

Reaching Out, Touching Lives

It takes strength, hope and faith in modern medicine to triumph over a major illness or injury. But where can one turn to in times of need? This is why we have gathered these inspirational stories of recovery from patients overcoming the odds by seeking treatment in Singapore. Share their fears and eventual joy as they embark on their quest for a new lease of life.

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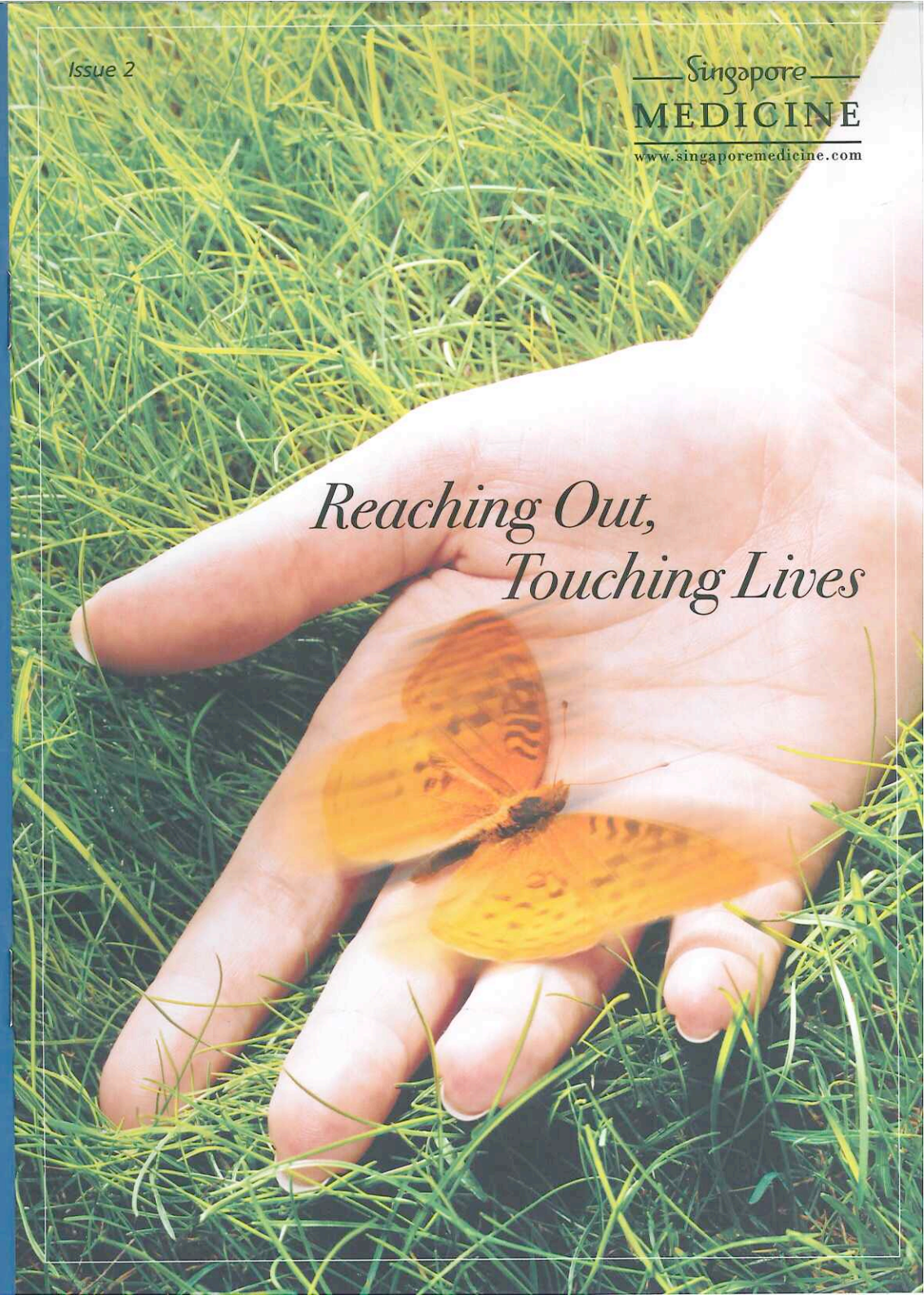
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The Road to Recovery

Dr. Lim, My Second Mummy

One dark night in February 2006, 16-year-old Al Menhali Makhoot Bakheet was rushed by air ambulance from Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, to Singapore.

He was referred directly by the Health Authority of Abu Dhabi to Dr. Susan Lim of Mount Elizabeth Hospital, Singapore, who came highly recommended by Sheik Muhammed bin Buti, a high-ranking government health official and leader of the large tribe to which Menhali belonged. He was acquainted with Dr. Lim through her series of health talks there, which had been organised by SingaporeMedicine.

