A Decade Of Saving Our Little Ones

Because Every Child Deserves A Future


TORSO


VIVA
DATION
life

10 Years of VIVA Milestones

2006

- Founding of VIVA Foundation for Children with Cancer on 6 Feb 2006
- Signing of memorandum of understanding with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and NUS/NUH to embark on collaborative efforts to help children with cancer

2007

- The first St. Jude Asia Forum was organised (now renamed as St. Jude-VIVA Forum in Paediatric Oncology)

2008

- Received S$12 million donation from Goh Foundation to advance Paediatric Oncology with NUS/NUH
- Launched the VIVA-Goh Fund in Paediatric Oncology

2009

- Official opening of the VIVA-University Children's Cancer Centre (VUC^3) at NUH
- St. Jude AML (Acute Myeloid Leukaemia) 2008 trial launched in Singapore, in conjunction with St. Jude researchers

2010

- NUS embarked on Ma-Spore ALL 2010 Clinical Trial

2011

- Far East Organization donated 18,500 ft^2 of space in Novena Specialist Centre (Level 3) to VIVA

2012

- Appointment of A/Prof Allen Yeoh as VIVA-Goh Professorship in Paediatric Oncology

2013

- Appointment of Prof. Dario Campana as the Mrs Lee Kong Chian Chair in Advanced Cellular Therapy
- Official opening of VIVA-CCF Hub in Novena Specialist Centre
- Expansion of VUC^3 in NUH
- Conclusion of 10-year Ma-Spore ALL 2003 Clinical Trial — Overall 10-year survival rate for children with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia raised to 92%, one of the best in the world

2014

- Raised S$2 million towards Cancer Immunotherapy Research
- Raised S$8 million to set up the new VIVA-NUS Centre for Translational Research in Acute Leukaemia (CenTRAL)

2015

- Signed MOU with KKH and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital to embark on the VIVA-KKH Paediatric Brain and Solid Tumour Programme

2016

- At the 5-year mark, Ma-Spore ALL 2010 Clinical Trial has raised the overall survival rate for children with Acute Lymphoblastic Leakaemia to 93%
- Official opening of VIVA-NUS CenTRAL located in NUS Centre of Translational Medicine (Level 9)
- 10th edition of St. Jude-VIVA Forum & Commemorative Ceremony
- 10th Anniversary of VIVA Foundation

A Second Chance in Life

It turned out that Joshua's condition was so rare that we would not have found the correct diagnosis and treatment for him had it not been for the right expertise.

Cheryl and Joshua
Mother and Son
Beneficiaries

We were devastated when we first found out about Joshua's medical condition. I still recall it all started on 10 March 2014 when we visited the paediatrician for Joshua's cold. She noticed a lump around Joshua's throat area and sent him for extra scans.

From the CT scans, we could see this huge tumour inside his nose and another in his brain. We were told that Joshua had possibly just two months left with us.

We were heartbroken, anxious and cried for the days to come. Even our older daughter, Genevieve, who was 9 years old then, would break down at home and in school too. It was like the end of the world.

But we did not give up hope. We scrambled around in search for an accurate diagnosis of Joshua's condition. His first biopsy at National Cancer Centre turned out to be negative – we were baffled. Next came the diagnosis of Burkits Lymphoma at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. Again, we were not convinced.

We were eventually referred to Prof Allen and his team at NUH. By then, our resolve had almost crumbled from three weeks of uncertainty. Through a series of tests, Joshua was correctly diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukaemia. Our mind was finally at ease as we can now be assured of the right treatment for Joshua.

When Joshua first started treatment, he had a tough time coping with the painful and numerous side effects, which included fever, muscle weakness and mouth ulcers. The traumatic side effects left Joshua emotionally withdrawn. He refused to speak to anyone else at the hospital but us.

But seeing Joshua respond well to chemotherapy gave us a lot of hope and relief. He entered remission within 29 days.

