

A tribute to palliative nurses

FROM **TAN CHEK WEE**

I am a doctor who has been in a palliative home-care setting for eight years, and it being Nurses Day, I take the opportunity to pay tribute to my colleagues — palliative nurses.

I cannot forget visiting a man who was severely constipated. He could not defecate on the bed, wearing diapers. Even after he was assisted to the toilet, he could not push out the hard stool due to weakness from his illness and the side-effect of medication. He was distressed.

Then I held the man to stand up a bit from the toilet seat, while my staff nurse removed the impacted faeces manually. The man was greatly relieved and thanked the nurse profusely.

Over a period of visits, a home-care nurse establishes bonds with a patient and his or her family. This facilitates the emotional support needed as an illness progresses.

The palliative home-care nurse retains the traditional hands-on role of Florence Nightingale. They lug around a heavy bag of medication, dressing material, etc, and sometimes climb several storeys of walk-up apartments in our hot, humid climate. What drives them on is passion for their work.

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