

Adieu to 24 Years of Crawling

By Tan Kim Hion Translated by Wong Mun Heng

A thank-you card plus a “Thank you, Dr Chua” summed up the profound gratitude that lay deep in the heart of Ang Chee Mun. With his harmonica, Dr Chua played the song, “Give Love”, and won thunderous applause from the audience. About a thousand people witnessed how Chee Mun moved from his wheelchair and stood on his own feet, and many were moved to tears when the two hugged each other.



[Photograph by Yong Mun Fei]

On March 17, 2017, Ang Chee Mun was wheeled to KL Tzu-Chi Jing Si Hall to meet the participants of the 2017 TIMA Conference. At that moment, he only had one wish, and that is, to be able to stand up and walk like a normal person one day.

To most people, standing up and walking is a natural thing; and just like drinking and eating, it is effortless. However, to 24-year-old Chee Mun, standing and walking were impossible due to his deformities. He thought he would not be able to stand and walk in his life.

Born with deformities in his lower limbs, Chee Mun had never experienced walking and he could only move around by crawling.

Going to school or outing, Chee Mun would rely on a wheelchair; and at home,

he had to crawl on all fours to move around. Crawling around had become a norm and he is not embarrassed or considered it difficult. But then, he still had a wish: To be able to stand up and walk like a normal person. That must be great!

One day, volunteer Kua Lian Huat brought him some good news. Dr Eddie Chan of TIMA saw the “Diary of My Crawling Days”, a documentary video on Chee Mun’s life struggle, and it occurred to him that Chee Mun’s deformities could be corrected. On September 25, 2016, Dr Chan invited a physiotherapist to assess Chee Mun’s muscle tones and the outcome was that Chee Mun’s muscles were strong and normal.

“The first thing that strikes me after viewing your video is to help you to stand

up and walk, Chee Mun.” Dr Chan’s affirmative statement gave Chee Mun a ray of hope.

Dr Chan then spoke to Dr Chua Yeok Pin, a Foot & Ankle Orthopaedic in Sunway Medical Centre, who is also a TIMA member, about Chee Mun’s case. On October 6, 2016, volunteers brought Chee Mun to see Dr Chua and after detailed examination, the latter recommended that with corrective surgery and post-operative physiotherapy, Chee Mun could stand up and walk again.

Although Dr Chua mentioned that the treatment may come with a lot of pain, Chee Mun would not want to miss this golden opportunity. He was determined to endure and face the challenges ahead, saying, “So long as I can stand up and walk, no matter how painful it is, I will bear with it.”

December 2, 2016, is the day Chee Mun would never forget in his life. This is the day of his corrective surgery.

As shown in the video clip (at the Conference), after the surgery, both Chee Mun’s legs were supported by the external fixation frames. The audience was shocked by the sight of numerous screws attached on Chee Mun. Every night, Chee Mun’s aunt would adjust the screws to return the angle of the ankle to the desired positions. The tremendous pain Chee Mun experienced was clearly written on his face and only he would know how painful it was.

Being a cheerful and positive person, Chee Mun would not cry when faced

with any challenges. But the corrective treatment had him crying, each time his wounds had to be cleaned and when the screws on the fixation frames had to be adjusted by his aunt.

Dr Chua had also cautioned Chee Mun that in order to prevent infection, he must take good care of the wound. “The treatment would fail if infection sets in; and worse still if it requires amputation.” This is what Chee Mun was most concerned about.

Due to the pain, Chee Mun had sleepless nights. However, he was very appreciative of Dr Chua’s efforts in viewing with care the wound dressing process recorded on the phone by his aunt on a daily basis. This is to detect any possible wound infection and for Dr Chua’s advice regarding the adjustment of screws on the external frames.

At the follow-up visits, Dr Chua noticed that Chee Mun had struggled to bear the pain and advised him, “Well, no one could help you but yourself.”

Chee Mun knew that giving up was never an option. In January 2017, the fixation frames were removed and replaced with a cast to stabilize the corrected position of his ankles. The worst was finally over. Chee Mun could see that his feet had straightened and could touch the floor. This joy gave him the confidence that the day of him standing up and walking was getting closer. He vowed that the moment he could walk out, he would go to a Tzu Chi recycling centre and use both his hands and legs in contributing

towards environmental protection. At the same time, he could repay the love and support others have given him.

Pillar of Strength from Family and Team

Dr Chua, who has done 20 similar cases with success said, “I could not bear to see a young man crawling on the floor. I must help him. As a doctor, I wish to contribute whatever little I could to help him to stand up, to walk and get a job to support himself; and hopefully, he can help others in the future too. ”

He was confident of Chee Mun’s case, as his muscle tones were good, and this is a crucial factor in determining whether he could walk or not, coupled with the post-operative physiotherapy programme.

