

When nursing care comes to you

When S'pore marks Nurses' Day on Sunday, many patients will be saluting the nurses who go to their homes to take care of them

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Healthcare workers took centre stage last National Day, with the Red Lions skydivers and Republic of Singapore Air Force fighter jets staging aerial displays near hospitals in Singapore.

The salute was well deserved as the workers had been in the trenches fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

While hospital-based staff have received most of the attention, nurses who travel to patients' homes have also played a critical role.

Ms Hariati Sahak, or Sister Hariati, as her clients call her, is a nurse with Thye Hua Kwan Home Care Services.

She cares for patients in their own homes and looks after those who find it challenging to travel to keep their medical appointments.



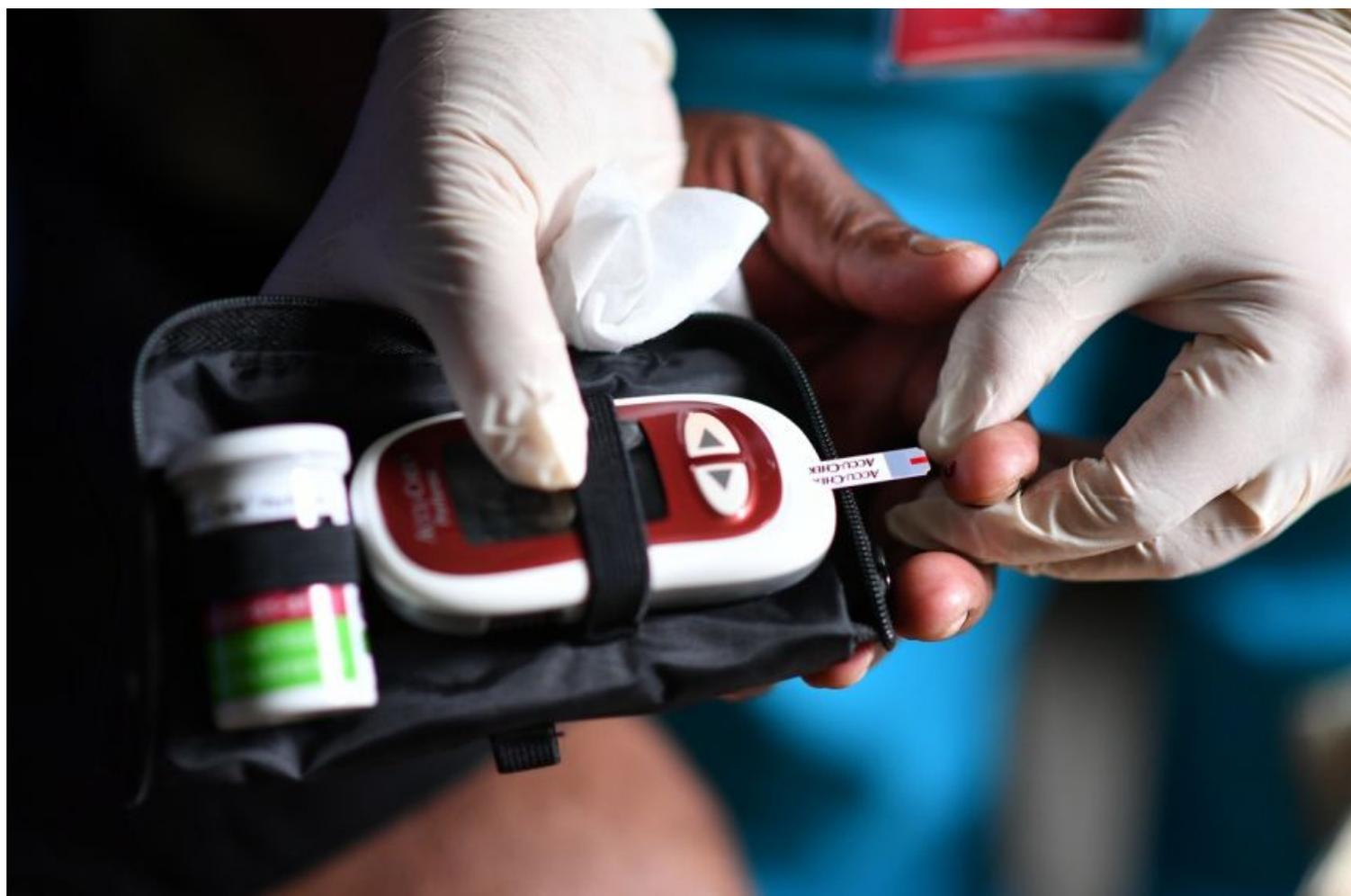
Under the care of Sister Hariati, Mr Chelvan is now able to travel on his own, even taking the



