

Nurses' Day



Senior staff nurse Nathanael Tan keeps a distance from his wife and two young sons so that he will not unknowingly put them in danger. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

No hugs, no kisses... for now

NATHANAEL TAN, 29

Senior staff nurse
National University Hospital,
Emergency Medicine Department

It has been seven months since Mr Nathanael Tan, 29, has held his sons - who are aged one and three - close.

"No hugs, no kisses. It is very emotionally distant for my two kids, especially because they like getting goodnight hugs and morning kisses," said Mr Tan, a senior staff nurse at the National University Hospital's Emergency Medicine Department (EMD).

Being in the first line of defence against Covid-19, Mr Tan has attended to EMD patients who were later found to be infected with the coronavirus.

Although he is dressed in personal protective equipment at work, maintaining a distance from his family gives him further reassurance that he is not unknowingly putting them in danger.

After showering in the hospital before heading home, Mr Tan would take a second shower at

home before retiring to a separate bedroom next to his wife and children's.

Mr Tan's older son, who is scared of thunder, used to snuggle against him for comfort.

"It's the rainy season now and at night when there is thunder, he will cry out for me and I can't do anything. I can't comfort him. The only thing I can do is video-call him," he said.

Without goodbye hugs at the door, his children will occasionally cry when Mr Tan leaves for work.

"At first it was very sad, but we nurses took a pledge to help at all times, in pandemic periods and all safe periods."

Mr Tan is also no stranger to wary looks on public transport.

In April, when he hailed a taxi in civilian clothes, the driver asked him why he was going to the EMD before letting him in.

"When I entered the taxi, he wound down all the windows.

"It was understandable. Everyone has his fears, we nurses also have our fears."

Shabana Begum



Dr Hoi Shu Yin is among the leaders guiding more than 3,600 nurses during the coronavirus pandemic. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Impressed by Sars 'courage'

DR HOISHU YIN, 41

Chief-nurse designate
Tan Tock Seng Hospital

During the Sars outbreak in 2003, Dr Hoi Shu Yin was a junior nurse in Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

Like other healthcare workers then, she was worried about her safety as medical staff were getting infected as well.

But when she saw a senior doctor and nurse calmly intubating the ICU's first Sars patient, treating the person like any other patient, it left an impression on her.

"That image was one of courage, calmness and responding to the call of duty," said Dr Hoi, 41.

From being a junior nurse during Singapore's last major infectious disease outbreak, she is now the hospital's chief-nurse designate, one of the leaders guiding more than 3,600 nurses during the pandemic.

She will assume the position

of chief nurse in October.

Along with other leaders, she oversaw the conversion of six wards with 230 beds to pandemic wards, and the deployment of over 500 nurses to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), to beef up manpower at ground zero of the country's battle against the virus.

Said Dr Hoi: "When we started operations at the Covid wards, the leaders donned the personal protective equipment with the nurses, and I remember one of my nurse leaders telling her staff that they are all equal now, and there is no hierarchy as they are in the same uniform."

Dr Hoi also appreciated how the nurses deployed to NCID came up with small solutions to be more efficient in serving patients.

For instance, to ensure safety, they fixed plastic screens to drip stands to create a barrier between patients and medical staff during swab tests.

Shabana Begum



Senior staff nurse Patrick Lin recognises that separation anxiety is an issue that patients and their family members face. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

A stand-in son or brother

PATRICK LIN, 30

Senior staff nurse
National Centre for Infectious
Diseases' Intensive Care Unit

Cold, white and silent. Patients sedated and hooked up to multiple lifelines. The occasional beeping of machines and call bells.

These are the sights and sounds of a typical intensive care unit (ICU), but senior staff nurse Patrick Lin, 30, does not want to describe his workplace as sombre.

Instead, he recalled his most memorable Covid-19 patient in the ICU of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), whom he described as a "cheerful but slightly breathless gentleman".

"We built a rapport very quickly during my shifts. He would talk to me about his job and family.

"Sometimes, I would purposely walk past his room to give him a thumbs up to encourage him, and he would raise his hand at me."

In the middle of his stay at the ICU, the patient's condition deteriorated and he had to be sedated and intubated, said Mr Lin.

But eventually, he became well enough to be transferred to the general ward. "When he was being wheeled out of the ICU, he saw me and said, 'hey thanks'."

Mr Lin was one of more than 500 nurses from Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) deployed to NCID earlier this year. He was posted to the ICU from February to mid-June.

In TTSH, he is part of the Nursing Research Unit, now working on Covid-19-related evidence-based practice and research.

Trained as an ICU nurse, Mr Lin recognises that separation anxiety is an issue that patients and their family members face, as families are not allowed to enter the ICU. This is especially the case for Covid-19 patients in isolation.

He would try to reassure family members when they ring the ICU.

"My biggest fulfilment during my stint at NCID would be having the opportunity to be with my patients in the room during their most vulnerable period, to be their stand-in grandson, son or brother," said Mr Lin.

Shabana Begum

Care, generosity and sadness

NOOR AYU MOHAMED AMIN, 36

Senior staff nurse
Singapore General Hospital

When Singapore General Hospital's Ward 68 nurses found out that migrant workers who were being discharged from the hospital to community care facilities did not have uncontaminated clean clothes to wear, they combed through their own wardrobes to donate clothes to the workers.