We were grateful for the dedicated work of the nurses and doctors, who gave Joshua a lot of emotional support and encouragement throughout his treatment. It's amazing to see how much he had opened up to the hospital staff after two years.

Prof Allen was one doctor whom Joshua highly regarded. It was heartening to see how Joshua enjoyed his intellectual jokes and how both of them were always so comfortable with each other.

Through Prof Allen and the outpatient clinic at the NUH, we found out more about the VIVA Foundation and how her close partnership with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in the US had helped saved Joshua's life.

It turned out that Joshua's condition was so rare that we would not have found the correct diagnosis and treatment for him had it not been for the expertise of a St. Jude researcher based in Singapore – Dr Allen, along with his research team.

VIVA has helped us in more ways than one. Back then, we were reluctant to include radiotherapy as part of Joshua's treatment due to the risks involved. We were relieved that this issue was swiftly raised at the 2015 St Jude-VIVA Forum in Singapore. Our decision to abstain from radiotherapy was strongly supported by the St Jude teams in US and Europe.

Through VIVA, Joshua is now able to obtain his second chance in life. We are hopeful that he will enjoy his life to the fullest and live healthy.


ACTIVITY 2

For the Love of My Son

My vision is for VIVA to help transfer and adapt life-saving research knowledge to Singapore, as well as the region.

Mrs Jennifer Yeo
Founder & Chair
VIVA Foundation for Children with Cancer

My son was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL) when he was three. Thanks to the dedication and hard work of the doctors, nurses and staff at National University Hospital (NUH) and St Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, where he had a bone marrow transplant, my son is now a healthy 22 year old medical student.

When VIVA first started, we had very limited resources. Yet, VIVA managed to catalyse strategic projects and programmes that help to improve the level of research and medical care for children with cancer, with the help and support of many kind and generous people.

I was very much inspired by the high level of expertise in St Jude and was fortunate to work with Dr Ching-Hon Pui of St Jude and Dr Allen Yeo of NUH to help transfer the knowledge to our hospitals, doctors and nurses in Singapore. It is translational research that will bring the lifesaving cures to children. St Jude has managed to achieve a survival rate of 94% for ALL, the most common type of childhood leukaemia, through years and billions of dollars in research.

My vision is for VIVA to help transfer and adapt that research knowledge to Singapore and Asia.

VIVA's work over the last 10 years would not have been possible without generous givers and supporters. In particular, I would like to thank Mrs Betty Wu-Lee, Mr. Goh Hup Jin and Mr. Philip Ng.

Mrs. Betty Wu-Lee is one of the founding Director of VIVA Foundation. Without her strong support from the day VIVA was conceptualized, we would not have gotten to where we are today. Mrs. Lee is a true friend to children with cancer and a true friend to doctors and scientists involved in curing them. Mrs. Lee's support has been unstinting and words cannot express the gratitude and love we have for her.

Mr. Goh Hup Jin and the Goh Foundation has been supporting VIVA's programmes including a $12 million VIVA-GOH paediatric oncology programme in NUH which started running in 2009, as well as our annual St Jude-VIVA Forum.

In 2011, Mr. Philip Ng from Far East Organisation very generously donated the 3rd floor of the Novena Specialist Centre to VIVA, allowing us to build a hub for childhood cancer which today houses the key charities involved in helping children with cancer, as well as a school for children recovering from cancer.

I give thanks for all the help and opportunities that we have received to save lives together and pray for continuing support to make our dream to save even more lives a reality.


VIVA
FOUNDATION
with cancer
PORE
Your giving
life-givi
life-saving
life-chang

Passion for Life

To me, every child is important;
it is unacceptable to lose even a single child
to cancer or any other medical conditions.

Dr Ching-Hon Pui
Chairman, St. Jude Department of Oncology
VIVA External Advisory Board

Helping children with cancer has always been something close to my heart. When I was a child in middle school (if I recall correctly), I happened by chance to watch a movie about a young child who bravely fought but lost the battle with leukaemia. I was deeply touched by its poignancy, the dreams of every child and value of life no matter how small the hope could be.

