

# THE HEART FUND SPECIAL

National University Heart Centre, Singapore

## A Passion to Serve

The Unsung Heroes

The Medical Social Workers behind The Heart Fund include (from left): Siti Munawarah Bte Maarof, Lydia Lee and Mitchell Yeo Tze Leng.



Medical social workers (MSWs) not only address financial challenges, but are also required to provide holistic care to a myriad of emotional, psychological and social problems faced by patients and their families. Patients' attempts to return to normal life and emotional well-being could be hindered by factors such as accepting their illness, job instability, financial strain and family discord.

Thus, medical social workers work hand in hand with teams in the hospitals and community bodies to provide patients and their families with continued care, even after discharge. Ms. Angeline Tan speaks with Ms. Lydia Lee, one of the MSWs behind The Heart Fund to find out what truly defines their profession.

### What is the most memorable story of a patient who benefited from The Heart Fund?

I look up to patients and families who are very resilient and support their loved ones who are ill despite the challenges they face. In one such case, I have a patient who is retired and married with children. He and his family could not bear the costs of a high-cost surgery on top of his existing medical bills.

When a patient is down with a serious illness, the last thing he or she should worry about is how to afford medical treatment and compromise treatment due to the lack of financial resources.

**After receiving help from The Heart Fund, the patient and his family not only avoided debts but also experienced less anxiety and could focus on staying strong throughout his recovery journey.**

I am in awe of how they are able to weather the storm. It is a reminder that in any situation, people have the ability and strength to cope! However, due to the impact that illnesses have on their finances, they would have to seek assistance in various forms (other than funding) from us. Financial relief from The Heart Fund and other charitable organisations gives them the extra strength to pull through difficult times like this.

### What are the most fulfilling aspects of your work?

It is fulfilling to provide financial assistance for patients who have

exhausted all options or address unmet gaps not covered by existing government and community assistance schemes so they can continue necessary treatment and care. To encourage them to be more compliant to treatment, I will connect with and understand them as a person and as different individuals with various needs.

**What is something that most people don't know about the work you do? Our assessments and interventions strive to bridge social inequalities. No patient should be denied of treatment due to his or her social or economic disadvantage.** We align ourselves with the commitment of The Heart Fund to help those with the greatest challenges. If a patient requires high-cost treatment, we can help the family to get more involved or apply for assistance to meet their medical needs. Many people are also unaware that we need to actively seek for funding from charities, which may have different guidelines.

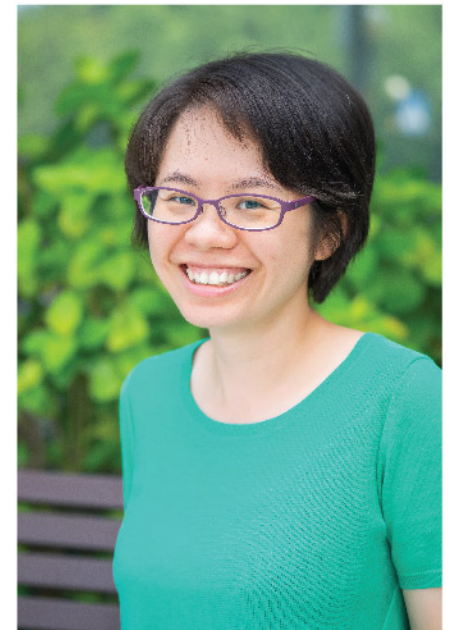
### What keeps you going?

When I see other people's difficulties, it keeps me humble and reminds me that we cannot judge others. I am grateful that patients allow me into their lives even though some of them face very complicated social situations. I am also thankful to have the support and constant guidance of our team leader, Subha Rajaiya. The work is very meaningful when we are able to work together to achieve financial relief and positive outcomes for needy patients.



By Ms. Angeline Tan  
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Angeline is from the Communications & Development team which oversees the internal and external communications and events for NUHCS. Angeline manages the patient education print collaterals, video production and The Heart Fund. She is also behind the editorial of Pulse.



The bubbly Lydia finds it rewarding to be able to offer financial and social assistance to needy heart patients of The Heart Fund.

It is also rewarding that through The Heart Fund, I am able to empower patients to battle heart disease by helping them to continue necessary treatment and care, allowing them to achieve a new lease of life and continue to work again to support their families and spend time on the things or with the people they love. •