

# Brain tumour not stopping boy from living life to the fullest

**11-year-old wins praise – and award – for raising funds and inspiring others**

**Jolene Ang**

At just 11 years of age, Javier Lim has been through five major operations to remove a benign but recurring tumour from his brain.

The tumour was located at the cerebellum, near the back of the head, and pressed on Javier's optic nerve. Surgical removal was the most feasible option.

Mrs Sharon Lim, Javier's mother, said the operations cost around \$20,000 to \$30,000 each. Some 85 per cent of all related medical costs are covered by Javier's insurance.

Last September, without his parents' knowledge, Javier started a fund-raising campaign for the Brain Tumour Society (Singapore) on crowdfunding website Simply-Giving, raising over \$200. It may be a small sum to some, but to Javier, "it was better than nothing".

It was only after the president of the Brain Tumour Society (Singapore) Melissa Lim called to thank them that his parents became aware of what he had done.

His selflessness and infectious, positive outlook on life won Javier one of 23 Singapore Health Inspirational Patient Awards given out by SingHealth this year.

Dr David Low, head of neurosurgical service, KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), and senior consultant in the neurosurgery department at the National Neuroscience Institute, said brain tumours are more common in adults, but around 40 children in Singapore undergo surgery for such tumours in public hospitals every year.



Mr Ken Lim and his son Javier having their heads shaved for Hair for Hope in July. This is Javier's 10th time participating in the event to show support for cancer patients. His selflessness and positive outlook on life won him a Singapore Health Inspirational Patient Award given out by SingHealth this year. ST PHOTO: LEE JIA WEN

Dr Low, who is treating Javier, said: "His tumours are considered to be benign. But any tumour in the brain, whether it is cancerous or not, can be dangerous and life-threatening.

"In general, once there is complete removal of the tumour, the chances of a benign tumour recurring are rare."

Javier's tumour has recurred four

times since 2013, the year it was discovered. The last recurrence was last year, after which he had to have 28 rounds of radiation therapy. He has also had several minor operations to address complications.

Despite his condition, Javier went for his 10th Hair for Hope event on July 29 to shave his head and show support for cancer patients.

He told The Straits Times last

month: "When I returned to school (after one of the previous Hair for Hope events), some of my friends said to me, 'Why did you shave your head? Now you are much uglier than you were before.'

"But I would really love to spread awareness about how cancer can affect families financially and psychologically. I'd like to share what the families are going through, espe-

cially families with kids suffering from cancer. They might be going through a lot more than us (Javier's family), and than people who don't have any conditions at all."

Javier's tumour was discovered in May 2013, a few months after his very first Hair for Hope event with his parents. He was only five years old and the minimum age limit for Hair for Hope participants is seven.

But he wanted to do it with his parents, and persuaded the organisers to let him join in that year.

Said Mrs Lim: "The tumour came as a shock to us, especially as there were no visible symptoms. It was devastating.

"My husband and I shaved our heads for Hair for Hope that year, because we wanted to show support for people with cancer... Months later, we discovered our son had a brain tumour."

The tumour was found when Mrs Lim, who suspected Javier had a lazy eye, sent him for an eye check-up at KKH. A magnetic resonance imaging scan showed a tumour pressing on Javier's optic nerve that was causing "lazy-eye"-like behaviour, like tilting his head to one side while watching TV or reading.

Mrs Lim said Javier, who is in Primary 5 now and attends Bedok Green Primary School, is not doing as well as his peers academically, though his grades are passable.

He missed half of Primary 1, and nearly two-thirds of Primary 2 and 3 due to the operations and recovery periods.

It is not known if Javier will ever make a full recovery.

His vision has also been affected – after one of the operations in 2014, the right portion of his face, including the area around the eye, was numbed. Doctors could probe at his eye and he would not even flinch, said Mrs Lim.

Unknowingly, he had "over-rubbed" his right eye and scratched his cornea badly.

Javier told ST: "I just want to live life to the fullest and have fun."

His idea of fun is going "bus-spotting" at the bus stop near his Housing Board block in Bedok, where he takes pictures of public buses that come by.

And he takes his fun seriously – he even bought a tripod stand for his mobile phone to help him take the pictures with a steady hand, earning him the moniker of "Little LTA (Land Transport Authority) Officer" by his mother.

When asked if he has any advice to help other kids with similar conditions deal with lousy days, Javier said with a wide grin: "Actually, I don't have down days. I'd like to tell other kids to keep fighting on... (and) they might not have a tomorrow, so they should live life to the fullest, like I am doing."

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