In Good Company
The story of a dedicated caregiver
Editor's Note

We are living in the computer age, the information era. Anyone of us can easily access information with the help of our trusted computer and our best friend, the internet. With the rise of search engines such as Yahoo and Google, encyclopedias are no longer needed in our everyday lives.

Personally, I doubt I can go a day without the internet. From checking my emails, knowing how my friends are doing through Facebook, to searching for information around the world and shopping online, the wonderful World Wide Web has become the centre of my life. Working in the Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC) sector, I use it daily to update myself on the latest news about the sector, or learn what our counterparts in other countries have done.

Though the internet has made the world smaller, there is too much information widely available. I sometimes get overwhelmed searching through multiple sources of information to get what I need. I am sure you also face this problem when trying to obtain information to better understand the care needs for yourself or your loved one, and it can be frustrating to get lost and not know where to go.

The Singapore Silver Pages, launched recently by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), is designed to make it easy for you to locate the right information at your convenience. In this issue of NEXTSTEP, we show you what Singapore Silver Pages can do for you and how you can use this portal to locate information that can empower you to make well-informed decisions about your ILTC. From making early assessment regarding your care needs to caregivers’ resources and services locator, these information and resources are presented from a layman’s point of view (read more on pg 3). And of course, we welcome your feedback on how we can improve the portal to meet your needs! We hope that everyone will think of Singapore Silver Pages whenever they need information on ILTC.

NEXTSTEP also had the honour of meeting 81-year-old Mr Yip Tuck Chong, whose level of commitment and dedication as a caregiver to his 84-year-old friend earned him the Model Caregiver Award in 2007 (pg 9). We also caught up with three passionate Healthcare Assistants who work tirelessly to provide care for their patients (pg 11). Their stories are truly an inspiration to me and I am sure you will be moved by their strength and character.

This issue provides you with a few Do-It-Yourself ideas to help your loved one handle some of the everyday simple tasks (pg 14), without burning a hole in your wallet! They are so easy that you can do it at the convenience of your home.

Much like Singapore Silver Pages, this issue has something for everyone. We hope this publication becomes an encyclopedia for you to find useful information and help you navigate the healthcare system with ease and confidence.

ANDY SEET
Chief Editor
The Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) recently launched Singapore Silver Pages, a one-stop online gateway for the public to access information and resources on Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC). The first of its kind in Singapore and in Asia, we take you through its features to show how you can use it to navigate the healthcare system with ease and confidence.

The GPS of Intermediate and Long-Term Care

The new media is changing the way we live and work. With the touch of the mouse, we can instantly access information anywhere, anytime. The availability of such information at our fingertips is good news to those who need to take care of a loved one and require information and resources to help them make decisions about their care needs.

While information and resources on ILTC are widely available, an individual or a caregiver is often overwhelmed with having to search through multiple sources of information to better understand their ILTC needs. For instance, when purchasing a wheelchair or finding the various care options available, one has to sieve through websites of different service providers to obtain the information they need to come to an informed decision.

Leveraging on the useful and comprehensive information readily available, AIC has taken the first step to organise such information and resources from a person-centric perspective. With Singapore Silver Pages, the public can now access reliable information at their own convenience. The Singapore Silver Pages aims to become the comprehensive and robust guide to ILTC.

The portal is developed in partnership with agencies such as Health Promotion Board (HPB), Singapore Health Services (SingHealth), National Healthcare Group (NHG) and AWWA Centre for Caregivers who have helped identify, re-organise and present credible information and resources relevant to those requiring ILTC and their caregivers.

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What is in the Website?

Singapore Silver Pages has several key features to empower patients and their caregivers with information on ILTC:

1. A comprehensive database consisting of 21 chronic diseases and conditions

James Chiang, 31, is a caregiver to an elderly relative who is suffering from impaired vision and requires special care. Being a new caregiver, James is often unsure on where he can obtain more information about his relative’s condition. With Singapore Silver Pages, information on chronic diseases and conditions such as “Visual Impairment” is available to help him understand more about the condition.

In this section, James will be able to gain in-depth knowledge such as the causes and symptoms of visual impairment, its diagnosis, types of treatments and preventions. James is also able to access links to other sources as well as a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) relating to the condition.

Currently, there are a total of 21 major chronic diseases and conditions found in Singapore Silver Pages; one of which is visual impairment. More chronic diseases and conditions will be added to make the listing more comprehensive.

