

Confronting cancer: a child's story

Muhammad Arujuddin Hussain speaks about his battle with nose cancer, his struggle for his life and his dreams for the future *By Emma Goh*

The cheerful 14-year-old who came to the door looked like any other regular teen you would meet in the street. The only difference is that, unlike any other teen, Muhammad Arujuddin Hussain has battled with nose cancer. We speak with him about his struggle with life and dreams for the future.

Braving the storm

"The first signs of the disease were the nose bleeds," Arujuddin recalls. "I went to many doctors, who told me things were alright. It was only when my tonsils started bleeding and had to be removed did doctors discover tumours behind the nose, the left cheek, and one close to my brain. The news was a huge blow, as my father had passed away early in the year from a heart attack, before I was told I had nose cancer in March 2003. It was an unusual disease for a child to catch, there were only six children, and the other patients receiving treatment were elderly folks.

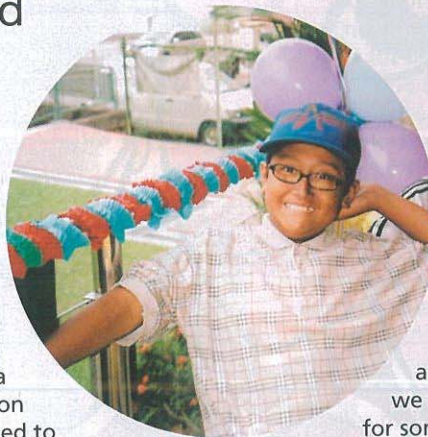
"I didn't cope well with it initially as I was still grieving over my father's death.

As I was suffering from depression, I received psychiatric treatment at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). It took me a while to get back on track, but I managed to with the help of my family."

Arujuddin's mother, Siti Zainib, recalls, "It was heartbreaking seeing him in such a state. Arujuddin was warded in KKH and was allowed only one visitor as it was the SARS period and hospitals were taking precautions. I would bring a video camera to record what he wanted to say to the family, bring the camera back and record messages and well wishes from his sister, brother and everyone else."

The treatments were painful and draining. Arujuddin had to go through chemotherapy and radiation therapy and cope with side effects such as dizziness and nausea.

"It was a difficult time," relates Siti. "The medical condition was both



mentally taxing and straining the family's financial resources." "(Fortunately,) with the help of Professor Henry Tan from Kendang Kebau Hospital's (KKH) Ear Nose and Throat Department,

we managed to get subsidies for some treatments, such as the MRI scans, from the Children's Cancer Foundation. We are grateful for that, as it helped to support the medical treatments, which were expensive."

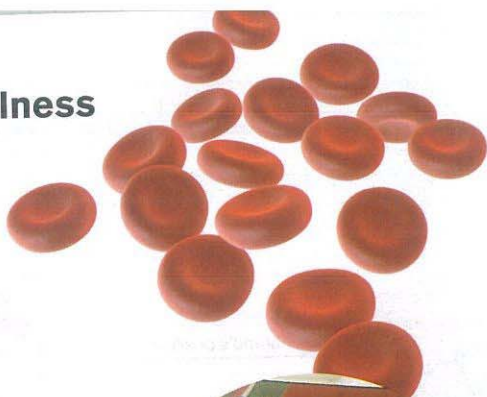
Children's Cancer Foundation

But more than that, ever since he started fighting nose cancer, Arujuddin drew physical and mental strength from the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF), in which he found hard and fast friends who shared similar experiences.

"Every child gets to make a wish through the CCF, which conveys those requests to the Make a Wish Foundation, and it was then that I got an autographed jersey from Ryan Giggs,"

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family wellness



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elaborates Arujuddin. "I also received a digital video camera, which I wanted to capture the images from daily life.

In fact, because of the deep impact CCF made on his life, Arujuddin remains an active member in the foundation even after recovery.



"I am still involved in the activities and performances which volunteers and members of the CCF put up for family and friends. I am the group assistant in the Youth Committee at CCF, and we organise gatherings, activities and performances for cancer-stricken children.

"I met a very good friend of mine, Firdaus, at CCF. We hang out together now and do things together. We even took part in the CCF Idol competition as part of the New Year Celebration last year and won the first prize for our hip-hop performance!"

