



Madam Pusphavalli's husband, Mr Selvam Sundram, helping her to carry the load at the supermarket as she is not supposed to lift more than 2kg of items on her right side. She used to haul heavy bags of groceries home on her own. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

Treatment over, but the anxiety remains

Madam N. Pusphavalli completed her breast cancer treatment about a year ago, but her heart still skips a beat at the sight of a rash or bump. "I will keep monitoring it every day for four to five days to observe if it gets bigger or if the skin around it gets thicker, though it may just be

a pimple or mosquito bite," she said. Like others, life as a cancer survivor for her has not been a bed of roses. Anxiety over rashes or bumps aside, the 44-year-old has also had to make several lifestyle changes. She used to haul heavy

bags of groceries home on her own, but now her husband or daughter helps her as she is not supposed to lift more than 2kg of items on her right side. If Madam Pusphavalli does not do upper body exercises every day, she tends to get stiff arms and joint

pain. Diet-wise, she has become allergic to food like raw vegetables or uncooked food after undergoing chemotherapy. For the past year, she has had to go to hospital many times for tests and check-ups. Fortunately, her company gives her time off without her needing to apply for leave.

"It is very important for a cancer survivor to have the support of the company and colleagues so that we can focus our energy on getting better instead of worrying if we would lose our jobs," said Madam Pusphavalli, a secretary.

Asked she if she would prefer seeing her general practitioner (GP) or doctor at the polyclinic for check-ups instead of going to the hospital, she turned apprehensive.

"If it's during the first few critical years, I would say no because I am not sure if the GP has the knowledge or skills for cancer detection," she said, adding that she is fine with it if this is after the five-year mark.

"Visits to the GPs would be useful if we can see them quickly after spotting a bump or rash for peace of mind instead of scheduling an appointment at the hospital," she said.

Mr Lim Kok Kiong, 56, has been a nose cancer survivor for 23 years but it was only four years ago that he experienced side effects of hormonal deficiencies from radiotherapy done decades ago.

A freelance writer who attends a cancer support group once a month, he hopes there will be more active post-treatment monitoring for survivors as the nature of side effects and when these surface differ for each survivor.

"Such monitoring is done all under one roof, instead of at different hospitals when one gets (different) side effects such as swallowing difficulties or hearing problems, it will be good for those with mobility issues," he added.

Janice Tai

DEPENDS ON WHEN

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MADAM N. PUSPHAVALLI on whether she would prefer to visit a polyclinic or a hospital for checkups