

## MEDIA RELEASE

26 May 2025

### WHERE NEW LIFE TAKES ROOT: NUCOT HONOURS THE LEGACY OF ORGAN DONORS

*The 'Tree of Life: Where New Life Takes Root' project is a befitting prelude to the landmark International Liver Transplantation Society (ILTS) Annual Congress 2025, led by NUCOT*



*The National University Centre for Organ Transplantation (NUCOT) launched the inaugural Tree Planting Legacy Project, 'Tree of Life: Where New Life Takes Root' at the National University Hospital (NUH) on 26 May 2025.*

SINGAPORE — The National University Centre for Organ Transplantation (NUCOT) launched the inaugural Tree Planting Legacy Project, 'Tree of Life: Where New Life Takes Root' on 26 May 2025 at the National University Hospital (NUH), to commemorate the invaluable sacrifices made by organ donors, and to raise awareness about the life-changing impact of organ donation (please see Annex for profile stories).

Each tree planted will symbolise a living tribute – just as a tree grows strong from its roots, the gift of organ donation creates ripples of hope, renewal, and gratitude across generations. Apart from NUH, trees have also been planted at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, Alexandra Hospital and Woodlands Health, as a collective gesture of support for organ donors.

More than 400 people in Singapore are currently on the national waiting list for an organ transplant, according to [Live On](#).

Living organ donation, in particular, can shorten a recipient's wait and improve patient outcomes. At public transplant centres, over 90 per cent of liver transplant patients do well one year after surgery. Research<sup>1</sup> shows that receiving a living-donor liver confers a significant survival advantage and living donor liver transplantation recipients have more favourable outcomes<sup>2</sup>, as compared to recipients of deceased donor liver transplants.

"Trees symbolise renewal and a new lease of life, made possible through the precious gift of organ donation," says Adjunct Associate Professor Mark Muthiah, Medical Director & Senior Consultant, Adult Liver Transplantation Programme, NUCOT, NUH, who is also the Local Co-chair of the ILTS Scientific Programming Committee 2025. "Through concerted efforts in public education and advocacy, we hope that more individuals will consider being organ donors."

### Shaping the future of liver transplantation

The 'Tree of Life: Where New Life Takes Root' project is held in conjunction with the ILTS Annual Congress 2025 (the Congress) from 28 to 31 May 2025 — the first time the Congress is being hosted in Southeast Asia. It will be officiated by Guest of Honour Professor Kenneth Mak, Director-General of Health, Ministry of Health.

Spearheaded by NUCOT at NUH and supported by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Liver Transplant Centre and Mount Elizabeth Hospital, the Congress will serve as a vital catalyst for driving innovations in liver transplantation, fostering collaboration, and connecting the global liver transplant community.

**Associate Professor Alfred Kow, Senior Consultant, Adult Liver Transplantation Programme, NUCOT, NUH and Local Chair of the ILTS Scientific Programming Committee 2025** said: "Today, through the dedication of our healthcare community and continuous technological advancements - from ABO-incompatible transplants to minimally invasive techniques for living donor liver transplantation, we have developed one of the most mature liver transplant ecosystems in the Southeast Asian region, with outcomes comparable to international centres.

"We are honoured to host the Congress and to contribute to the global effort by sharing best practices, strengthening partnerships, learning from the international community, and advancing the field of liver transplantation together."

### Embracing innovation, honouring pioneers

A distinctive highlight of this year's Congress is the comprehensive transformation of the programme, to foster greater collaboration across the globe. In line with the theme of "**Advancing Liver Transplantation: Embracing Innovation for the Future**", local experts such as Professor Dean Ho, Provost's Chair Professor and Director of the Institute for Digital Medicine at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, will delve into the

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<sup>1</sup> [Survival Benefit of Living-Donor Liver Transplant | Surgery | JAMA Surgery | JAMA Network](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Clinical Impacts of Donor Types of Living vs. Deceased Donors: Predictors of One-Year Mortality in Patients with Liver Transplantation - PMC](#)

role of AI-driven precision medicine, in transforming the decision-making process for liver transplantation.