Since then, helping children with leukaemia and other types of cancer has become my lifelong passion. It has all along been the primary motivational force that drives my choice of career. I worked hard to qualify for enrolment into medical school. I eventually specialised in paediatric oncology and stumbled upon the opportunity to help children with cancer at the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

I was drawn to St. Jude's mission of finding cures and saving children with cancer and other catastrophic medical conditions. The hospital has made remarkable achievements, pushing the overall childhood cancer survival rate from 20% to 80% since its inception more than 50 years ago. Throughout my tenure with St. Jude, I have overseen advancements in childhood cancer treatment, as well as the establishment of international networks to share knowledge and resources to improve survival rates.

The unique thing about St. Jude is that we freely share the breakthroughs that we have made. Every child saved at St. Jude would mean that doctors, scientists and hospitals worldwide can use that knowledge to save thousands more children. Families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing and food. At St. Jude, we believe that all a family should worry about is helping their child pull through cancer and obtain a new lease of life.

Jennifer and I met at St. Jude, where we developed deep camaraderie through sharing the same passion of helping children with cancer both in Singapore and in Southeast Asia. Our partnership began immediately after Jennifer founded VIVA. Together with St. Jude's 24 partner sites in 17 countries, VIVA will be well-poised to promote sustainable improvements in childhood cancer care and cure rates throughout Asia.

Our partnership with VIVA has seen encouraging impact both locally and regionally. In addition to improving the local infrastructure of childhood cancer care, VIVA is also able to attract world-class scientists, such as Professor Dario Campana, and nurture outstanding local clinicians, such as Dr Allen Yeoh, to conduct ground-breaking research to increase the cure rates of childhood cancer. The annual St. Jude-VIVA Forum is another highlight of our partnerships. Many regional clinicians cannot afford to travel to US or Europe to learn, and so VIVA brings the world-class investigators and scientists to Singapore to teach them.

I am hopeful that our efforts will continue to break new grounds and improve the lives of children with cancer. To me, every child is important; it is unacceptable to lose even a single child to cancer or any other medical conditions. I will continue to work hard daily to find ways to cure all of these children.

4D HUMAN
DELUXE TORSO
ANATOMY MODEL
4D MASTER
Build Your Own Human Anatomy Museum!
1:2.5
15" / 38cm
54
14+

Connecting Hope, Saving Lives

I feel empowered with the necessary skills to forge on as a local leader in improving the care and outcome of childhood cancer in my country.

Dr Mae Dolendo
Paediatric Oncologist at the
Davao Medical Center, Philippines
VIVA Regional Support

Hi, Dr Mae! The St. Jude-VIVA Forum could not have been the success that it is today without your efforts over the past 10 years. Could you share with us some of the challenges that you and the team faced in the early years of organising the Forum?

Dr Mae: The start is always the most challenging. It was initially difficult to find the right people with the enthusiasm and commitment to help the (Asian) region improve its care for children with cancer. In the first Forum, our resources were stretched and everyone had to wear many hats and contribute in many areas. But with guidance, funding and the help of everyone, we managed to grow the Forum into what it is today – a meeting of doctors, nurses and support staff committed to continuing education and improving the care and survival of children with cancer in the region.

The Forum has seen active participation from around the region. What was your role and how much has the Forum grown these last 10 years?

Dr Mae: Being overseas, my main task was to help with the 2-day VIVA-Asia Pre-forum. We have grown from a small group of 20 to 30 to the 70 to 80 paediatricians, haematologists and oncologists from regional countries. We have come a long way from being just a 2-day conference. The Forum is now an umbrella of knowledge-sharing platforms and collaborative meetings. The growth was possible with funding and leadership from VIVA and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital which allowed doctors from countries with limited resources to participate.

How does the Forum impact its participants and, more broadly, help improve the care and treatment of children with cancer?

