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Words from the heart make a world of a difference.

Listen to 71-year-old Mr Sam Ngiam: “We come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing.”

And he believes in keeping to his promised word.

Managing director of Haneflex (S) Pte Ltd, a company he established that deals in airport fuelling components, Sam has been an NKF donor since 1997. Back then, he made a pledge that if his business does well, he would pledge a dialysis machine to NKF every year to give kidney patients a new lease of life.

To date, Mr Ngiam has donated eight dialysis machines. Each machine costs about $20,000 and can give life to six kidney patients in shifts. A total of 48 patients have benefited from the eight machines.

Lessons from his grandfather

Speaking from his office, Mr Ngiam recalled that his desire to help the less fortunate was due to the moral values that his grandfather taught him, one of which was to ‘give back to society’.

And it is this important value that has been embedded in, and embraced by each generation of his family.

Mr Ngiam says that he chooses to bless others in whatever way possible so that he can leave a lasting legacy not only to his children but his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

And he chose to donate dialysis machines after seeing his ex-colleague battle and finally succumb to kidney failure.

“We cannot bring along all the riches that we save when we die. We might as well use some to bless others”, says Mr Ngiam.

Life was not so easy for Mr Ngiam in his younger days. He only managed to finish primary school and took up jobs such as working as a coffee boy and storekeeper to help make ends meet. Determined to educate himself further, he worked in the day and took up a five-year part-time course at night to be a car mechanic.

Like father like son

Indeed, his compassionate heart has influenced his youngest son, 36-year-old David, to be philanthropic as well.

David, who works in his father’s company as a general manager, is happy to see that NKF has, over the years, helped make dialysis treatment readily available, affordable and accessible to needy kidney patients with a network of 24 dialysis centres island-wide.

“I cannot imagine what a kidney patient has to go through, hooked up to a dialysis machine four to five hours a day, three times a week. So if I can, why not help others?” says David.

In fact, during the interview, father and son decided to pledge their eighth dialysis machine to the NKF by signing a cheque on the spot for $20,000 because their company had just sealed a business deal.

Confident in the new NKF

Mr Ngiam knows that poor kidney patients in other countries are deprived of dialysis treatment and care because they simply cannot afford its high cost.

“Many kidney patients in other countries, I believe, do not have ready access to have good dialysis facilities, but patients in Singapore have been very fortunate to have dialysis centres located all over Singapore, so that they do not have to travel too far. It’s also good that a charitable organisation like NKF can also help them with the costly dialysis fees”, said the general manager in Haneflex.

David and his father say that they will continue to be steadfast supporters of NKF’s cause.

“We will continue to donate dialysis machines to the NKF as we can be certain that it will benefit patients directly”, says David.

A new dialysis machine costs $20,000. Donors can make an outright donation for the full amount or choose to pledge yearly installments over up to 5 years.

To recognise the donor’s generosity, there will be a plaque-mounting ceremony in which the donor mounts the plaque onto the machine at the dialysis centre.

For more information, please call the General Line at 6299 0200 during office hours or email contact_us@nkfs.org for more details.
‘I fought kidney failure’

Sukumaran Gopalan felt as if he was struck by lightning when he was diagnosed with kidney failure in 2005.

Shocked, surprised, speechless, the 42-year-old did not know what to do.

So many questions went through his mind but there were no concrete answers to how his kidneys failed.

“What if I had been more careful with my diet? What if I had gone for regular medical check-ups. What if...what if...”

The only hint he had that something may have been amiss was when he had protein in his urine during his National Service medical checkup.

Blessed with family support

For Sukumaran, now 45, the events leading to his kidneys failing happened like a whirlwind.

Four years ago, he was feeling giddy and physically uncomfortable one day and decided to see his General Practitioner. His blood pressure reading that day was so high that the doctor referred him to the hospital immediately.

Sukumaran then went through a barrage of tests and was diagnosed with kidney failure as well as hypertension.

“I was very down at first but my family members, especially my sister and brother, kept encouraging me and reminding me that it is not the end of the world, and with dialysis, I can still lead a relatively normal life,” says Sukumaran.

Shy but extremely polite, Sukumaran is still single and is living with his mother and brother. He regrets not being married as he felt it would be better to have someone to share what he is going through in life.