At the Congress, novel innovations such as minimally invasive surgeries and next-gen solutions involving biomaterials and biosensors will be presented. In recognition of the growing role of allied health professionals (AHPs) in liver transplantation, there will also be a workshop designed to engage AHPs around the world, facilitating an exchange of insights into their diverse responsibilities and offering an opportunity to share best practices.

In the spirit of the event, the 2025 ILTS Distinguished Service Award will be conferred at the opening ceremony, upon two eminent trailblazers in the field: Professor Sung-Gyu Lee, from Asan Medical Center, who pioneered living donor liver transplantation using a modified right lobe graft for the first time globally in 1999, and Professor Lo Chung-mau, the Secretary of Health of the Government of Hong Kong. Professor Lo was the chair of Hepatobiliary & Pancreatic Surgery at The University of Hong Kong.

The Congress will also feature 60 scientific sessions and more than 200 presentations from a distinguished lineup of leading experts from around the world, who will share their insights across the breadth of liver transplantation science and practice.

Professor Nazia Selzner, President of ILTS and Professor Valeria Mas, ILTS President-Elect and Chair of the ILTS Scientific Programming Committee 2025 will also be attending the Tree Planting Legacy Project, alongside representatives from NUH and organ donors and recipients.

For more information on the ILTS Annual Congress 2025, please visit <https://ilts-congress.org/>.

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## Chinese Glossary

International Liver Transplantation Society (ILTS) Annual Congress 2025	2025 年国际肝脏移植协会(ILTS) 国际大会
“Advancing Liver Transplantation: Embracing Innovation for the Future”	推进肝脏移植：以创新引领未来
National University Hospital (NUH)	国立大学医院
National University Centre of Organ Transplantation (NUCOT)	国大医院器官移植中心
Associate Professor Alfred Kow Senior Consultant Adult Liver Transplantation Programme National University Centre of Organ Transplantation National University Hospital	勾伟杰副教授 高级顾问医生 成人肝脏移植计划 国大医院器官移植中心 国立大学医院
Local Chair, ILTS Scientific Programming Committee 2025	
Adjunct Associate Professor Mark Muthiah Medical Director & Senior Consultant Adult Liver Transplantation Programme	Mark Muthiah 客座副教授 内科主任兼高级顾问医生 成人肝脏移植计划

National University Centre of Organ Transplantation National University Hospital	国大医院器官移植中心 国立大学医院
'Tree of Life: Where New Life Takes Root'	'生命之树：新生命的根源'

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**About the National University Hospital**

The National University Hospital (NUH) is Singapore's leading university hospital. While the hospital at Kent Ridge first received its patients on 24 June 1985, our legacy started from 1905, the date of the founding of what is today the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. NUH is the principal teaching hospital of the medical school.

Our unique identity as a university hospital is a key attraction for healthcare professionals who aspire to do more than practise tertiary medical care. We offer an environment where research and teaching are an integral part of medicine, and continue to shape medicine and transform care for the community we care for.

We are an academic medical centre with over 1,200 beds, serving more than one million patients a year with over 50 medical, surgical and dental specialties. NUH is the only public and not-for-profit hospital in Singapore to provide trusted care for adults, women and children under one roof, including the only paediatric kidney and liver transplant programme in the country.

The NUH is a key member of the National University Health System (NUHS), one of three public healthcare clusters in Singapore. For more information, visit [www.nuh.com.sg](http://www.nuh.com.sg)

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## **Profiles for ‘Tree of Life: Where New Life Takes Root’**

Mr Sean Ter, Mr Leo Qi Xiang and Mr Herman Sing may hail from different backgrounds, but a common thread unites them: They are all living organ donors who have given the most precious gift of life to someone in need.

### **An enduring ripple of kindness**

For altruistic donor Mr Herman Sing, who was conferred the President’s Volunteerism & Philanthropy Awards 2024 by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre for his longstanding dedication to volunteer work, the selfless decision to donate his liver to a complete stranger has reaped endless dividends.