Dr Mae: The considerable improvements made over the years in the regional practice of paediatric oncology could not have been possible without the Forum. From the networks established in the scientific meetings and knowledge shared by international experts, the Forum provides participants various opportunities to learn and keep themselves abreast of the latest developments in childhood cancer. This is the main reason that attracts participants to return every year.

What does the future hold for the Forum, both in Singapore and in the region?

Dr Mae: The Forum will continue to serve as a beacon of hope, not only for children with cancer, but also for those taking care of them. For Asian doctors like us, the Forum is a pioneering effort that will serve as a cornerstone for progress in the regional practice of paediatric oncology. It still has a lot of frontiers to conquer, but I believe that we can definitely do so one step at a time in the right direction.

How has the Forum impacted you in your role as a doctor helping children with cancer?

Dr Mae: I am now a better paediatric oncologist thanks to the learning opportunities provided at the Forum's various platforms. More importantly, I feel empowered with the necessary skills to forge on as a local leader in improving the care and outcome of childhood cancer in my country.

Of Love, Devotion and Hardwork

It has been a rewarding journey for me to see children smile, laugh and play as they make their recovery from cancer.

Dr Allen Yeoh
Clinician Scientist, VIVA-Goh Professor in
Paediatric Oncology, National University Hospital
VIVA Doctor (Blood Cancers)

I dreamed of becoming a surgeon as I graduated from medical school in 1990. But unexpectedly, fate would nudge me towards the path of paediatric oncology instead.

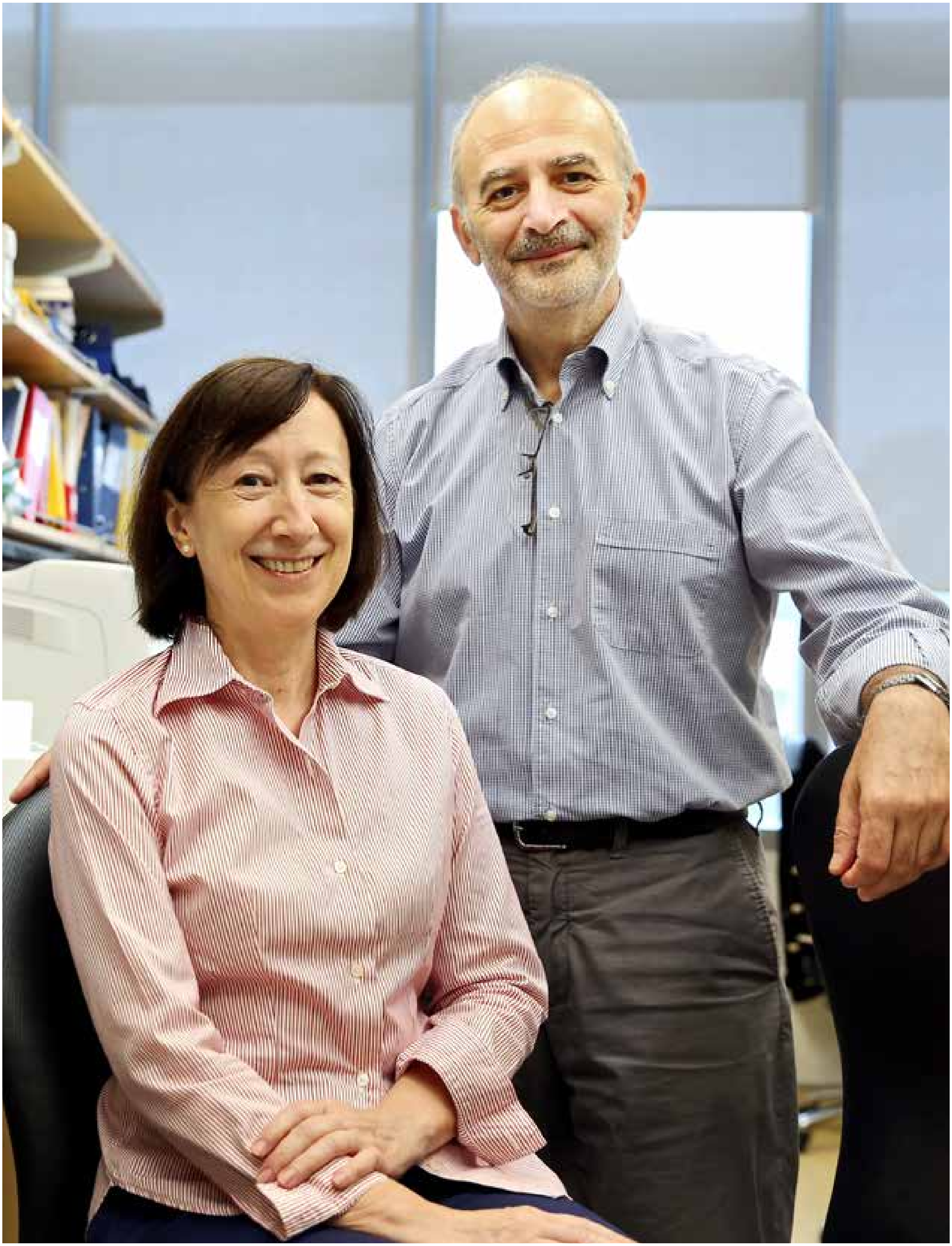
It was a cold morning when a mother brought her adopted young infant for a routine check-up. I found that the baby was exhibiting signs of abnormal development and thus cautioned the mother, who broke down immediately. I comforted her and then advised her on maximising the baby's potential through physiotherapy.