2. An extensive directory of healthcare service providers

Susan Lim, 64, was devastated when her husband was diagnosed with stroke and diabetes. As the sole caregiver, she is concerned about her husband being left unattended when she leaves home for work and does not know where to search for a suitable service provider.

The directory of healthcare service providers on Singapore Silver Pages, which provides a listing of the various acute hospitals, community hospitals, nursing homes, day rehabilitation centres and home care providers, can help Susan solve her problem. She would be able to easily search for service providers and access information such as their contact details, visiting and operating hours, admission criteria, as well as the type of meals, services, facilities and programmes available.

3. Listing of healthcare products

The directory of healthcare products in Singapore Silver Pages boasts a wide array of healthcare products such as wheelchairs and toilet aids by various vendors to allow users to locate such information easily.

Felicity Soh, 55, had trouble searching for a lightweight wheelchair when her daughter suffered from a fall. She had to go through multiple search platforms before finding a suitable wheelchair for her daughter. With Singapore Silver Pages, all Felicity needs to refer to the “Healthcare Products” section and search for the lightweight wheelchair she is looking for.

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4. Comprehensive information for caregivers

As a caregiver, Ifzan Ibrahim, 45, finds the information under “Caregivers’ Resources” section, particularly useful. This section provides him with guides and tips on caring for his father who suffered a stroke. Through reading about the experiences of other caregivers found in the section, Ifzan learns that he is not alone and is consoled that there are many other caregivers like him around.

In addition to the “Caregivers’ Resources” section, users are able to consult AIC’s Client Relations Associates on their ILTC needs, via a live chat on Mondays to Fridays from 9am to 5pm.

If you need more information, visit www.aic.sg.
Slowly But Surely

Mdm Lim Teh Sin is diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease, a disorder that causes the breakdown of nerve cells in the brain and affects a person’s ability to think, talk and move. Instead of staying at a nursing home, Mdm Lim has opted to receive care within the community through the Temasek Cares – Singapore Programme for Integrated Care for the Elderly (TC-SPICE). NEXTSTEP follows her for a day to find out how she is coping at Salvation Army Bedok Multi-Service Centre.

7:30 AM
It’s Monday and I’ve just arrived at Salvation Army Bedok Multi-Service Centre. The transport provided by the centre sends me there and so my family doesn’t need to bring me to the centre themselves.

8:10 AM
A simple breakfast of bread and butter plus a cup of Milo starts off my day. The meals provided at the centre ensure that we get the nutrition and energy we need for the day.

8:30 AM
After my breakfast, it’s time for my medication. My case manager sweet-talks me into taking the medicine, knowing I dislike the taste of it.

2:00 PM
After lunch, we do a variety of fun group activities. Healthcare aides will get us to participate and see that we have a good time. Today we get to play with the big blue ball; just like the good old childhood days. It’s so fun!

5:00 PM
It has been an enjoyable day. I’m a little tired after all the activities but happy that I get to see my family when I return home. I’m looking forward to going back to the centre tomorrow!

The elderly can now look forward to an alternative care solution to nursing homes under the Temasek Cares – Singapore Programme for Integrated Care for the Elderly (TC-SPICE), a care delivery model developed by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and funded by Temasek Holdings.

Adapted and localised from the Programme for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) project in the United States, TC-SPICE caters to frail elderly who are classified as Category 3 under the Resident Assessment Form (RAF) and as such, are eligible for nursing home care. Because of functional impairments and multiple co-morbidities, such elderly will require long-term intensive care, including assistance in activities of daily living such as feeding, toileting and personal grooming, and may be wheelchair-bound.

By making significant enhancements to the existing capabilities of day care centres, frail elderly can receive care within the community during the day and continue to live at home amongst their loved ones. This also provides support for their families, allowing caregivers to continue to work and get respite from caring for the elderly during the day.

TC-SPICE was piloted at Salvation Army Bedok Multi-Service Centre in October 2010. There are plans to roll out to more day rehabilitation centres, so that more frail elderly can age at home and in the communities they are familiar with.

For more information on TC-SPICE, please visit www.aic.sg

7:00 AM
It’s activity time! I get to do activities that help improve my thinking skills and the way I grip things with my hands. Look at the colourful blocks that I get to stack, aren’t they lovely?

8:45 AM
My favourite activity for the day - shower! My brother and sister used to shower me at home previously, but they don’t need to do that now as the centre provides showering services for us.

9:30 AM
I really enjoy coming to the centre everyday as there is always someone around to make sure I am well taken care of. I get to interact with the staff and the others who attend the centre.

4:15 PM
I’m hungry again after the group activities. I enjoy being here because all meals are provided for – even tea time snacks!

