

GIVING VOICE TO CANCER

After his brush with larynx cancer, North East resident **Ricky**, 59, now counsels other cancer patients as a volunteer with the Singapore Cancer Society

"You might not see it immediately but cancer has left its mark on me. The skin around my neck is a shade darker than it should be. Sixteen years ago, cancer treatment was not so advanced, and the radiation used to treat me caused these burns.

The other 'souvenir' that cancer left me is my raspy voice. I always sound as if I have a very bad sore throat. This was one of the first symptoms of my cancer. I was losing my voice so I went to Changi General Hospital for a check-up. The medical report confirmed that I had stage 3-4 larynx cancer, which is a form of throat cancer. I needed chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

The news left me sad, frustrated and scared. I was scared that the treatment would not be successful. I dreaded the thought of dying.

Thankfully, the treatment was successful. I am now cured of cancer and also familiar with the emotional rollercoaster as well as the physical ordeal that the disease brings.

I use my experience to help others cope in their battles with cancer. I

am now a committee member and volunteer counsellor with the Singapore Cancer Society's New Voice Club. This is a support group for larynx cancer patients.

We work as a team and help one another

by sharing experiences and keeping one another company through difficult times. When new patients join the group, we give them first-hand information about the effects of the treatments they will receive. Some of them have to learn to speak without a voice box after treatment. We help these patients cope with this challenge that is unique to larynx cancer.

I always tell them that the choice is theirs, that how they cope with cancer is determined by their mindset. I believe a positive mindset is most important. I tell them to try their best to go through this journey without fear. Cancer is not a death sentence.

At the same time, prevention is better than cure. My brush with cancer was a turning point, and forced me to re-think my dietary habits and choice of activities. Now, besides eating healthily, I try to get out in the morning for some sunshine as well as some exercise every day. I also try to get enough rest. My advice is not to smoke, nor drink heavily. " ◊

WARD OFF CANCER!

A healthy diet and lifestyle can help reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases such as diabetes and stroke

- Eat less salt, fat and processed food
- Eat more fruits, vegetables and food rich in fibre
- Quit smoking
- Drink in moderation
- Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight
- Avoid casual sex