The incident was a turning point in my life. My boss, Prof Quah, who had been observing my potential to be a caring doctor, offered to train me as a paediatric oncologist. I was pleasantly surprised and proceeded to take the offer, as I shared his vision of a future where fatal cancers in children would become curable through research advancements. That baby grew up well and is now a proud mother herself. She is an inspiring example of how we can overcome handicaps and achieve our potential through love, devotion and hard work.

I am now both a doctor and a clinician scientist in paediatric oncology. As a clinician scientist, I am constantly exploring ways to improve treatment and care of children with cancer. This includes developing tests to help doctors better gauge the amount of chemotherapy that can safely cure a child with leukaemia. As as doctor, the care and well-being of the child is my top concern. I advise the family on treatment issues and how best we can use our research findings to help the child.

Much of my work and achievements in paediatric oncology could not have been possible without VIVA's funding and support. Helping patients from developing countries in Southeast Asia would be something that I plan to address through VIVA-St. Jude Forum. Diagnoses are often wrong and doctors there seldom have access to laboratory tests that can properly diagnose and stratify the risk of relapse in children with cancer. Oftentimes, excessively strong chemotherapy was used, which resulted in fatality to the child patients.

It has been a rewarding journey for me to see children smile, laugh and play as they make their recovery from cancer. I look forward to greater progress in improving the cure rate for childhood leukaemia through research and clinical studies, so that every child can live out his dream and achieve his potential in life.



Research for a Brighter Future

Our research aims to develop such therapies and administer them in the most appropriate way, so that there can be a bright future for children with cancer.

Prof. Dario Campana
Scientist, Mrs Lee Kong Chian Chair in Advanced Cellular Therapy, National University of Singapore
VIVA Scientist (Blood Cancers)

Medical research is something that invigorates my soul, like how one feels energised by coffee early in the morning. My initial research did not pertain to childhood cancer; I was trained in adult oncology. But my interest in childhood cancer grew after my move to the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where I realised that I would be able to make a greater impact through research in leukaemia.

I first came to Singapore as a speaker at the St Jude-VIVA Forum and was very impressed by VIVA's commitment to support paediatric oncology. Our belief in VIVA, together with the excellent research funding and vibrant academic setting here, were the key reasons my wife Elaine and I took a leap and relocated to Singapore to further develop our research.

My research focuses on improving the classification and monitoring of childhood leukaemia, as well as the development of new treatments for cancer by using the child's own immune system. New treatments based on the power of the immune system offer an additional tool to improve cure rates. My vision would be for these new treatments to one day replace chemotherapy.

