His heart stopped beating for 16 minutes

Clara Chong

For 42 days, Mr Toh Kiat Kiat’s family endured a roller-coaster ride of emotions.

“We went from heaven to hell as he got better, only to have our hopes dashed a few days later, and then back up again,” his son told The Sunday Times on Friday.

Mr Toh, with his failing lungs, was one of the most seriously ill Covid-19 patients in Singapore. But man and machine pulled him from death’s door and on April 22, he was discharged from hospital.

One of the worst times was the seventh day when he was hoisted to a machine that acted as his artificial lungs.

And on another occasion when his heart gave up, a team from the National University Hospital (NUH) fought for 16 crucial minutes to get it going, and subsequently nursed him back to health.

The lung machine is called extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) life support, which takes over the role of a person’s diseased lungs, allowing him to recover.

It sucks out blood, which is oxygenated artificially outside the body before being returned into the body. The 24-year-old patient, who is in ICU, became the first Covid-19 NUH patient on ECMO to be discharged, making a full recovery from Covid-19 after being hospitalised for 42 days.

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Mr Toh did exercises at home to aid his recovery. He now requires a walking stick to support him in his movements. For 13 days, he had to rely on a ventilator to help him breathe.

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