This orchid plant symbolises the hopes and aspirations of the NKF’s founders.

Thanks to community support...

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Celebrating 40 Years of Life and Hope

The 7th of April 2009 was a very special day for the NKF as it celebrated its 40th Anniversary at the NKF Centre in Kim Keat.

The theme for the celebration was “Reaffirming our Roots” as the new NKF affirmed the original objectives of what the NKF set out to do when it was inaugurated on 7 April 1969 (World Health Day), by the then Minister for Health, Mr Chua Sian Chin. This, in essence, is to give life and hope to needy kidney patients with the community’s support.

Gracing this milestone celebration as our Guest-of-Honour was Minister for Health, Mr Khaw Boon Wan. Among the 300 guests at this simple gathering were our dialysis centre and prevention centre sponsors, donors, volunteers, healthcare and business partners, Children’s Kidney Centre beneficiaries, patients, NKF Board of Directors and members of the NKF’s committees past and present, and NKF staff.

One special guest who was honoured during the occasion for his contributions to medicine and society was Dr Khoo Oon Teik, founder of the NKF. It was because of his vision and perseverance that the NKF exists today.

During the celebration, Dendrobium “NKF Singapore” was unveiled. This unique orchid hybrid – created by a local and renowned orchid breeder – was a gift from NKF staff to the Foundation to express their faith and confidence in the new NKF. The staff purchased the naming rights to this orchid.

Dendrobium “NKF Singapore” is a cross between the hybrid Dendrobium Andree Miller, and species Dendrobium macrophyllum. This species is a delicate yet vigorous, hardy plant with strong roots that symbolises life and hope. Its elegance and prominence reflects the hopes and aspirations of the founders of the NKF. Forty years on, its original roots remain firm.

Today, a new, spirited, energetic and forward-looking Foundation is at the threshold of a new era as it reaffirms its roots of giving life and hope to needy kidney patients with the support of a caring community.

“We would like to thank all our donors, volunteers and supporters for your continued contributions and support in the new NKF’s journey in attaining its goals.”

- Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan

NKF, at 40, has played a pivotal role in the care of patients with kidney failure, across the full spectrum from prevention to dialysis to promotion of transplantation...It is with the help of the community, that NKF has helped thousands of renal failure patients over the years. The facilities and treatment in NKF are amongst the best in the world.

“Professor Khoo Oon Teik was way ahead of his time when he founded NKF in 1969. He strongly advocated a publicly-funded dialysis treatment programme for patients. He felt that this would better inculcate a spirit of self-help and caring for one another. Professor Khoo’s legacy of selfless volunteerism is now carried on by numerous individuals and organisations who continue to support NKF.”

- Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan
New Initiatives...

During the NKF’s 40th Anniversary celebration, its Chairman Mr Gerard Ee announced two new initiatives in the Foundation’s on-going efforts to serve the needs of kidney patients - the launch of NKF’s Public Transport Subsidy Programme and its plans to set up its 25th dialysis centre in the western part of Singapore.

Helping the needy patients with public transport subsidies

Thanks to a generous donation of $50,000 from The Singapore Buddhist Lodge together with the Taoist Federation, Jamiyah Singapore and the Hindu Endowments Board, the NKF officially launched its “Public Transport Subsidy Programme”.

Since November 2007, the new NKF has been providing transport subsidies to needy patients under its Patient Welfare Fund. Needy patients, such as amputees who require special transportation to and from the dialysis centres and cannot afford the additional costs, are given subsidies for their taxi and ambulance expenses for their 3 dialysis sessions every week. As at December 2008, there were 51 patients benefitting from this transport scheme.

With this gift, the new NKF hopes to extend its transport subsidies to another 140 needy patients. Each of them will receive $30 per month to help support their bus/train expenses to and from the dialysis centres.

Another Centre to give ‘Life and Hope’

The NKF’s steadfast supporter, the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, is generously sponsoring the cost of building and equipping the NKF’s 25th dialysis centre in the western part of Singapore, estimated at $2 million. The Temple will also sponsor the centre’s net annual operating expenditure of approximately $800,000.

This is the second time the Temple is sponsoring the building and net annual operating cost of an NKF dialysis centre. In 1998, the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple contributed towards the establishment of a dialysis centre in Simei and has been supporting the centre since then.

The new centre will meet the projected increase in demand for dialysis places at the NKF. Based on recent years’ figures, the net increase is estimated at 150 patients per year.

