

Ice-cream comfort for hospice patients

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THE elderly woman had thrown up everything she was fed. Everything except ice cream.

And it gave as much joy to the sisters who were feeding her as it did the 70-year-old grandmother, who was suffering from fourth-stage cancer.

"It was a feeling of joy seeing her enjoying the ice cream," one of the sisters, Ms Peggy Lim, 35, told The New Paper. The incident involved the grandmother of a close friend.

Inspired, she and her sister, Claudia, 28, who together own gelato store Ci Gusta! decided to do something special for the patients at HCA Hospice Care at Jalan Tan Tock Seng.

Yesterday, they took an hour off from their busy schedule at their stores at Lot One Shoppers' Mall and Anchorpoint yesterday.

They lugged two tubs of gelato – mango-flavoured and chocolate-flavoured – to give the 30 or so day-care patients at the hospice a treat.

Excited chatter filled the hospice canteen yesterday at about 3pm, when the tubs were placed on the counter.

"I think this is the best and it made my day better," Mr Abdul Latip, 66, said cheerfully as he took slow spoonfuls from a cup of mango-flavoured gelato.

"Whatever they give us – we are very thankful," he added.

He has multiple myeloma (a cancer that affects cells in the bone marrow).

Many other patients at the hospice suffer from life-limiting illnesses like end-stage cancer, Aids and Alzheimer's Disease.

Another patient, Madam Lim Bay Lee, 74, was also all smiles.

"It tastes good and I'm happy," she exclaimed in Mandarin.

The Lim sisters, who had their hands full serving and even feeding some of the patients, were introduced to the idea of serving ice cream to palliative-care patients over a decade ago.

In 2000, they were advised by their mother's doctor to feed her ice cream following a operation to remove a brain tumour.

Ice cream is good for its milk and sugar content, the doctor had told them.

"I remember very clearly that the doctor said to give her ice cream, although it was just a casual comment, and we were quite surprised.

"I thought, 'Oh, ice-cream is actually healthy!' So, this thought just stuck with us," said Ms Peggy Lim.

For about a month, they fed their mother with small cups of vanilla ice cream while she was in the hospital. Their mother died in 2009.

Endorsement

The idea of ice cream having certain benefits is also endorsed by Dr R. Akhileswaran, chairman of the Singapore Hospice Council.

He said: "Our patients have small appetites, so when we give them something like ice-cream, most of them enjoy it.

"Palliative care is all about the quality of life, and ice cream is something that perks them up, so this is the best combination one could look for," he added.

Watching the elderly palliative-care patients leave the canteen in high spirits, Ms Claudia Lim smiled and said:

"Ice cream gives this feeling beyond dessert – it's comfort."



TNP PICTURE: GARY GOH
HEART-WARMING: Ms Peggy Lim feeding a patient at NCA Hospice Care ice cream.