

This Four-Time Cancer Survivor Helps Other People With Similar Battles

Even though her own fight with cancer has been long and difficult, she dedicates some of her time to helping others in the same shoes



Zoe Yap was in the third trimester of her **pregnancy** when she started experiencing discomfort whenever she emptied her bowels. She was told that it was part and parcel of being an expectant mother, but when she continued to feel a dull pain even after giving birth, she consulted a doctor. She was then diagnosed with stage 3 rectal cancer.

That was seven years ago, and thus far, she has suffered several relapses. But the 40-year-old not only continues to **stay positive**, but also helps other people battling chronic illnesses via various means. She opens up about her struggles with her condition, and what keeps her going despite having a survival rate of 20 per cent.

Coming To Terms With It

Understandably, Zoe was devastated when she received her diagnosis.

“One moment, I was over the moon becoming a **first-time mom** after trying for a child for five years. The next moment, I was told that I only had a 60- to 70-per cent survival rate. My first thought was how much time I’d have left with my newborn son,” she says.

“I was shocked. For over 20 years, I led a healthy lifestyle—I was a **vegetarian**, exercised regularly and even ran marathons. It took me almost two years to accept the fact that I have cancer. It was one of the lowest points of my life.”



Not that coming to terms with her condition made her struggle with the side effects and complications any easier: she suffered from severe numbness in all four limbs, had internal bleeding and anal fissures, and at one point also had to use a stoma (a surgically-created opening of the intestine brought onto the skin for the purpose of emptying stools) for almost a year.

And because she was constantly fatigued, she was unable to spend much time with her son.

“It broke my heart when he was distant from me during the first two years of my treatments because I was regularly in and out of the hospital.”

Finding A New Calling

Since then, Zoe has had three relapses and has had a quarter of her lungs removed in the process. Her cancer is currently in remission, but because her survival rate is now at 20 per cent, she considers herself lucky to be alive.

It is her wish to live the remainder of her life more purposefully. As such, she has dedicated herself to helping those in her shoes navigate through the challenges that come with their conditions, so apart from being a patient ambassador at the Singapore General Hospital, she’s also a volunteer with the Singapore Cancer Society.

“I hope to encourage caregivers and patients. I want them to know how important it is to **never give up** even when all hope seems to be lost. There is always so much to hang onto if you learn to look at things from a different perspective. Happiness is a choice. Choose happiness,” she muses.

And in being a senior financial consultant with Great Eastern, she aims to help people realise the importance of **financial planning**—particularly after losing a close friend to cancer.

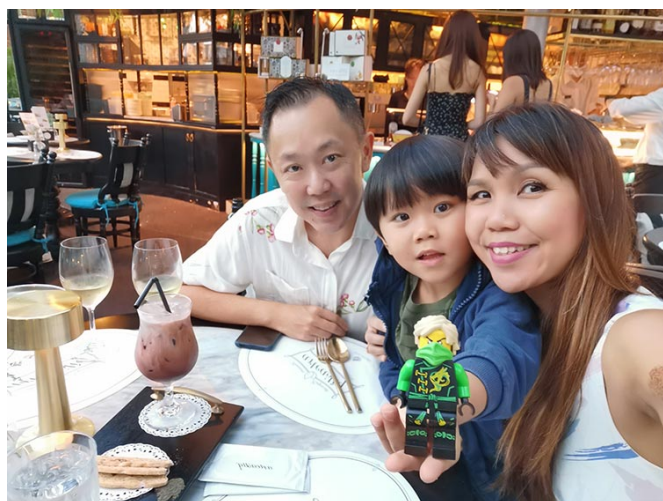
“A close friend was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer in 2019. She had to manage the medical bills on her own as she was hardly covered by insurance. She tried her best to manage the medical costs but she was not able to focus fully on her recovery as she had to make ends meet. In fact, she continued working despite her illness.”

“I did not have to work as my hospitalisation and medical bills were fully covered by my **insurance plans**. I also received a lump sum payout for my living expenses during the recuperation period as I was unable to work during that time.”

She lets on that had she not been insured, she'd have had to fork out at least \$800,000 for her medical bills to date.

Seeing Things Through

Zoe hasn't been able to have more children since she had her son. During her first diagnosis, doctors had warned her that the radiotherapy treatments would result in premature menopause.



“It was heartbreaking for me. I have always wanted to have a big family as I have many siblings,” she says. She adds that, looking back, she should have gone for medical checkups more regularly to detect any critical illnesses early.

But right now, she just wants to do the best she can in helping others.

“With my limited time, I am more motivated than ever to make a positive impact on others and give back to society through my volunteer work and position as a financial representative. When we are blessed, we should also be that person to bless others in return.”

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