

Creating Awareness on Paediatric Brain Tumours

By Angela Yap and Yvonne Chia

FOR A full 15 minutes, the sound of car engines filled the driveway of KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). A crowd had gathered around and onlookers were busy whipping out their handphones and snapping pictures. Upon advancing closer, one could see the culprits responsible for drawing such attention. Transforming the usually peaceful Saturday morning at KKH into a place packed with excitement were two dozen Lamborghinis neatly lined up along the driveway. These sports cars and their drivers were not simply cruising through KKH. In fact, they were intentionally waiting there, as part of the inaugural Paediatric Brain Tumour Awareness (PBTA) Day held on 1 November 2014, to receive 24 special children who have been through more suffering than their peers have experienced: brave young survivors of brain tumour.

Amid the throng was also another important group of people – the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School students behind PBTA Day. In end 2013, Dr David Low (consultant paediatric neurosurgeon at KKH) and Dr Joshua Chua (recent graduate from Duke-NUS), two individuals who were moved by the sufferings of the paediatric brain tumour survivors, came up with the idea of organising an annual event to celebrate the lives of these young fighters. They brought together a group of second year Duke-NUS students to form the PBTA group, and the very first public awareness event for paediatric brain tumour patients in Singapore was born.

We hoped that PBTA Day could provide the young patients with a day of fun and laughter, enabling them to momentarily forget their suffering from the various medical treatments they had been subjected to. Thus, the celebrations at KKH included a mini carnival featuring game and balloon sculpting booths for the children's enjoyment. In addition, we also wanted this occasion to provide an opportunity for family members to demonstrate mutual support for one another and rally together for the difficult journey ahead. To achieve this aim, educational talks, about recent advances in paediatric brain tumour research and social platforms available for families to seek aid from, were also organised.

The main highlight of the event, however, was the joyride,



Photo: PBTA Group

The PBTA Group

in which the 24 car owners volunteered not only their cars but also their time to drive the young patients from KKH to Kallang Leisure Park. The significance of this event to the children could be exemplified by the account of one participant who fell ill on the morning of PBTA Day, and had to be temporarily warded at KKH. But this young survivor was unwilling to allow his illness to defeat him and eventually regained his strength to attend the joyride.

This heart-warming story reminds us that despite the suffering these paediatric brain tumour patients face, their condition is simply just one part of their lives. The treatment regimens these patients undergo often leave them with fragile health and other side effects, such as scars from surgery or hair loss from chemotherapy. However, in showing our support and care for these children, we can encourage them and their family members to look beyond the illness and its devastating effects; and recognise instead that they too are capable of living a meaningful life outside the illness.

Our thanks

PBTA Day 2014 was made possible through collaboration with the Brain Tumour Society Singapore (BTSS) who rallied support from the Lamborghini Club Singapore for the joyride segment. BTSS is a newly founded non-profit organisation that celebrated its launch on 1 November as well. To show their support for brain tumour patients, BTSS successfully organised their own Brain Tumour Awareness Day with the Brainy Car Rally event, for adult sufferers, on the same day.

We would also like to thank our various partners – KKH, Children's Cancer Foundation, VIVA Foundation for Children with Cancer, and Science Centre Singapore. With the love and support that our first event had garnered, we look forward to its next edition this November, to bring smiles and laughter to these children again.

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

Angela Frances Yap and Yvonne Chia (Duke-NUS Class of 2017) are the chairperson and vice chairperson for PBTA Day 2014, respectively.