In addition, the new centre will also provide the NKF the opportunity to ‘right-site’ some of its existing patients by placing them at centres closest to their homes or work places. 53 patients dialysing at other NKF centres will immediately benefit from this new centre in the West.

Leading a Fulfilling Life

NKF’s longest surviving patient epitomises the work of the NKF over the past 40 years - giving life and hope to kidney patients with the support of a caring community. Without community support, the NKF would not exist to give needy patients like Richard Tay a new lease of life. Thanks to you, Richard has been able to receive dialysis for 28 years and lead a meaningful and productive life.

At a young age, Richard did not enjoy what others his age would be typical doing - busy studying, partying, travelling, playing all kinds of sports and living life to the fullest without much worries in the world. Richard’s bladder problems caused him to be in and out of hospital until he was 6 years old, which eventually caused his kidneys to fail at the age of 19.

Richard’s world could have crumbled but he took it in his stride and made up his mind that the only difference between him and others is that he has to go for dialysis three times a week. His positive attitude towards life has kept him alive and soaring from strength to strength.

Indeed, talking to him today, one can never tell that he is a kidney patient. This is also due to the fact that he does not treat himself like one. He often greets people with a ready smile and has an air of positivity. Although Richard is not suitable for transplant due to his bladder problems, it has not dampened his zeal to towards life. The 47-year-old keeps fit by exercising, bowling with friends, and surfing the net during his free time.

Richard believes that for patients to stay well, they not only need medical treatment, but also emotional and psychological support. As a model patient, Richard is always encouraging other kidney patients to look for jobs to support themselves as well as contribute to their families so that they could lead life with purpose, dignity and self-respect.

Like Richard, we should not take life for granted but live it to the fullest and show gratitude for what has been bestowed upon us. Richard is blessed to have the community’s support, the NKF family of nurses, doctors, as well as friends at the dialysis centre. They have been there for him for the past 28 years and continue to walk the journey with him. For Richard and other NKF patients like him, they never walk alone.

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“I used to think that by going on dialysis, a kidney patient cannot live for long. But look at me, I’m still alive after 28 years. I’m grateful to the people who support the NKF.”
The story of the NKF began in the 1960s when Dr Khoo Oon Teik, a nephrologist, witnessed the agonising plight of kidney failure sufferers, including his own brother who became a victim and died from this disease. At that time, about 200 Singaporeans died each year from kidney failure. Dr Khoo was determined to help them.

So in September 1968, with a group of doctors and benefactors, Dr Khoo formed the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), which was officially inaugurated on 7 April 1969 (World Health Day).

The NKF’s objectives were essentially:

1) to save the lives of kidney failure patients by rendering all possible services to persons who are suffering from kidney failure
2) to encourage and promote research in all aspects of kidney diseases, and
3) to carry out public education programmes on kidney diseases

In 1969, the first dialysis unit in Ward 21 of the then Outram Road General Hospital (now Singapore General Hospital) was expanded and moved into the attic above the Surgical Unit A of the Hospital with 10 beds. The dialysis machines used were made of stainless steel.

In September 1982, the NKF officially opened its first dialysis centre with 10 dialysis machines at the Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital. However, capacity was limited due to the lack of funds.

As dialysis was only an alternative treatment for kidney failure, the NKF promoted the importance of kidney transplantation to the public. This led to the passage of the Human Organ Transplant Act. The Act presumes that non-Muslims, between the ages of 21 and 60, have pledged their kidneys upon accidental death, unless they have opted out.

“The Foundation needs considerable help and I hope its organisers will not be disappointed in their faith in the sustained support which they expect to get and must get from the community if this Foundation is to succeed.” – the then Health Minister Chua Sian Chin emphasising the importance of community support for the NKF in his speech during the NKF’s inauguration.

Source: National Archives of Singapore
The majority of kidney failure sufferers could not afford the high cost of dialysis. So, under the leadership of its then CEO, Mr T T Durai, the NKF began to look into establishing a financially sustainable dialysis programme. It came up with the idea of building dialysis centres at the void decks of HDB blocks. This would save on rental costs and at the same time, provide easy access and convenience to patients living in the heartlands.

The NKF also introduced a system of co-payment where patients pay part of their treatment costs with the NKF providing subsidies through public support as well as reimbursements from medical insurance.

The NKF believed in the philosophy of providing holistic care, supporting patients beyond dialysis. It launched a rehabilitation programme to inject optimism, self worth and self respect into patients by helping them with job placements, skills upgrading courses, exercise regimes and family support services.

From 1987 to 2002, thanks to caring sponsors, 21 dialysis centres were set up island-wide providing easy access and convenience to kidney patients living or working in the heartlands. Three more dialysis centres were established after year 2005.