I am grateful for VIVA's philanthropic funding to support research in childhood cancer. VIVA's contribution has allowed our research programmes to proceed at a much faster rate and to initiate clinical trials of novel immunotherapies developed in our laboratory.

Our most urgent goal would be to develop new therapies that can improve cure rates for childhood leukaemia while decreasing the side effects associated with standard therapies. Our research aims to develop such therapies and administer them in the most appropriate way, so that there can be a bright future for children with cancer.

Dr Elaine Coustan-Smith
Scientist , National University of Singapore
VIVA Scientist (Blood Cancers)

You could say that Dario and I are practically inseparable. We share the same home, the same laboratory, the same research interest and at times the same projects.

My work focuses on identifying the type of leukaemia the child has so that the correct treatment could be administered. I also monitor the effect of treatment on leukaemia cells, so that the chemotherapy can be given in the right amount. This is crucial as chemotherapy – toxic to both cancer and normal cells – can be injurious or even fatal if not delivered with precision, especially in children.

I embarked on my current research track when I was in the UK undergoing training in methods to classify and monitor leukaemia. My interest expanded when I moved to the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where coincidentally I met Dario there.

Dario and I first met Mrs Jennifer Yeo and her family at St. Jude. We hit off quite well given our mutual passion and desire to improve the lives of young cancer patients. Next we heard, VIVA was founded and our links with Mrs Yeo strengthened. At first, this was through the annual St Jude-VIVA Forum in Singapore, where we conducted workshops for five consecutive years. We gradually realised that the time was ripe for us to introduce our methodologies and work more closely with colleagues in Asia.

Through encouragement and funding support from VIVA, Dario and I took our research to Singapore and we have not looked back since. VIVA has provided us invaluable opportunities to network and exchange knowledge with oncologists and technical staff from around the world. Seeing how everyone at VIVA works tirelessly to raise awareness and improve the lives of children with cancer inspires me to do more for children with cancer.

Straight from the Heart

Our impact in helping children with cancer is still rather limited, as childhood tumours require cutting-edge treatments that are experimental or require immense financial support.

Dr Soh Shui Yen

Haematologist
KK Women's & Children's Hospital
VIVA Doctor (Solid Cancers)

Since my medical school days, I have been fascinated with the subject of oncology, in particular brain and solid tumours in children. Such tumours are notoriously difficult to manage and complex to treat. A huge team is involved, which means that plenty of coordination is required. The success rate is relatively low and definitely worse than childhood leukaemia.

I am motivated to help, as a doctor and as a researcher, these young cancer patients with brain and solid tumours as so much more can be done for them. It is my dream to aid in the development of better treatment and hence better outcome for children with cancer. The treatment needs to be less toxic with milder and fewer side effects, and more importantly, affordable too. Breakthroughs in research can definitely help with that.

As a doctor overseeing my patients, their safety and wellbeing are my priority. Every step along the way of treatment, I strive to have my patients' best interests at heart, guide the treatment process, communicate and explain options, and also to provide encouragement and comfort along the way.

The greatest challenge of brain and solid tumours would be to get funding and support for treatment and research. They are considered a rare disease, as each of the brain and solid tumour has its own unique profile and hence requires a different type of treatment. We are extremely fortunate that VIVA is very supportive of our efforts to improve research, education and clinical care of these cancers.

Dr Amos Loh

Clinician Scientist & Surgeon
KK Women's & Children's Hospital
VIVA Doctor (Solid Cancers)

Paediatric surgical oncology was a late discovery for me. I was already a trainee at a local hospital before I stumbled upon it. It was an unpopular field with an abyss of undiscovered knowledge and unanswered questions. I had always been eager to apply my work as a doctor and a researcher where needs from patients were greatest. So I jumped right in.