Talking to Sukumaran, one can sense that he chooses to dwell on the positive side of things.

Sukumaran had decided right from the point he was diagnosed with kidney failure that he will face the future with courage and optimism.

NKF to the rescue

Sukumaran says that he is thankful to NKF for the dialysis treatment subsidies.

He remembers the early months when he was first diagnosed with kidney failure. While waiting for his medical report to be completed, he had to start his dialysis at a private centre.

However, the hefty dialysis fees wiped out whatever little savings he had very quickly. Fortunately, after about four months on private dialysis, he was transferred to NKF and he began his treatment at its centre in Kim Keat.

With NKF’s help, he only has to pay $70 out of his own pocket for his monthly dialysis fees compared to about $2,000 a month at a private centre.

Today, about 58% of NKF patients pay $50 or less a month out of pocket for their dialysis treatment.

Regaining self worth

Kidney failure forced this former airport police officer to stop work in 2004. Regular dialysis for over a year made him fit again to work, but no jobs came his way.

NKF has a job placement programme to help patients learn new skills to help them get back into the workforce. The push for training, and hence employability, is aimed at giving patients a sense of self worth as they are able to be self-reliant and not be a financial burden to their families.

NKF encouraged Sukumaran to attend a course the company ran to obtain a certificate for a security guard license.

Sukumaran enrolled in the course, studying with dogged persistence for the mandatory test and passed. He says that life is more meaningful now that he is working.

Looking at Sukumaran, one can tell that he is looking forward to a better and brighter future.

He says, “I’m very, very happy that I feel well and working. Even though I have kidney failure, I can still lead a fulfilling life.”

Protein in the urine

Protein in the urine is a warning sign. It may indicate kidney damage or disease or it may be a temporary surge due to an infection, medication, vigorous exercise, or emotional or physical stress. Better and close monitoring of protein in the urine slows the progression of chronic kidney disease (CKD), and makes it less likely for a patient to require dialysis.

In Singapore, there were 3,963 people on dialysis as at end-2007. Diabetes and hypertension accounts for 7 in 10 cases of kidney failure. Sadly, not many people who have high blood pressure and diabetes realise that unchecked high blood pressure and blood glucose may severely damage the kidneys and is a major cause of CKD.
The NKF Hougang-Punggol Dialysis Centre stands out as a glowing example to the community.

It is an inspiring NKF “first”.

Never before had a multi-racial group of heartlanders raised funds to set up an NKF dialysis centre. Previously sponsored centres were funded by a single individual or organisation.

Noted Mr George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs & MP for Aljunied GRC at the official opening on 16 August, “This dialysis centre is very different from the other dialysis centres…it is created by people who wanted to do good. Big organisations, small organisations, and many others.”

In 2006, the NKF and Aljunied GRC saw a need to build another centre in the Hougang area because the existing Singapore Buddhist Welfare Services-NKF Dialysis Centre located at Hougang Avenue 1 had no vacancies.

There were more than 100 NKF patients living in Hougang, Sengkang, and Punggol areas who were dialysing at other NKF dialysis centres due to the lack of places at Hougang Avenue 1.

With the opening of this new centre, patients who live in these areas can now receive dialysis treatment there. They need not spend more time, money or energy travelling long distances to and from their homes or workplaces for treatment.

Costing $1.4 million to build, the centre has a capacity to accommodate 16 dialysis stations which can serve up to 96 dialysis patients.

Continuing with this “many helping hands” spirit, the residents of Aljunied GRC came forth to build an organic garden next to the dialysis centre so that patients can enjoy pesticide-free vegetables.

The vegetables that are planted in this garden include what we all commonly know in local names as kangkong, sweet potato leaves and other local favourite herbs.

This initiative is yet another “first” for the new NKF and Aljunied GRC as it sees the continuing of this “kampung” spirit of coming together to lend a helping hand.

The NKF looks forward to continue working with the community in this spirit of oneness to make a positive difference to the lives of kidney patients and give them hope for a brighter tomorrow.

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**Special ‘first’ for 24th dialysis centre**

“...This dialysis centre is very different from the other dialysis centres...it is created by people who wanted to do good. Big organisations, small organisations, and many others.”

- Mr George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs and MP for Aljunied GRC.

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