10:00 AM
Back then, I used to watch TV at home and laze the whole day away. Here, the therapist makes sure that I do a lot of exercises and physical activities to keep fit.

11:30 AM
It’s time for lunch – my second meal of the day. There’s always someone around to pace my eating so I don’t eat too much and too fast.

1:00 AM
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PATIENT PROFILE
Name: Mdm Lim Teh Sin
Age: 59
Condition: Huntington’s Disease (diagnosed in 2006)

IN YOUR SHOES

IN YOUR SHOES
or many years, Mdm Chew Siew Lee, 84, has been living alone in her one room flat without the company of family members. Her weak legs give her lots of difficulties when walking around her neighbourhood or even in her own home. Simple tasks like buying food from a nearby coffee shop or washing clothes prove challenging for the retired cleaner. However, it all changed when her friend who is a volunteer at the Presbyterian Community Services Singapore (PCS), introduced her to Mr Yip Tuck Chong six years ago.

More than just a friend to Mdm Chew, Mr Yip also plays the role of her caregiver. Aside from preparing meals for her, he is the person she goes to when facing a problem or a health emergency. Mr Yip looks out for Mdm Chew and calls the ambulance when she requires emergency medical assistance.

In one extraordinary incident, he even saved her life. It was in 2007, when a gas explosion occurred in the flat below Mdm Chew’s home, Mr Yip was the first person to go to her rescue, wheeling her to safety while personnel from the Singapore Civil Defence Force evacuated other parts of the HDB block. His vigilance lasts till this day as Mr Yip keeps his mobile phone turned on at all times, in case Mdm Chew requires assistance at any time of the day.

Despite the occasional squabbles, these arguments are not enough to break the bond that has been forged over the years. Mr Yip is determined to take care of his friend for as long as it takes. “I’ve never stopped helping her. We’ve been friends for so long and I really sympathise with her situation,” he said.

For his selfless efforts in caring for Mdm Chew, the Asia Women’s Welfare Association (AWWA) Centre for Caregivers awarded Mr Yip with the Model Caregiver Award in 2007. This award recognises a person’s high level of commitment and dedication to caregiving. Mr Yip believes that while it is great to have been awarded for his contributions, the acknowledgement of his ability in helping others is even more important.

While there are caregivers like Mr Yip who prefer to handle the task of being a caregiver alone, it does not always have to be that way. There are various resources that caregivers can refer to to help them in their caregiving role.

SINGAPORE SILVER PAGES (www.aic.sg)
Developed by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), Singapore Silver Pages is a one-stop online portal offering information and resources on Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC). The portal aims to make it easier for those requiring care and their caregivers to better understand their ILTC needs, so that they are able to navigate the healthcare system with greater ease and make well-informed decisions for better health outcomes.

From assessing your care needs and searching for a service provider to finding a healthcare product that suits your needs and means, you can now easily access credible information and resources at your convenience. Think ILTC. Think Singapore Silver Pages.

AWWA CAREGIVERS’ HANDBOOK
The AWWA Caregivers’ Handbook highlights ways to take care of yourself as a caregiver. An online version is available in English and Chinese. To get a copy, visit www.awwa.org.sg

TOUCH COMMUNITY SERVICES CAREGIVERS’ GUIDE
TOUCH Caregivers’ Support developed their very own Caregivers’ Guide to provide tips on care giving for the elderly and disabled. It also provides information on financial and insurance schemes, as well as eldercare services located in your neighbourhood. To get a copy, visit www.caregivers.org.sg

COMFORT KEEPERS SENIOR CARE RESOURCES (www.comfortkeepers.com.sg)
This website provides useful and practical articles for caregivers, ranging from legal concerns for the elderly to advice on how to communicate effectively with your loved ones whom you are caring for.

CARING HANDS
The iPhone app version of Khoo Teck Puat Hospital’s Guidebook for Handling Someone Safely teaches users ways in which their dependent loved ones can be transferred from one place to the other in the safest way possible. For a limited time only, you can download the app for free from the iTunes Store.
Working as a Healthcare Assistant (HCA) is both a challenging and rewarding career. NEXTSTEP speaks to three HCAs and find out how this meaningful and fulfilling career has given them a new lease of life.

BY CHIN WEI-LIEN & CINDY LEE

The ageing population in Singapore is an urgent problem that needs to be addressed. According to the Singapore Department of Statistics, as of 2008, there are more than 300,000 people aged 65 years and above in Singapore, and the number is projected to increase to about 19 per cent of the country’s population by the year 2030.

