

3-time cancer survivor has words of hope for others



Mr Gabriel Loh, 21, hopes to share his story with those battling cancer, their loved ones, and survivors.

PHOTO CHILDREN'S CANCER FOUNDATION

BY ELAINE N SAMBOO

For most people, one cancer diagnosis already is life-changing.

But for Mr Gabriel Loh, he heard the gut-wrenching news three times – at five, and 14 and then 17 years old.

This year, the 21-year-old was a Hair for Hope ambassador. The three-time cancer survivor saw it as a good opportunity for him to share his story with those battling cancer, their loved ones, and survivors.

He said: "Since my strength is in finding hope in Jesus and the community who have rallied around me to give me support, I decided to shave my head for Hair for Hope this year.

"I am also glad to see that my friends from junior college registered as a group to shave their heads and some of my relatives did their part (by donating) funds."

SETBACKS AND PROGRESS

Mr Loh himself had remained resilient by doing what he could to get on with his life during and after treatment.

He had missed the whole of his K2 year in pre-school, but made up for lost time in primary school. His treatment then lasted for about a year, and he also had to take medication that made skin on his face and arms peel off.

To ease his pain during this time, his parents

had bought him a game console, so that he could channel his energy towards playing games. They also let him have fast food in place of hospital food, as he had developed an aversion towards it.

Mr Loh's second brush with cancer was in 2018. Doctors found a tumour high up in the nose near his brain and eyes.

As he was now old enough to grasp the gravity of cancer, he worried about post-cancer survival.

His greatest fear was the side effects of the treatment, coupled with his fear of being a burden to his parents. Moreover, he was afraid his IQ would be affected too as he required radiotherapy and surgery in the nose.

When he was warded in the Singapore General Hospital during this period, he felt downcast.

Mr Loh recalled: "I felt helpless and also hopeless at times due to the after-effects of the chemotherapy sessions." He was also worried that his frequent hospital appointments were disruptive to his studies.

Eventually, his parents went with him to South Korea for proton therapy as an alternative to chemotherapy. Doctors said it would reduce the adverse effects of radiation on his brain and eyes, but it was not available here then.

Again, Mr Loh overcame this disruption to his life and managed to do well enough to enter junior college.

The third time he was diagnosed with cancer was just before his A-level mother tongue exam

and, again, he did not let it get in the way of his preparations as he continued to study while going in and out of hospital for scans and treatment.

He said: "I was worried about the difficulty of coping in JC or whether I should take a gap year. I eventually took one and completed my A levels in 2023." He added that his rock band CCA in JC helped him cope with his treatments' side effects as he found solace in playing music.

Recovering while in school was not easy. He said: "I think not many are aware that the survival post-cancer is very challenging.

"I found it quite hard to cope due to my affected memory as I forgot easily, encountered short-term memory loss and can even forget my train of thought throughout a conversation.

"I was so affected by this, as some of my friends might have misunderstood me for not being bothered to listen to what they were saying."

Mr Loh is thankful to his parents and his church community, as they were instrumental in helping him recover. The Children's Cancer Foundation also supported and encouraged him by giving him a study award.

He now wants to help others who are struggling just like him.

He has volunteered at the Woodlands Social Centre and will be pursuing a social work degree at the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

ST SCHOOLS EDITOR Serene Luo JOURNALISTS Ang Yiyi, Nishalini Saralatan, Nur Syahidah Zainal TEACHING SPECIALIST Debra Ann Francisco SUB-EDITOR James Jr Quek ART & DESIGN Jaster Ngui BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER David Tan CIRCULATION INQUIRIES Sherry Loh (call 6319-1039 or e-mail cirschool@sph.com.sg)

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

Mathematical-Logical
Think abstractly and conceptually, and identify logical patterns.



Interpersonal
Respond appropriately to others in a group context.



Intrapersonal
Improve self-awareness by developing inner feelings, values, beliefs and thinking processes.



Visual-Kinesthetic
Learn through the use of manipulatives, craft or visual aids, or hands-on tasks or movement.



Verbal-Linguistic
Discuss and develop opinions.

STSchools

@STSchools