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Media Release

VOLUNTEERS GO THE EXTRA MILE IN SUPPORTING SENIORS

The unwavering 'gotong-royong' spirit shines in the South East district despite COVID-19.

Singapore, 19 February 2022 – “Where is the young man? Mr Gan Kim Swee will often ask his family, especially during the COVID-19 period.

Mr Gan, who is 78 years old, lives with his wife and helper. He has been a patient at Changi General Hospital (CGH) since 2014 due to multiple chronic diseases.

Upon discharge from CGH in 2019, the **Neighbours For Active Living programme's** (Neighbours, in short) Community Care Team continued to follow up with frequent home visits to Mr Gan, ensuring that his social and health needs were addressed while providing care from hospital to home. With **Friend-A-Senior @ South East** in place where volunteers are matched with the seniors from the South East district, the Community Care Team felt that Mr Gan would benefit from befriender support as he was mostly alone at home in the day and was often sad and frustrated with his multiple medical conditions. They had him matched with Dr Kyaw, whom Mr Gan fondly addresses as ‘The Young Man’.

The friendship between Mr Gan and Dr Kyaw started in 2018 through regular home visits. As Dr Kyaw's workplace is in close proximity to Mr Gan's residence, he usually visits Mr Gan after work. Even as COVID-19 disruptions hit, Dr Kyaw continued with bi-weekly phone calls to Mr Gan.

During their interactions at house visits, Dr Kyaw helped to check that Mr Gan was taking his medications regularly and reminds Mr Gan to go for his medical appointments. He also provides a listening ear to Mr Gan on his medical conditions, which greatly alleviates Mr Gan's initial frustrations on his health. Over the years, Mr Gan and Dr Kyaw have forged a strong relationship. Mr Gan looks forward to Dr Kyaw's visits and calls as he enjoys the companionship and often shares with Dr Kyaw about his grandchildren. As a result, his wife and helper have noticed that Mr Gan has become more cheerful, and his medical condition has improved.

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Acting as the eyes and ears for the Neighbours team, Dr Kyaw helps to monitor Mr Gan's health status and catch red flags that allow the Community Care Team to intervene in a timely manner. For example, he alerts the Team to assist and follow up when he notices Mr Gan's medications running out.

Apart from providing social assistance by befriending and building rapport with Mr Gan, being a befriender gave Dr Kyaw a better understanding on the daily struggles seniors may face, thus providing him with deeper insights on how he can advise patients who are discharged from hospital.

The Neighbours Community Care Team works hand-in-hand with these volunteer befrienders trained via Friend-A-Senior @ South East, to exemplify the unwavering '*gotong royong*' micro- community spirit in support of seniors in the community. Introduced in 2013, Neighbours is a unique and holistic model of care that looks into the health and social needs of vulnerable seniors in the South East district (*Refer to Annex A for more information*) by journeying with them. The programme has attracted 800 volunteers of various professions and ages from 11 to 83 years old, from community partners such as schools, grassroots to Social Service Organisations. To date, Neighbours has supported more than 12,000 seniors.

Mr Fahmi Aliman, Mayor of South East district, said, "Neighbours is a meaningful collaboration between South East CDC and Changi General Hospital. Our volunteers come from all walks of lives, they are students, working adults or even retirees living amongst us. To date, we have worked with over 800 volunteers and supported more than 12,000 seniors. I stay heartened whenever I hear them sharing how fulfilling their experiences have been, and how much the seniors enjoy and look forward to spending time with helping fellow seniors in need. I hope our volunteers continue to find this befriending journey enriching and meaningful."

Dr Eugene Shum, Chief Community Development Officer, CGH said, "We are very grateful to our volunteers and community organisations on partnering with CGH to provide strong community support over the last nine years in helping residents stay well and engaged. We are very grateful to South East CDC for their unstinting support and robust collaboration. This innovative health-social care approach leverages the strength of the micro-community, allowing us to journey long-term and making a large difference to the community we serve."

In recognition of the volunteers' contribution to the community, the Neighbours Volunteer Appreciation Day was held this morning to celebrate their longstanding dedication and acts of selflessness. About 100 volunteers took part in the virtual celebration graced by Guest-of-Honour, Mr Tan Chuan Jin, Speaker of Parliament and Adviser to Marine Parade GRC GRO.

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About South East Community Development Council

South East CDC was set up on 24 November 2001. It oversees the Marine Parade Group Representative Constituency (GRC), East Coast GRC, (SMC), Mountbatten SMC and, and serves a population of about half a million residents. At the helm of South East CDC is Mayor Fahmi, who steers efforts in achieving the three strategic thrusts that guide the work of the CDCs. Termed the “ABCs of Community Bonding” — Assisting the Needy, Bonding the People and Connecting the Community — South East CDC initiates and manages programmes in collaboration with both community and corporate partners along these three strategic thrusts, so as to nurture a vibrant and self-reliant community.

More information on South East CDC at www.cdc.org.sg/southeast or be our Facebook fan at www.facebook.com/secdc

About Changi General Hospital

Changi General Hospital (CGH) is an academic medical institution caring for more than 1 million people in Singapore. A tertiary referral centre with over 1,000 beds, CGH is committed to medical research and education, clinical innovation and care for patients through a comprehensive range of medical specialties and services. Helmed by a multi-disciplinary, dedicated team of healthcare professionals, CGH consistently delivers positive health outcomes for patients. For more information, visit www.cgh.com.sg

About Neighbours for Active Living (Neighbours)

The Neighbours for Active Living programme (Neighbours in short) was pioneered by Changi General Hospital (CGH) in partnership with South East CDC in July 2013. It is a unique and holistic model of care that supports residents with high medical and social needs who are living in the South East district. Piloted in Bedok and Siglap, the programme aims to reduce hospital readmissions for seniors with high care needs and ensure they receive appropriate care in the community following their discharge from hospital. The programme has since fully expanded its coverage in the eastern region of Singapore.

The CGH Neighbours Community Care Team consists of 50 full-time professional staff. Staff are embedded in the community to foster closer relationships with community partners. It also helps to be closer to the seniors on the ground for the purpose of providing continual support to them. The Community Care Team visits residents at home to assess their safety, psychosocial needs, facilitate their medical appointments, improve medication adherence and look out for red flags.

South East CDC and CGH co-created the Friend-A-Senior @ South East (FAS) programme, which trains and sustains a pool of volunteers as befrienders in support of Neighbours. Communication, observation and questioning skills are imparted to befrienders through experiential workshops and role-playing, so that they can effectively engage the seniors. The continual engagement of Neighbours Befrienders is integral to the success of Neighbours. FAS aims to support the Neighbours programme in reaching out to vulnerable seniors living in the South East district who are in need of care and attention to live a meaningful life in the community.