



Tuesday, July 26, 2011

- HOME
- ASIA PACIFIC
- SINGAPORE
- WORLD
- BUSINESS
- SPORT
- TECHNOLOGY
- ENTERTAINMENT
- HEALTH
- SPECIAL REPORTS

Video Finance Lifestyle Travel Weather Discussion TV Shows About Us

Home >

HEALTH NEWS

A- A+

The boy who beat cancer

By Leong Wai Kit, channelnewsasia.com | Posted: 24 July 2011 05:47 hrs

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SINGAPORE: When Wong Jun Da was diagnosed with cancer at nine years old, the boy knew there was nothing he could do about it – which was why he decided his world must not come crashing down.

"At that age, I do know about cancer and what it means to have cancer," says the acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) survivor, who is now 16.

"I thought about it for a while, and how it would affect me in future. But after about two minutes, I tried to snap out of it and accept that reality," Jun Da says, recalling his reaction in June 2004 at KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

"Even if I were to cry over it, there is nothing I can do to change that fact," he adds.

Fortunately for Jun Da, doctors did change that fact.

Childhood cancers in S'pore

Every year, about 100 new cases of cancer are reported in Singapore, with ALL being the most common one.

Treatment for ALL include chemotherapy, radiation and in some cases, bone marrow transplants.

The survival rate for children with ALL is at between 70 and 90 per cent, which is "very good", says the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF).

A dose of determination

Jun Da began chemotherapy in June 2004 but suffered a relapse in September 2005.

He was then put through more intensive treatment, including full-body radiation in 2005 followed by a cord blood transplant in 2006.

To focus on his treatment, Jun Da stopped attending school for two years when he was in primary five.

His mom, Mdm Koh Bee Geok, says: "We didn't hire tutors because Jun Da said he could self-study so we let him do that for two years.

"A few days before his PSLE (Primary School Leaving Examination), he was warded for bronchitis and had to sit for the exam in hospital."

But that did not stop Jun Da, who aspires to be an artist, from doing well enough to get into the express stream in Bedok South Secondary School.

Something to smile about

By the time Jun Da was cleared of his cancer in May 2009 - at age 14 - he had already undergone about six surgeries.

Although his treatment was not a bed of roses, Jun Da often tries to find something to smile about.

"I was able to look on the brighter side despite my condition because I think I had some maturity to begin with.

"And I think having cancer didn't kill that optimism but instead, helped me appreciate the things around me.

"For instance, though cancer stopped me from being a child for two years, I gained in other ways, including forming close friendships with nurses and social workers (from CCF)."

These days, Jun Da the survivor has been actively giving back to the community.

Besides doing volunteer work with Make a Wish, an organisation which helps grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions, Jun Da also makes time to share his experience with other children with cancer.

And on Sunday, Jun Da will help out at the CCF's Hair for Hope event at VivoCity, to raise funds for children with cancer.

The CCF, which has served about 1,950 families since 1996, needs about S\$3.5 million each year. Donations can be made to the



Photos 1 of 1
16-year-old Wong Jun Da survived acute lymphoblastic leukemia, a form of cancer with which he was diagnosed at nine-and-a-half years old.

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