As Arujuddin tells us, CCF is an important support system for children with cancer. "The CCF is a good place for me to get to know people and make friends. We share stories, and understand the difficulties that each of us had to go through. It's a support system and we also get to help others who are facing cancer, which I think is something I can contribute to."

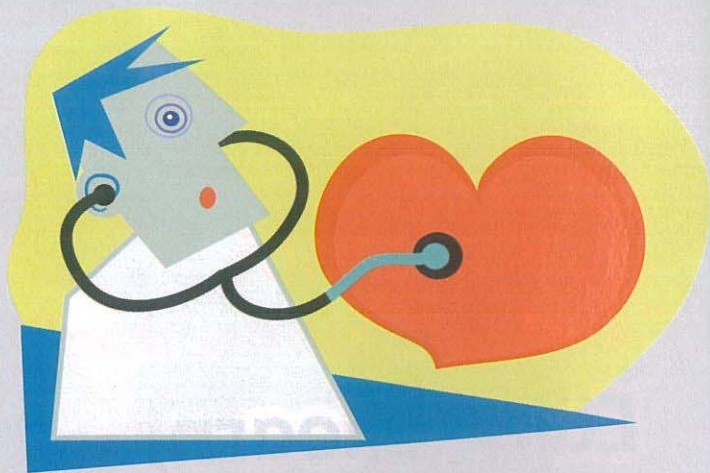
Looking forward

Having pushed his education back for a year to make room for treatment and recovery, the pupil at Admiralty Secondary School is enthusiastic about learning and creating.

"I would like to do well in my O' Levels, go to the polytechnic, study technology or multimedia," Arujuddin shares. "I joined the Robotics Club at school to learn more about the mechanics of machines, and enjoy it very much even though it takes up a lot of my spare time. I also take up photography sessions in CCF to pick up skills on what makes a good picture and the functions of the camera." And having clinched a second place in class during his mid-year and final year exams in Secondary One, Arujuddin's goals look promising indeed ♥

The Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF) offers financial assistance, provides counseling, and conducts support groups and outings for children like Arujuddin and their families. If you'd like to help or find out more, please visit www.ccf.org

ask the doc



Q I noticed a ringing noise in my ear and a temporary slight hearing loss after I stop listening to my mp3. Is this any cause for worry?

Listening to excessively loud noises, such as loud music from your mp3, may permanently damage your hearing and result in hearing impairment.

The ear has three main parts: the inner ear, middle ear, and outer ear. The eardrum separates the inner ear from the outer ear, transforming sound waves into vibrations that are detected by special fluid and hair cells in the inner ear. Hence, noise or music that is too loud may damage the delicate hair cells and nerves of the inner ear, resulting in the loss of hearing.

If the music from your mp3 can be heard by people around you, or if you have to struggle to hear what people nearby are saying to you, then the music from your headphones is too loud. In such cases, it would be advisable to turn down the volume of the music you listen to. Doing so will help prevent further damage to the inner ear.

If symptoms persist or worsen, it is advisable to consult an ENT specialist or an otologist. He will be able to assess damage done, if any, as well as provide advice or administer required medical aid.

Q I go to bed at around 10pm every night but often have trouble falling asleep until about 2am. Even then, I tend to wake up and have trouble getting back to sleep. Why is this so?

Insomnia is sleep of reduced quality, due to trouble falling asleep, restlessness, and waking up repeatedly during the night. Sometimes there may be no particular reason for insomnia; one just has problems falling asleep. This is known as primary insomnia. On the other hand, insomnia may be an indication of health issues, caused by medical conditions such as depression, anxiety, drugs or even stress.

It would be helpful to keep a sleep diary and take note of your sleeping patterns, so that you'll be more aware of possible reasons for your condition. Stress and alcohol consumption are some common reasons.

If your insomnia persists and affects your performance or behaviour during the day, consult a doctor. Discuss with him the results of your sleep diary, as this would help him make an accurate diagnosis.

GOT A QUESTION? Send it to Ask The Doc, 12 Science Park Drive, #02-03, The Mendel, Singapore 118225. Fax: 6395 9394
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