At the frontline of this issue are Healthcare Assistants (HCAs), who are vigilantly caring for the elderly and sick requiring Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC). HCAs play a vital role in the healthcare industry by helping patients with many aspects of daily functioning and management of ongoing medical conditions. There are currently more than 2,000 HCAs working in the ILTC sector. NEXTSTEP speaks with Wendy Lam from the Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital, as well as Teng Peck Choo and Nur Syamimi Binte Akram from Peacehaven Nursing Home about the challenges faced as a HCA and what makes it all worthwhile at the end of the day.

WENDY: I was a member of the St John Ambulance Brigade when I was in school. Since then, I developed a keen interest in caring for the elderly and sick, and it continued to be my passion for the past 35 years of my career.

NUR SYAMIMI: After my mother gave birth to my younger sister when I was in primary school, I took care of them on my own. That motivated me to take up the apprenticeship course at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) six years ago, training to become a HCA.

PECK CHOO: When I was hospitalised a few years ago, I saw how meaningful being a HCA can be. They took care of my needs and made my stay at the hospital as comfortable as possible. After 13 years as a child care teacher, I wanted a change of environment and still be able to help people. That is why I made a mid-career change two years ago to become a HCA.

I would say is the lack of manpower and the physical demands of being a HCA. Having said that, I enjoy rising up to the challenges of being one.

Initially, it was very difficult for me to understand the needs of the elderly patients, since they spoke in their own dialects. However, I enjoyed learning various languages along the way, which has helped me in managing their behaviours and adapting to their needs accordingly.

Aside from the fact that we have two to three HCAs and one nurse for every shift to take care of 21 patients, we have to take note of the diet of each and every one of them too. Taking care of these minor details and making them feel better is as satisfying as it is challenging.

Why did you choose to become a HCA in the ILTC sector?

What are some of the challenges you faced during your work?
To many of us, the act of picking up a bath soap or buttoning our shirt is so simple that we hardly think about it. However, it is not the same for those recovering from major illnesses. Using materials that cost less than $20, NEXTSTEP introduces a few simple ideas that you can make or buy to help your recovering loved one cope at home.

**Step 1:** Remove the buttons on the shirt.

**Step 2:** Mark the location of the old buttons with a tailor’s chalk.

**Step 3:** Sew one side of the press studs on the marked locations.

**Step 4:** Sew up the button holes and mark the location of the old button holes.

**Step 5:** Sew the remaining side of the press studs onto these marked locations.

**Easy-On Buttons**

**Problem:** Buttoning up the shirt can be a challenge for your loved one if he/she faces difficulties in moving his/her fingers.

**Solution:** Replace shirt buttons and button holes with press studs to help your recovering loved one dress himself/herself with less effort. These easy-on buttons are much easier to use since they need less fine finger-and-hand control.

**Materials Needed:** Press studs from your neighbourhood seamstress, sewing kit

**DIY Cost:** About $3

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**WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL MANTRA OR WORK PHILOSOPHY?**

**WENDY:** Patience, tolerance and love. I believe that if I care for others now, others will care for me when I grow older. That is why we try our best to see the patients as individuals and attend to their every need.

**NUR SYAMIMI:** I believe if you do good things for people, the good karma will come back to you someday. I hope that by doing this and setting an example for others, my children will also learn the value of caring for others and look after me in the future.

**PECK CHOO:** As we will all get old someday, we should treat others the way we want to be treated. So I do my best for these people, enjoy the work and try not to take life for granted.

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**SO WHAT MAKES IT WORTHWHILE TO CONTINUE WORKING AS A HCA?**

**WENDY:** There was an 85-year-old patient admitted to our nursing home with a nasogastric tube for feeding as she was unable to eat on her own. Over the course of two years, we managed to train the patient to feed herself, which eventually led to her discharge. I find this particularly rewarding as it is not something you get to experience as a HCA at an acute hospital.

**NUR SYAMIMI:** The relationships you build in a home are completely different from those in hospitals. We treat every patient like a family member and we create long-term relationships with them.

**PECK CHOO:** Here, the patients are completely dependent on us. The little ways in which they show their gratitude and their appreciation, even though they don’t always say it, is very rewarding to me.
Panic Call Bell

Problem: For your recovering loved one who is bedbound or have limited movement and speaking abilities, he/she may find it difficult to call out for help in times of need.

Solution: Install panic call bells on the walls in different rooms around the house. You should place it in rooms which your loved one frequents, such as the bathroom or his/her own bedroom. When your loved one needs help, he/she just has to press the bell for immediate help and attention.