The NKF moved its headquarters from the Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital to a 2-storey building and make-shift temporary offices in Kim Keat Road in February 1995, with plans to build an adjacent 12-storey building. The NKF Centre, completed in 1999, was made possible by five caring donors - The Shaw Foundation, the late Mr Tay Choon Hye, Singapore Pools, Lee Foundation and Singapore Buddhist Welfare Services.

With the increasing number of Singaporeans getting diabetes and hypertension – the two leading causes of kidney failure in Singapore – the NKF conducted health screenings in the community to encourage the public to take care of their health. It also established two Prevention Centres which aimed to provide comprehensive health screenings, as well as support services at subsidised rates for people with diabetes and hypertension.

The NKF established the Children’s Dialysis Fund on 15 January 1993. This Fund supported patients below 18 years of age by providing subsidies for dialysis treatment, drugs, hospitalisation charges, and transplant and post-transplant expenses. On 23 February 2002, with a $4 million donation from the Shaw Foundation, the NKF set up the Shaw-NKF Children’s Kidney Centre at the National University Hospital to support children with kidney diseases.

It was very rare for women on dialysis to conceive, and even then, some babies did not survive. The pregnant mother would also be more susceptible to anaemia and hypertension. However, NKF’s efforts to provide quality dialysis resulted in a medical breakthrough. On 6 October 1992, one of its patients, Madam Nooraini Abdul Rahman, gave birth to a healthy baby girl. Since then, many other patients had successful deliveries.
With a new Board and Management team, the turnaround towards a leaner and more cost-effective NKF was underway. Calling itself the “new NKF”, it went about systematically transforming the NKF and fixing its deficiencies, while at the same time preserving its strengths. A new vision and mission was set, which was in line with the original objectives of the NKF when it was inaugurated in 1969.

To achieve high standards of corporate governance, accountability and transparency, 10 sub-committees were formed to cover key areas of management.

It also adopted an “open-door” policy, working closely with grassroot organisations to conduct regular Dialysis Centre Open-House events in the heartlands where residents can learn more about the services provided by the NKF.

The NKF re-focused its efforts on being a patient-centric organisation – delivering affordable, cost-effective and professional medical services to kidney patients, and providing more holistic care with social and community support.

Over a period of two years, its dialysis fees went through four reductions, from $200 per session to $130 per session, a 35% reduction in total.

The NKF also started a Portable Subsidy Programme in 2008 for needy kidney patients with other medical complications. As the NKF was not licensed to handle such cases, it gave out subsidies to these patients referred to the NKF by the Restructured Hospitals so that they could seek dialysis treatment at private centres where emergency medical services were accessible.

The NKF Saga – July 2005

The NKF saga broke in July 2005 following the NKF’s unsuccessful defamation suit against reporter Susan Long and her employer, Singapore Press Holdings. This caused a backlash and fallout of donors of the NKF, resulting in the resignation of its CEO, Mr T T Durai and its Board of Directors.

A new Board of Directors was appointed by the Ministry of Health comprising distinguished members led by Chairman, Mr Gerard Ee, a respected public accountant and at that time, President of the National Council of Social Service. The Board appointed Professor Goh Chee Leok as its interim CEO, and nine months later, a new CEO, Mrs Eunice Tay.

A full independent audit on its finances by KPMG revealed several shortcomings. In April 2006, the new Board subsequently filed a civil suit and obtained judgement against the former directors of the NKF in respect of, amongst others, breach of fiduciary duties during their tenure as officers of the NKF.

To serve more needy patients, the NKF opened three more dialysis centres in the heartlands – NKF Dialysis Centre in Woodlands on 16 May 2007, Pei Hwa Foundation – NKF Dialysis Centre in Ang Mo Kio on 17 August 2008 and NKF Hougang-Punggol Dialysis Centre in Hougang, which became operational in March 2008.

To enhance patient services as part of its holistic care approach, the NKF introduced more programmes to take care of patients’ psycho-social, physical health and nutritional needs. It employed trained Medical Social Workers to counsel patients as well as organised group therapy sessions to help them overcome the emotional effects of kidney failure.

In 2008, the NKF established a Patient Welfare Fund to lessen the financial burden of the neediest kidney patients such as providing monthly food vouchers and public transport assistance to and from the dialysis centres.
Congratulations on the NKF’s 40th Anniversary! I want to make a Special One-Time Donation of:

☐ $200  ☐ $100  ☐ $50  ☐ Others $

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