At that time, Dr Chua estimated the total cost for the whole medical treatment would be around RM50,000. When he knew that Chee Mun would not be able to cope with it financially, he decided to seek gratis treatment for him.

“With great humility, I asked the hospital to exempt him from hospitalization charges, including my own surgical fees. Thankfully, the hospital approved without a fuss. Likewise, the anaesthetist, when told of Chee Mun’s background, also readily agreed to waive his fee.”

Despite his hectic schedules, Dr Chua still found time to share Chee Mun’s case with others, in an attempt to get him the gratis treatment. Some of his friends

disagreed with his actions. But Dr Chua firmly believes that compassion does exist in everyone’s heart. It is just a matter of whether opportunity is given or not to do kind deeds.

With regard to Chee Mun’s treatment, Dr Chua humbly said that his contribution was rather minor. He felt that Chee Mun’s family members have been his driving and motivating force. He knew Chee Mun needs to endure extreme pain. Without the mindful care and support from his family, he would not be able to get through the treatment successfully.

Another driving force for Chee Mun is the volunteers who had accompanied him in and out of hospital for follow-up visits and also visiting him at home. TIMA members’ visits and sharing of tips on some simple exercises, as well as, words of encouragement from volunteers, such as, “Chee Mun, you must persevere and never give up,” have boosted Chee Mun’s courage.

Dr Chua was grateful for the great efforts of Chee Mun’s family members, TIMA members and Tzu Chi volunteers in making the impossible possible. Whenever he saw Chee Mun’s previously deformed legs stepping flat onto the ground, he felt a great sense of relief and joy. When dealing with Chee Mun, he likes to crack some jokes to cheer him up. For instance, when inviting him to share at the TIMA Conference, he said to Chee Mun, “If you are sharing, then I will share. If you don’t, then I won’t!”

In fact, to give a pleasant surprise

to Chee Mun, he promised to play a harmonica musical piece for Chee Mun during the latter's sharing at the Conference. Dr Chua's unconditional love for Chee Mun touched him dearly. His sincere care has helped Chee Mun to cope with the pain and suffering.

Road to Recovery Is Long

Lian Huat, who has been accompanying Chee Mun, was overwhelmed when he saw the latter trying his best to stand up and give Dr Chua a hug when presenting a thank-you card to the doctor.

It has been a long nine years since Lian Huat first started giving Chee Mun

care and support. They have treated each other like father and son. Lian Huat said, "Chee Mun is a brave and strong boy, and he is willing to learn. No matter how tough life has been, he would never complain and instead, he would work harder to learn more. Over the years, I have always seen him smiling radiantly. I know his wish is to be able to walk and get a job, so that he can be independent and take care of his grandmother, who is getting old."

Over the years, a total of 30 volunteers have been taking turns to send Chee Mun to see a doctor, for outings or to visit him at home. This is especially so during the treatment period, where they would carry Chee Mun up and down the car, send him for follow-up consultations



With the external fixation frames removed and replaced with a cast to stabilize the corrected position of his ankles, Ang Chee Mun is a step closer to his dream of standing up. [Photograph by Yong Mun Fei]

Ang Chee Mun tried his best to stand up to offer Dr Chua Yeok Pin a thank-you card and a hug. [Photograph by Chan Tuck Meng]



and arrange custom-made shoes for him. So long as the need is there, everyone would take turns to keep him company. Chee Mun has never been left alone.

“Doctor said the road to full recovery for Chee Mun is still a long way. After this corrective surgery and the removal of external fixation frames, we need to bring him to have special shoes custom-made for him. Currently, he has to undergo physiotherapy regularly.”

Lian Huat is aware that the next one year would be a big challenge for Chee Mun. For one who has never walked in his life, he is like a child learning to stand, make his first stride and then walk. Fortunately, Chee Mun is mentally prepared to turn his dreams into reality. Every day, he follows the physiotherapist’s instructions to learn to stand up and he is diligent in doing physiotherapy exercises too. The earnest wish of Lian

Huat and other volunteers who have been accompanying Chee Mun on this road to recovery is to see him walking properly one day.

As Dr Chua played the song, “Give Love” with his harmonica on stage, he was looking towards Chee Mun’s direction as if dedicating his best wishes and blessing to the latter, while at the same time, making his call to all medical personnel present: “Hopefully everyone, while treating the patients, do not forget to spread love to the corners of the world and because of your love, the lives of many more people are changed for the better.”

This love beyond medical treatment has opened up a new horizon where healthcare professionals could feel the pain and suffering of a patient with empathy. That is the true essence of “curing people, treating illnesses and healing minds”!

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