Materials Needed: Door bell alarm from your neighbourhood hardware store, batteries

DIY Cost: About $20

Step 1: Take note of where your loved one frequents the most around the house.

Step 2: Measure his/her height and the reach of his/her arms to make sure that he/she can easily reach the panic call bell in times of need.

Step 3: Secure the panic call bell onto the wall of your chosen rooms using adhesives such as double-sided tapes.

Bath Soap Stocking

Problem: Trying to pick up a bar of soap on the floor during a shower can be difficult and dangerous, especially if your loved one has a knee or waist problem.

Solution: Put a bar of soap inside a stocking. Tie the stocking to a towel rack in the bathroom. For your loved one to soap himself/herself, he/she just needs to pull the stocking towards himself/herself.

Materials Needed: Stocking, bar of soap

DIY Cost: About $3

Step 1: Find or buy a pair of stockings and use one of the stockings.

Step 2: Put a bar of soap into the stocking.

Step 3: Tie one end of the stocking to a towel rack in the bathroom.

Medication Management Chart

Problem: Trying to remember which, when and how much medicine to take can be confusing for your loved one. In the end, he/she will either forget or refuse to take his/her medicine altogether just to avoid the hassle.

Solution: Make a medication management chart to organise your loved one’s medicine. Label each slot by day and time, so your loved one will know which, when and how much medicine to administer in one glance.

Materials Needed: Photo album from your neighbourhood photography store, paper, marker, masking tape, vanguard sheet

DIY Cost: About $6

Step 1: Cut out 31 pockets from the photo album.

Step 2: Paste the pockets onto a vanguard sheet using masking tape to look like this (see image on right).

Step 3: Take a large piece of paper and cut it into 10 equal portions. Write on each piece of paper the times of the day (AM, PM, NIGHT) and the days of the week (MON – SUN).

Step 4: Slot AM, PM, NIGHT labels into the top row pockets. Slot MON – SUN labels into the column pockets on the left (see image on right).

Step 5: Put the correct medicine into each pocket according to prescription.

Walking Stick Holder

Problem: If your loved one uses a walking stick, he/she faces a common problem of not knowing where to place the stick when he/she is seated.

Solution: Use cable ties to secure an empty toilet roll to the leg of a chair. Your loved one can now place his/her walking stick easily without it slipping away from his/her chair.

Materials Needed: Empty toilet roll, cable ties

DIY Cost: Less than $1

Step 1: Buy a bag of cable ties. Two strips of cable ties will be needed, but use more if your loved one prefers it to be more secure.

Step 2: Recycle a used toilet roll.

Step 3: Secure the old toilet roll to the back of the chair or the legs of a table with the cable ties. Make sure that the opening of the toilet roll is facing upwards.

The DIY solutions are available from the Book of Solutions by The ABLE Studio. For more DIY solutions, visit Singapore Silver Pages at www.abil.sg
A nursing home is a solution for patients who require long-term care. Respite care services are usually recommended for patients who require short-term care and whose caregivers need a short break from their care giving duties. Respite care services are available in private and some Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) nursing homes. You may call the nursing home directly to enquire about the admission criteria and charges. However, users of this service are expected to pay non-subsidised rates. A referral can be made by the attending doctor from a hospital or specialist clinic.

Community hospitals also provide respite care services. Likewise, a referral by a doctor from a hospital or specialist clinic is required.

Private nursing homes that provide respite care service includes Econ Medicare Centre, St Luke’s Hospital and Orange Valley Nursing Home.

For more information about respite care or to search for a service provider of respite care, you may visit Singapore Silver Pages at www.aic.sg.

Being a caregiver is a heavy responsibility and many caregivers, like your brother-in-law, are placed under intense pressure to make sure their loved ones receive the best care. While providing full attention to their loved ones, they tend to forget to care for their own well-being, resulting in pent-up negativity.

Allocating some personal time is a great way to manage the stress your brother-in-law is feeling. While your sister is sleeping, he can take some time off to engage in activities he enjoys. Your brother-in-law should not be shy to ask for help from family members. By doing that, it will lighten his load and create a positive environment for your brother-in-law. If your brother-in-law is in his senior years and has trouble handling daily chores while being a caregiver, a suggestion would be to get ‘Home Help’ services. If needed, they will provide meals, perform household chores and take care of personal needs. A good way to find ‘Home Help’ services would be through our Eldercare Service Locator found on our website, www.aic.sg.
For more information visit www.aic.sg