There were numerous memorable incidents and poignant moments throughout the course of my work. I could vividly remember this boy who had a relapsed Stage 4 high-risk neuroblastoma – a cancer of nerve cells. He came to remove the tumour in his belly, which had grown back aggressively despite treatment. Surgery was difficult and prolonged. Due to complications, his stay in the hospital dragged on for weeks straight into the holiday season. Despite the painful daily procedures that I performed for him, he always had a smile for everyone.

His chances at surviving the relapse were slim. This might well be his last Christmas. Not one to be expressive with my feelings, I finally plucked up the courage, bought him a little toy and sheepishly handed it to him while on duty on Christmas eve. I would never forget the look on his face when he awoke on Christmas morning to open the gift and play with it. He was discharged soon after, but also passed away not long thereafter. Alas, he was one of those that left a strong impression on me and made me more determined to make a difference.

Our impact in helping children with cancer is still rather limited, as childhood tumours require cutting-edge treatments that are experimental or require immense financial support. Traditional funding sources, such as pharmaceutical organisations and national bodies, are also disinterested to fund endeavours of little economic returns.

I believe VIVA understands that the lives of this handful of young patients cannot be simply quantified in dollars and cents, and that they deserve every chance at life. Its strong partnership with the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and the regional networks forged through the St. Jude-VIVA Forum, has afforded us avenues to bring our impact to a larger group of children with cancer in Asia.

Caring through Education

Our observations, care and assessment
form the basis on which clinical decisions
are made by the rest of the team.

Dr Sally Blair
Member of Organising Committee,
St. Jude-VIVA Forum
VIVA Key Contributor

I am heartened to see how the St Jude-VIVA Forum has grown and evolved over the past 10 years to now involve nurses, patients and their families. All these could not have been possible without the contributions of the speakers, the participation of the delegates and the visionary guidance of the organising committee.

The Forum presents cutting-edge research to inspire our regional delegates on the next steps forward in treating children with cancer. Delegates can learn from each other and collaborate on common projects or research topics through interactive sessions at the Forum.

As a physician-scientist, the Forum has allowed me to learn so much from experts around the world. I am in awe of the work being done in Singapore, internationally and in regional developing countries where care and research for children with cancer still face significant challenges.

Sister Laura Tan
Senior Nurse Educator at the VIVA-University Children's Cancer Centre (VUC^3)
VIVA Key Contributor

Most people still have the perception that the role of a nurse is limited to just caring for patients at their bedside. The challenge of being a nurse goes beyond that.

As a senior nurse educator, I work with each stakeholder in the young cancer patient's journey. In addition to caring for children with cancer, I support the nursing team in education and training. I facilitate and teach a few courses, including a course on paediatric nursing oncology. When a child is diagnosed with cancer, the whole family is affected. As nurses, we are advocates for the family. We work with the care team and always try to balance the child's difficulties in coping and the family's concern. Part of my role also involves training nurses in the necessary skills to support the entire family through the storm of emotional and financial turmoil, especially when young patients had to stop treatment due to financial difficulties.

It is an amazing opportunity to be part of VIVA's paediatric oncology care team. As nurses, we spend the most time at the child's bedside. Our observations, care and assessment form the basis on which clinical decisions are made by the rest of the team. Due to our multidisciplinary approach, we work hand-in-hand with each member of our team to deliver the best care to our young patients at the VIVA-University Children's Cancer Centre.

I am glad to be part of VIVA's mission to help children with cancer and its continued support through various initiatives in educating nurses to provide better care. The VIVA Asia Nursing Symposium is one such initiative. It provides a platform for nurses from Singapore and regional countries such as Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam, to integrate, share and review practices in paediatric oncology.

Helping children with cancer through my various roles for the past ___ years allowed me to grow as a person, a caregiver and an educator. Let us work towards the future of ensuring the best nursing care for children with cancer.

No Effort Too Small

No matter how small our effort may be, we know we can make a big difference together with everyone.

Elaiyarani Subramaniam
VIVA Volunteer

I love meeting people and had been mentoring children and youths as a volunteer. When I heard about VIVA and its mission of saving children with cancer, I thought of putting my experience and strengths to good use as a volunteer.

