

Sharing from a single parent

I work in the healthcare sector. On 12 May 2003, I was shocked to hear that the doctors, nurses and some patients in the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) where I was working were down with a fever. They were suspected of SARS and were admitted to Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

All my colleagues and I were called to attend an urgent meeting. We were then informed that we would be quarantined for 10 days. At that time, I was shocked, confused and worried as my children were having their exams the next day. I also had no idea how I should go about explaining to their paternal auntie, who is their caregiver. On that particular evening, we were allowed to go home and pack our things. I reached home and broke the news to my sister-in-law. Luckily, she was quite supportive in agreeing to look after my children while I was away.

The next day, I resumed my work at IMH. All staff were briefed that the Ministry of Health had arranged breakfast and lunch for us. We would serve our quarantine order in a hotel. Transport was arranged to send us to the hotel. We were not allowed to go home. After work, there would be transport to send us to the hotel and we were told to remain in the hotel.

Due to the shortage of staff, I was assigned to help out in other areas that were short of manpower. Taking temperature three times a day, washing our hands and putting on our masks was part and parcel of our life.

In the beginning, it was scary. I did not know what would happen to me. This was especially so when I saw my colleagues, one after another, having fever and were warded at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital for observation. I began to doubt if all the precautions I took were enough or helpful at all. I began to lose confidence in myself.

Another thing that was constantly on my mind was the financial impact it would have on my family.

Fears and worries continued to roam in our hearts while we were under quarantine, until 17 May 2003, the unforgettable Sunday. The good news was that the illness was not related to SARS. Everyone was very happy and relieved. The most important thing that came to my mind was going back home to my children.

However, things did not resume back to normal so quickly. Some of my friends knowing that I was working in IMH, started to avoid me. I felt hurt and frustrated. But the support from my church friends helped to keep me going.

After this episode, I realized that the support that we can give each other in times of crisis is very important. If not for the support from my sister-in-law to take care of my children, I might not have been able to serve my quarantine order in peace. If not for the support that we gave each other when we were serving our quarantine order, we would have been broken down by our fears, worries and concerns. We would not have been able to continue performing our duties to the

existing patients in IMH. This is one life experience that jostles me to think ahead. It is a frightful yet meaningful experience.

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