

By Dr Janice Wong

The Passion of the Call



Getting down and dirty is all part of the fun at Club Rainbow's annual camp.

*This is the second in a series of articles on Club Rainbow, the adopted charity of the Singapore Medical Association. In this issue, **Dr Janice Wong**, a volunteer medical manager of the charity, recounts why she stepped forward to help.*



Dr Janice Wong, a Medical Director of Club Rainbow, is also an Associate Consultant, Paediatric Medicine, at KK Women's and Children's Hospital. As a paediatrician, she sees children with chronic illnesses daily. She was elated to see how these children were able to enjoy themselves when she volunteered at Camp Sunshine in 2002. This has made her determined to do more for these children and their families, so that they can cope with their illnesses with the best medical education and support.

We became doctors when we answered the call to heal. Above all else, we swore an oath to do everything in our power to help cure our fellow man of illness, disease, abuse and neglect. The insane hours spent in study and training, the many sacrifices endured along the way, were eclipsed in a heartbeat by that simple smile we received from our first patient who recovered because we were there to help.

As a paediatrician, children, especially those suffering from lifelong illness, hold a very special place in my heart. Each day I see many of them in hospital, battling courageously just to cope with their illnesses. I am always left in awe at their spirit to endure despite the pain and often poor prognosis.

I had often wondered what happens to them outside the hospital and how they are getting by. The answer to these questions came when I was roped in to help out in a Club Rainbow activity while still a young medical officer. I was not sure what I had expected to see but what I saw surprised me. These were the same children I had treated in hospital. And here they were running about, playing, laughing and well, just being normal kids. Maybe I should not have been surprised by their resilience. Still it was hard not to be moved.

This spurred me on to continue my

association with Club Rainbow. The charity, through its many activities such as outings and workshops, gave these children opportunities to interact with other kids, to help them put aside their illnesses if only for a day and cherish the moment.

As a doctor, my responsibility at these activities is to ensure that the programmes are safe and well organised. It is an important task. Many outdoor activities, which the charity would like to hold including our ever-popular annual camp, can only happen if there are sufficient volunteer doctors who are willing to give their time for these children.

After my postgraduate exams, I decided to take on the role as medical manager on Club Rainbow's Volunteer Management Council. I took over the reins from one of the founders of the charity, Dr Angelina Ang. She had already set in motion many medical support services within the charity such as the parent-child medical education programme, illness-specific support groups and the management of medical volunteers for activities.

I spent most of the past four years improving on these protocols with the help of another medical manager and support from the charity's full-time staff.

Club Rainbow is currently supporting more than 420 children. It also offers help to their

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families. The five main illness groups comprise children suffering from Thalassaemia Major, Biliary Artesia, Congenial Heart Diseases, Spina Bifida and premature babies with very low birth weight.

Club Rainbow is poised to grow significantly in the months ahead. Plans are in the pipeline to offer support to children from other illness groups.

We are always in need of doctor volunteers for our Medical Committee. You could help us in providing medical coverage for activities, and giving talks for our families on how they can manage their children's condition at home.

If you prefer helping out in non-medical areas, this too can be arranged. We are always on the lookout for volunteer tutors and Befrienders who will be trained to act as Big Brothers (or Sisters) in support of our Rainbow Children.

I have enjoyed my years as a volunteer. It has allowed me to interact with children on a more personal level. I am proud to say that I have made many friends from amongst the Rainbow kids and their families. I urge more SMA members to join me in pledging your time and expertise for an excellent cause. It is a decision you will never regret.

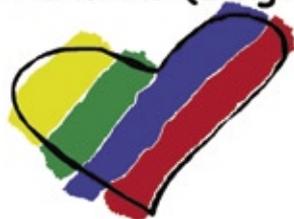
Volunteering is not just about giving. I have learnt much from being around these kids. The



Mind over matter – Club Rainbow children designing a boat, using sticks and a Styrofoam board, to "transport" marbles.

power to heal is indeed a humbling experience perhaps second only to the indomitable human spirit to persevere. ■

Club Rainbow (Singapore)



**Providing Compassionate Relevant Services
for chronically ill children and their families**

**If you would like to know
more about volunteering
at Club Rainbow,
please call 6377 1789 or email
contact@clubrainbow.org
The charity has also recently
relaunched its website
(www.clubrainbow.org).
Do take a look!**

The Singapore Medical Association Rainbow of Hope Doctors' Pledge 2006

The SMA will be holding a fundraising event for its adopted charity for the year – Club Rainbow. The objective is to raise donations to help fund various support functions of Club Rainbow.

The types of free services provided by Club Rainbow are:

- Emotional Support
- Educational Help
- Informational Support
- Financial Assistance
- Social Integration

Doctors can make a pledge towards Club Rainbow on **6 November 2006**, Monday. All donations will qualify for double-tax exemptions. Please look out for the pledge form and more details in upcoming issues of the *SMA News*.