours

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Photo: Bryan Chen Xiangdian