

Help for cancer patients with new rehab centre

Facility coming up in Jem mall to offer counselling, support groups

By LINETTE LAI

EVEN after cancer treatment succeeds, many patients find they need help getting back on their feet.

This is where the Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) hopes to step in, with its new rehabilitation centre opening in September.

Announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday, the centre will occupy around 7,000 sq ft of space in Jurong's Jem mall.

"We all belong to this family - I'm a cancer survivor too," said Mr Lee, who was speaking at the society's 50th anniversary celebrations at Star Vista mall in Buona Vista. "We're all here, we live on, we fight on together."

Mr Lee was diagnosed with lymphoma in 1992 and underwent chemotherapy. His cancer is in remission.

The new centre will be located opposite the upcoming Ng Teng Fong General and Jurong Community hospitals.

It will help to rehabilitate can-



Members of the Samba Masala performing at the Singapore Cancer Society's 50th anniversary celebrations yesterday at Star Vista mall. The SCS' new rehabilitation centre is slated to open in September this year.

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DESMOND WEE

cer survivors both physically and emotionally, running services like counselling, support groups and return-to-work programmes.

The latter would have been a great help to Madam Keller Kong, who was diagnosed with cancer in 2005 and retrenched.

The 50-year-old eventually found another post as an accounts executive, but said that other patients might not be so lucky.

"If you go for an interview, you need to highlight that you are a cancer survivor," she said. "Then they might reconsider."

In Singapore, 33 people are diagnosed with cancer every day. A sur-

vey of around 200 cancer patients - carried out by SCS and the National University Hospital - found that nine in 10 reported some kind of decline in their physical abilities. Nearly half said they experienced pain and weakness, while others also felt persistent fatigue and depression.

But there is currently no dedicated service to rehabilitate such people, said Dr Ng Yee Siè, who is on the task force set up by the SCS to study needs here.

While outpatient rehabilitation centres exist, they do not specialise in cancer care, he said.

"They have very generic pro-

grammes, focusing on things like stroke or hip fractures," added Dr Ng, who is head of the Singapore General Hospital's rehabilitation medicine department.

A fee will be levied to make sure people stay committed to the new centre's programmes, which last at least eight weeks.

But needy patients will not be left out. Chief operating officer David Fong said that SCS will provide financial assistance for those in need.

"In no way will we turn away anyone just because they can't afford to pay," he said.

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