Non-directed altruistic donors like Mr Sing, who have donated to undirected or unrelated recipients are even more rare, with just five such organ donations since 1990 to 2024 at NUCOT.

While Mr Sing’s family and friends voiced concerns for his health and wellbeing when they learnt of his decision in late 2022, he reassured them by highlighting the high survival rate for donors and urged them to put themselves in the shoes of the recipient. “With technology advances, organ donation is very safe,” Mr Sing says. “The medical team at NUCOT is very good, and I was able to be discharged three days after the surgery as I wanted to be home with my family.”

His precious gift has given a new lease of life to the recipient, and Mr Sing is equally heartened by the enduring ripple of kindness it has created. “After the news of the donation was out, there were many people who came forward to ask me about non-directed organ donation, as they did not know such a procedure existed,” he says. “There were also many others who wanted to join me in volunteering, to give back to society.”

### **A 48-hour race against time**

Mr Sean Ter, 40, fondly recalls his mother’s radiant smile at the long-awaited tea ceremony he and his wife held in early 2022. While it may be a common rite of passage for many Chinese families, it was a hard-won battle for Mdm Yap Poh Lian, 72, when she suffered acute-on-chronic liver failure (ACLF) in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With Mdm Yap’s liver failing rapidly and only a sliver of opportunity for a transplant on the horizon, Associate Professor Alfred Kow, Senior Consultant, Liver Transplantation, NUCOT, National University Hospital (NUH), and a large multidisciplinary team worked swiftly to complete the extensive battery of tests and evaluations necessary prior to organ transplant surgery.

Mr Ter and his brother had stepped forward as potential donors.

Mdm Yap was transferred by air ambulance from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore in April 2021, after approval by the Ministry of Health was obtained. She was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit within a few hours of admission for critical care support. The workup was expedited within 48 hours for Mdm Yap and Mr Ter, enabling her to undergo living donor liver transplant just two days later.



To circumvent the challenges presented by the pandemic, the NUCOT team made adjustments where necessary, to ensure the safety of Mdm Yap, Mr Ter and the medical team. These included converting the OTs from positive pressure to neutral pressure with independent airflow and adequate air exchanges.

These days, Mdm Yap busies herself whipping up her family's favourite dishes each day, a love language that lives on, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the multidisciplinary team who rallied together in the race against time.

### **A son's ultimate gift**

Like Mr Ter, Mr Leo Qi Xiang, 39, did not hesitate to step forward as an organ donor, when his mother, Mdm Lim, unexpectedly developed liver failure in March 2023. A bout of COVID-19 infection had activated Wilson's disease, a genetic disorder that typically affects the liver, a condition Mdm Lim did not know she had.

Mdm Lim was placed on the organ transplant waitlist, but her condition deteriorated quickly over the next two months. "Her doctor at NUCOT sat us down in early May, and explained the urgency of the situation – we only had a narrow window of three weeks for my mum to receive a liver transplant," recalls Mr Leo. "I remember asking to speak to my mum in private – and the only question I asked then was, 'Do you still have the desire to live on?' Her answer was a simple yes."

Mr Leo, who was assessed to be a compatible match, made a snap decision to donate his liver, despite the concerns he had about his young family and career. Mr Leo says, "My mum was also reluctant initially as she was worried about how it would affect my career in the Singapore Armed Forces and my family."

"I devoted time to building up my body pre-surgery, by eating well and preparing myself mentally. After the surgery, I was careful not to carry heavy weights and not to rush through the recovery process," shared Mr Leo. His efforts paid off as Mr Leo (and his mother) both made good recovery following the transplant.

Two years on, life has returned to normal for Mr Leo and Mdm Lim, who was inspired by her son's gift, to lead a healthier lifestyle. "My mum was overweight previously and led a sedentary lifestyle, but now she exercises daily without fail," he shares. "She said she didn't want to waste my liver."

For those considering stepping forward as organ donors, Mr Leo has some words of advice: "It is not as scary as people think, we just need to weigh the risks and plan for our loved ones."