"This caught the migrant workers by surprise, that we already provided them with care and now they are receiving new clothes as well. They were very appreciative," Ms Noor Ayu Mohamed Amin, 36, said.

The senior staff nurse at Ward 68 added that it was satisfying to be

able to connect with the patients, as it was not easy to communicate with them.

She remembers checking in on a migrant worker in an isolation room. She was puzzled to find him watching TV and looking well as her colleague had told her that he did not pick up her phone calls.

When she asked him if his bedside phone was working, he stared blankly at her.

Realising that the migrant worker might not understand much English and could have been reluctant to answer the phone, she used gestures to ask him if he had a cough or felt breathless.

"He said, 'Oh! I'm okay, sister.' And he smiled," said Ms Ayu.

She added: "The biggest challenge I face when I nurse migrant

workers is the language barrier. "But when we manage to connect with the patient, that is an achievement."

Ms Ayu also works in the intensive care unit (ICU) of Ward 68, where she has seen a patient die of Covid-19.

The bodies of those infected with Covid-19 are prepared for cremation or burial by healthcare workers in hospitals, and protocols include double-bagging the bodies before they are placed in airtight coffins.

"Family members are not allowed to go inside the ICU and they can only look from outside. In a way, there are no proper goodbyes," said Ms Ayu.

"It is sad, you don't know when was the last time they held one another. Therefore, it is so important that we be there for the family as much as possible and make the process smooth for them."

Shabana Begum



NO PROPER GOODBYES

Family members are not allowed to go inside the ICU and they can only look from outside. In a way, there are no proper goodbyes... It is sad, you don't know when was the last time they held one another.

MS NOOR AYU MOHAMED AMIN

Ms Noor Ayu Mohamed Amin says being able to connect with the migrant workers is an achievement. PHOTO: NOOR AYU MOHAMED AMIN

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...Helping Others Regain Health And Dignity

Ms Loh Jiar Lin, 25, is a senior staff nurse at the Medical & Neurology High Dependency Unit in Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Apart from direct patient care, she also teaches and mentors junior nursing staff who join her unit.

Ms Loh discovered her calling when her grandfather fell sick and was admitted to the hospital multiple times. "I was heartbroken when I saw him struggling with his illness and I felt helpless. I lacked the knowledge and skills to make him more comfortable," she recalls. "This struck a chord with me and made me pursue a healthcare-related course after I finished secondary school."

She moved to Singapore from Malaysia in 2012 to pursue her nursing diploma, and, in 2019, furthered her studies at Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), where she earned a Bachelor of Nursing (Post-Registration), awarded by The University of Sydney, Australia.

Something she found particularly useful in her SIM course was learning physical examination skills. She says: "I am now confident in my patient assessment and am able to pick up subtle changes in my patient's condition and highlight it to the medical team for early intervention. This is an invaluable skill



PHOTO: TED CHEN

Loh Jiar Lin
25, senior staff nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital
"Nursing is never an easy job. One should have a positive attitude and be resilient. And always have compassion for the people you care for."

that has equipped me to be a better nurse today."

She sees herself providing "compassionate and competent bedside care" to her patients in the long run. She remembers caring for a bedbound patient who needed help to get to a commode (mobile toilet). The patient thanked her profusely. "The simple act of helping the patient may be insignificant

in the eyes of others, but to my patient who was ill, being able to relieve herself naturally meant retaining her dignity and reducing her reliance on others," Ms Loh says.

Her advice to aspiring nurses? "Nursing is never an easy job. One should have a positive attitude and be resilient. And always have compassion for the people you care for."

...Drawing Strength From The Courage Of Patients

Ms Kok Hui Scen once thought of quitting the nursing profession because of work pressure, but her patients gave her strength.

A nurse in the palliative care setting at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, she said: "My cancer patients demonstrated much resilience and persistence, which strengthened my will to care for them. As I reflected on what I could have done better to help them, my commitment to nursing grew stronger."

The 34-year-old, a senior staff nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, also worked on the front-line of the nation's fight in the Covid-19 pandemic. She was part of the hospital's healthcare team in charge of suspected Covid-19 cases.

In 2018, Ms Kok embarked on a two-year part-time Bachelor's of Science in Nursing with Honours (Top-up) programme with Ngee Ann Academy, awarded by King's College London. She is graduating this year.

She says the course has equipped her with well-rounded nursing skills and in-depth knowledge, which is particularly helpful as she comes across patients from different backgrounds who require different kinds of care.

She adds: "The physical assessment module, for example,



PHOTO: TED CHEN

has strengthened my foundation in clinical practice and given me greater confidence to manage more complex care.

"My experience with King's College London has taught me the importance of independent learning and how it should be a continuous effort that goes beyond the classroom."

She hopes to apply her new knowledge and skills to provide greater patient-centred care. Ms Kok says she is also looking forward to pursuing a master's degree to advance her nursing career.

She finds joy in caring for her patients and gaining their trust to improve their quality of life.

"The journey of nursing can be challenging but one must never give up. Find your internal drive that can help you to overcome the barriers. Lifelong learning is also essential for nurses to keep our skills sharp and think outside the box to handle any situation. No matter what type of nursing work you do, it all contributes to making a difference to patients' lives," she says.

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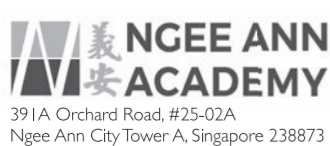
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