As a volunteer, I liaise and bring together children, parents, members of the medical team such as the doctors, nurses and pharmacists, as well as representatives from biopharmaceutical companies. Such encounters allowed me to learn and understand from each of their perspective the bigger picture how children with cancer can be helped and better cared for.

It was absolutely heart-breaking to see young children suffering from the torment of cancer and not being able to live a normal, healthy life like their peers. But their stories allowed me to discover so much about their courage and tenacity in the face of illness. It inspired me to take charge of my life too.

Volunteering at VIVA has given me a great sense of satisfaction. I am part of a team that brings smiles and hope to the lives of children with cancer. Seeing how the children are making progress in their cancer treatment always makes my day so much brighter and more meaningful.

Boon Meng
VIVA Volunteer

It was my love of improving lives through medical research that brought me to the doorsteps of VIVA as a volunteer. My undergraduate days were spent in a laboratory conducting research in paediatric acute lymphoblastic leukaemia under Dr Allen Yeoh, who was my professor. When the opportunity to be involved in the St. Jude-VIVA Forum sprang up, this was a natural step to take.

As a science student, I was inspired by VIVA's mission of improving the treatment and care of children with cancer through research excellence. I believe that research provides the foundation for future advancements in paediatric oncology and the St. Jude-VIVA Forum is a crucial step towards such hope for the future. No matter how small my effort may be, I know I can make a big difference together with everyone at VIVA.

Melissa
VIVA Volunteer

Seeing how everyone at VIVA is working passionately to save the lives of children with cancer motivated me to become a volunteer. I wanted to do my bit to help the young children, most of whom are around my age or even younger.

At such a young tender age, they should be playing outdoors with friends, going to school and on excursions with classmates, or simply enjoying life with their family. But they are so sick from the side effects of treatment.

I am glad to be able of at least some help to these children through VIVA. What little time I am able to devote towards the children's welfare is nothing compared to the sacrifices faced by them and their families.

The Fight of My Life

I was not sure how death would be like.
Would it be painful? Is it like closing your eyes
to sleep and never waking up?

Caleb Sim
Young Cancer Survivor

I could vaguely remember that I was only 13 years old when the doctor diagnosed me with Burkitt's Lymphoma. He said that it is a type of cancer that affects the body's lymphatic system. Since the lymphatic system is the body's transport system for infection-fighting white blood cells, the cancer was destroying my immune system.

By then, my cancer had already advanced to Stage 4, where it had spread to other parts of my body. The cure rate was supposed to be like around 50% to 60% and my risk of dying was very high. To me, I was not sure how death would be like. Would it be painful? Is it like closing your eyes to sleep and never waking up?

My parents did not lose hope. They brought me to the VIVA University Children's Cancer Centre (VUC3) where I immediately began treatment as a subsided patient. I stayed at the inpatient ward for four months on-and-off and underwent many sessions of chemotherapy. I guess that my body must be responding well to the treatment, since I subsequently went back as an outpatient for my follow-up checks and treatments.

I have fond memories of VUC3, including the friends I made there. No doubt the treatment was very painful and unpleasant. But with encouragement from my family and the doctors, nurses and staff at VUC3, I was able to keep a very positive attitude and pull through the awful side effects of the treatment. Under the conscientious care of Dr Allen Yeoh and the nurses, I received a new combination of antibody therapy on top of the standard chemotherapy treatment, which went on to improve my chances of cure.

During my recovery process, I attended PALS school at the VIVA-CCF Hub for 4 months. Back then, my body's immunity was very low and I could be easily infected by common germs and bacteria due to both my cancer and the treatment. Attending school outside was out of the question. PALS was an awesome place where I regained focus on my studies, played many fun games and made new friends with other children with cancer.

In October 2014, my battle with cancer came to an end after 16 months of pain and tears, I am finally cured. My dream came true. Today, I am a 16-year-old regular boy attending Fairfield Methodist Secondary School. I enjoy playing video games and reading comic books after school each day.