

Stroke patient back on her feet

By CHRISTINA KOH

HOUSEWIFE Ann Yeoh Ean Leng had been conducting her usual line dancing class in Ipoh when she suddenly felt a sharp pain in her temple and found she could not co-ordinate her movements.

She had no idea she was suffering a full-blown stroke and it was only due to the alertness of a colleague that she was rushed to the hospital.

Yeoh was warded at the hospital's intensive care unit for 10 days in a semi-conscious state.

When she finally came to her senses, she realised she was half paralysed as she could not feel her hands or feet.

"It was a traumatic moment for me because I always felt I was a healthy person. I go for annual blood tests and I had been pretty active in exercising. I was even an instructor for my line dancing class.

"I couldn't accept that it had happened to me. I always thought only old people got strokes until I met other survivors who were younger than me, people in their 20s," says the 45-year-old woman.

More than two years after the incident, Yeoh has proved to many that there is life after a stroke after all.

It was with quiet pride that she recalled walking out of the hospital on her own after a physiotherapist worked with her on exercises to strengthen her legs.

"I was lucky. The physiotherapist started working with me nearly immediately after I regained consciousness. The longer you wait to rehabilitate a stroke survivor, the harder it will be for him or her.

"The doctor had even warned my husband at the beginning that I might not be able to walk again," she said.

She remembers, however, feeling depressed in the weeks afterwards. She lost complete interest in all the activities she used to love. She stayed home and would cry for months.

It was only after seeing a psychiatrist, who encouraged her to take up new hobbies, and committing herself as a



volunteer with the Perak Palliative Care Society that she felt useful again.

"I found myself regaining my self-confidence and self-esteem, things that were taken away when I suffered the stroke.

"I learnt to focus beyond myself and not to indulge in self-pity," says Yeoh after a training workshop organised by the National Stroke Association of Malaysia (NASAM) for stroke volunteers on Sept 4 and 5.

The gutsy woman believes the experience has made her a stronger person and given her a new purpose in life, by helping others who went through the same thing.

Three weeks ago, she suffered an unexpected post-stroke epileptic attack. She ended up having to take new medication, and in the days afterwards, needed to be accompanied by a friend in case the fits came again.

It has not daunted her one bit. Yeoh is now the chairman of the NASAM centre in Ipoh, the latest offshoot of the non-profit voluntary association aimed at providing physical, emotional and social rehabilitation for stroke survivors.

The other centres are in Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Penang.

Last February, her committee managed to get permission from the NASAM headquarters in Ampang to set up the centre.

She hopes to kick off NASAM Ipoh's first series of rehabilitation programmes for survivors at its centre next month.

During their workshop, participants learnt the basics on what a stroke was and how to recognise its signs, symptoms and effects.

Physiotherapist Tracy Chan, from NASAM Ampang, stressed that it was important for volunteers to encourage stroke survivors inside the house to walk to places like the toilet on their own.

The idea, she says, was for



Yeoh (on mat) showing participants of the workshop how a stroke patient should be handled.

the survivors to speed up their own recovery by exercising their own muscles.

"Avoid the temptation to help them all the time. They might certainly complain or say that they are tired, but it is for their own good," she said.

She also advised volunteers

not to wear rings, wristwatches and jewellery that might cut into the skin.

Chan adds that the public should be wise to any of the symptoms of an oncoming stroke, such as sudden numbness of the body, blurred vision, slurred speech, mental

confusion, loss of sensation, severe headache and nausea.

"If you see the signs, don't wait. Go to a hospital immediately," she said.

NASAM headquarters manager Margaret Chang and speech and language pathologist Audrey Colliver also head-

ed the workshop sessions.

The Nasam Ipoh centre is looking for a full-time administrative assistant and volunteers to work with stroke survivors.

For details, contact the centre at 05-3211089 or Yeoh at 012-5253663.

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