



# *My Life, My Legacy*

Text and photos by Lim Yu Rui

*“Death ends a life, not a relationship.”  
– Morrie Schwartz*

**PROJECT LEGACY** is an initiative spearheaded by a group of National University of Singapore medical students who believe in helping palliative patients celebrate their lives by leaving keepsakes for their loved ones, which can take the form of letters, photo albums, video montages, or even recipe collections. For the patients, this project provides a renewed sense of personal power and importance, recognition of past achievements and contributions, reconciliation of feelings, and resurgence in interests and activities. After the patients' passing, these keepsakes also serve as unique mementos for their loved ones. For the medical student volunteers, this project helps inculcate a humane approach in them, by allowing them to gain experience in caring for the dying and increase their understanding of caregiver responsibilities, so that they can better manage future patients.

Project Legacy, conducted in partnership with HCA Hospice Care and supported by SMA, successfully concluded two cycles and started its third run in October last year. The project has helped 12 patients and their families, and another three were carried over to the third cycle. We will be recruiting more patients and medical student volunteers.

One of Project Legacy's beneficiaries was Mdm Tay Choo Hong, who was stricken with metastatic cancer at the age of 49. Mdm Tay wanted to draft letters for her three adolescent children. In her lifetime, she had amassed a wealth of personal experiences and knowledge that she wanted to distill into teaching

moments for them. The Project Legacy team's role was to assist her in turning these lessons into physical form so that she would still be able to mould her children's future long after she had passed on.

“Even though she was terminally ill, she faced her circumstances with courage. She had dedicated her life to bringing up her children and she would not let her cancer stop her from achieving this. Working with Mdm Tay has taught me valuable lessons on dedication, altruism and being a better person in general, as shown by her example and the advice she wished to communicate to her children,” said Jeremy Chai, a fourth year medical student volunteer in the team.

The team managed to help Mdm Tay write the letters and even decorated scrapboards with photos for her children in a short period of time, as her condition was deteriorating rapidly. These keepsakes were presented to her children at her funeral. “Her sudden passing was a reflective time for all of us. We had only just developed a working relationship with her, and had all manner of elaborate plans in mind, but this was a stark reminder to us of what could come so unexpectedly,” added Jeremy.

Another patient, Mdm Ho Geok Keow, 69, wanted to have a video montage of her life for her family, especially her one-year-old grandson, so that he could know more about his grandmother when he grows older. The team sorted through numerous photos and interviewed her for the video montage. Although this project was mainly for Mdm Ho, the team also spoke to her daughter-in-law, who was her caregiver, during each visit, as it is also



**Clockwise from left** Members of the Project Legacy team with: Mr Mohamed Hussin Bin Ahmad and his wife; Mr Soh Cheow Leong and his family; and Mdm Ho Geok Keow



important to express concern for the caregiver as well.

"I am deeply appreciative of the trust and reciprocity that Mdm Ho and her family had granted us, allowing us to step into their lives and hear their stories. While the role of the caregivers is often overlooked, I have learnt that their well-being is in fact an important consideration in providing holistic care for the patients," said Chin Run Ting, a fifth year medical student volunteer.

Mr Mohamed Hussin Bin Ahmad, 56, was one of the three patients carried over to the third cycle. The team initially faced difficulties in getting him to open up as he felt depressed and had pain in his left knee. However, over time, his mood improved and the team helped him to do muscle strengthening exercises for his left leg so that he could try to walk again. The team eventually prepared a scrapbook of photos of him and his wife.

"During the first visit, Mr Hussin was in a lot of pain. This probably made him feel helpless and we did not expect how he would be feeling when we decided to visit him. I was so glad that his mood was better in the subsequent visits. He was determined to learn to walk so that he would not feel like a burden to his wife. His resolve at that moment really affected me a lot," recalled VN Vikram, a fourth year medical student volunteer.

The daughter of Mr Soh Cheow Leong, one of the project's patients, had nothing but praise for Project Legacy: "In our case, the video biography is a celebration of my father's life. Sitting through the thousands of photos (while creating the video) helped him to

reminisce the good old times and to be thankful for all the blessings along the way. Besides the cathartic effect, the video also served to give those who attended his wake a glimpse into the life of my father. I would like to thank the volunteers as we now have a very visual and meaningful legacy for all who have loved him!"

For more information on Project Legacy, please contact Lim Yu Rui (lim\_yurui@yahoo.com) or Lee Shi Hui (shihui1818@hotmail.com). Thank you. **SMA**



*Yu Rui is a fourth year medical student at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, and the leader of Project Legacy Cycle 3. She is grateful to have been part of the project since its first cycle and feels that this project is extremely meaningful.*