Menhali was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Mount Elizabeth Hospital, critically ill with advanced *acute promyelocytic leukaemia*, multiorgan failure and *septicaemia* (a life-threatening infection).

A multidisciplinary team of specialists was efficiently assembled to quickly treat his severe pneumonia and bring down his high fever, which had made him delirious.

The type of leukaemia Menhali was suffering from greatly reduced his immunity, leaving him immensely susceptible to all kinds of infections. He required respiratory support via a *tracheostomy* (making a small hole in the windpipe in the neck) to enable him to breathe.

He was hypotensive – an abnormal low blood pressure condition which could result in seizures. Renal dialysis was

arranged for him as his kidneys had already failed him then.

Dr. Susan Lim, the principal surgeon, led eight other specialists in nursing Menhali, and throughout his initial stay, his severe sepsis persisted with multi-resistant bacteria such as *Pseudomonas Aeruginosa*, which is sensitive only to one type of antibiotic.

She shared that there were occasions when Menhali's condition took turns for the worse and they even feared losing him. Determined to persevere, they fought a long, hard battle for more than six months with extensive round-the-clock dedicated healthcare and devotion.

Constant chemotherapy produced positive results and Menhali also showed excellent



Dr. Susan Lim with Al Menhali Makhoot Bakheet

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response to the medication, such as an *all-trans retinoic acid* that has the ability to convert leukaemic cells to normal cells.

However, one month before he was scheduled to return home, he developed severe inflammation of the liver and went into liver failure. He was immediately treated with anti-liver failure medication and again responded very well.

After Menhali showed favourable progress, he moved out of the ICU into a regular ward. This meant that he had longer waking hours to interact with

hospital staff and his close-knit family who was totally supportive and kept a vigil by his bedside when he was very ill.

When Menhali was ready to go home, it was clear how popular he had become with the doctors, nurses and all other staff, as many had come to wish him well with warm smiles before he left. The bond was especially strong between Menhali and Dr. Lim and there was a tender moment when he presented her with a plaque he had made, bearing his thanks and a picture by which Dr. Lim could remember him. In return, Dr. Lim made him a compact disc (CD) with a self-edited video clip of their time spent together outside of hospital – including times when Menhali and family dined at Dr. Lim's home and visited Sentosa and other Singapore landmarks.

No one would expect a veteran doctor with a hectic schedule to bring Menhali and his family around Singapore. However, Dr. Lim took the initiative, selflessly setting aside the time and giving that personal touch.

In return, Menhali had nothing but heartfelt thanks and compliments for the healthcare staff of Mount Elizabeth Hospital.



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A hospital representative reveals that news of Menhali's stay in Singapore had travelled home to Abu Dhabi and a few patients who were initially scheduled to seek treatment in the USA chose to come to Singapore instead.

Menhali's leukaemia is now in complete remission after several studies and all he

requires is a follow-up check-up to monitor his progress and perform molecular tests. Little does he know that Dr. Lim, a winner of the Spirit of the Century Award (conferred by the Singapore public to role models of the 21st century), will be springing a special visit on him at his home in the desert to ensure his health is fine.

Now, that is the mark of a truly selfless, dedicated and professional healthcare giver, and it is little wonder that with such personalised treatment and concern, Menhali enjoys a 90 per cent chance of full recovery as he happily heads home.



Al Menhali Makhoot Bakheet and Dr. Susan Lim at the Merlion Park

Leukaemia

What Is Leukaemia?

It is cancer of the blood or bone marrow, characterised by an abnormal increase in white blood cells.

What Will Happen?

The dysfunctional white blood cells put the body at high risk of infection while the normal marrow cells are replaced by malignant cells. This reduces the number of blood platelets, which are essential for blood to clot and wounds to heal. Red blood cell deficiency may also lead to anaemia, which causes weakness and fainting, and in serious cases, heart failure.

How Can One Recognise Leukaemia?

Symptoms include:

- Loss of appetite and weight
- Swollen or bleeding gums
- Headache
- Fever and chills

Four Major Types

- 1) Acute – More likely to happen in children and young adults, the unhealthy blood cells grow rapidly and an untreated patient can die in weeks.
- 2) Chronic – A slow build-up of excessive white blood cells, which may happen over many years and affects mostly older people.
- 3) Lymphocytic – Affects the lymphoid cells.
- 4) Myelogenous – Affects the myeloid cells.

What Can Cause Leukaemia?

While there is no proven cause to date and there is the possibility of different triggers for the various types of leukaemia, researchers have found likely links to:

- Certain viruses
- Specific chemicals
- Ionising radiation
- Genetic predispositions