Mr Chelvan enjoying a packet of tea Sister Hariati bought for him while chatting with her. ST

One such patient is Mr Panirel Chelvan, 58. He has been living alone in a Bukit Merah rental flat for the past 18 years.

Mr Chelvan, who uses a wheelchair, has chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes. But osteomyelitis, or bone infection, in his right hip troubles him the most.



Sister Hariati checking Mr Chelvan's blood sugar level. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

He underwent surgery on that hip after an accident in 2008, but had a bone infection after the metal plate that was implanted as part of the surgical procedure was removed in 2011.

Even now, pus oozes out from the right side of his body.

Ms Hariati cleans his wound when she visits him fortnightly. She also packs his daily medication - a cocktail of about 20 tablets - into a pillbox to make it easier for him to take it on time.



Sister Hariati cleans Mr Chelvan's wounds when she visits him fortnightly. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Sister Hariati washes her hands thoroughly after cleaning the wound on Mr Chelvan's hip. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

The 53-year-old nurse manager says her patients sometimes forget to take their medicine.

She also says that some pick and choose their medication, especially patients with chronic illnesses who may have lost the motivation to deal with their ailments.



During her fortnightly visits to Mr Chelvan, Sister Hariati packs his daily medication into a pillbox to make it easier for him to take it on time. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Mr Chelvan affectionately calls Ms Hariati "kagak" (elder sister in Malay). She has been caring for him for the last nine months.

He finds her very kind and sincere and says she always asks him if he has eaten. She also buys him food and beverages and pays for them with her own money.

"Missy" is the moniker that Madam Law Bee Neo, a client with dementia, has for Ms Hariati. It is a colloquial term elderly patients often use to address nurses.



Sister Hariati taking the time to explain to Madam Law why she needs different types of medicine. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Sister Hariati chatting with Madam Law during one of her visits while showing the patient, who has dementia, an old photo of herself. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

The 83-year-old patient, who lives with her son and daughter in a Queenstown flat, has chronic illnesses such as hypertension and diverticular disease, which involves an inflamed digestive tract.

Apart from sorting out her medication and checking her blood pressure, blood oxygen and other readings during the fortnightly visits, Ms Hariati provides Madam Law with words of encouragement.

The nurse speaks several dialects and often banters with Madam Law in a mix of fluent Hokkien and English. While Madam Law is not always coherent, she made her affection for Ms Hariati clear when she blurted out "I like you" midway during a random conversation.



Sister Hariati taking a walk with Madam Law. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Sister Hariati holding Madam Law's hand as they walk. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

They often go for short walks during Ms Hariati's visits so that Madam Law can enjoy some fresh air and exercise.

The pandemic has made the challenging job even more difficult. Ms Hariati, who is married with three children, has to ensure that her patients do not run out of medication as restrictions have made it harder for her patients' children to take their parents for medical reviews.



Sister Hariati heading for the lift lobby after visiting Madam Law in her Queenstown flat. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Sister Hariati cleaning her face during a quick break in her car before driving to the next patient's home. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

She liaises with polyclinics to ensure her patients have an ample supply of medication. She also often eats her lunch alone in her car because dining out is prohibited.

When Singapore celebrates Nurses' Day on Sunday, many patients will be saluting the home-care nurses who have given them some sense of normalcy.

Correction note: An earlier version of this story misspelt Sister Hariati's first name. We are sorry for the error.