

# CELEBRATING DADS

In the spirit of Father's Day, **The Straits Times** celebrates the efforts of healthcare workers who have been great role models to their children, and the father-son duos who are exceptional in the nation's fight against Covid-19.

## Doc stayed away from family to volunteer at dorms

Cheryl Tan

For two months, he lived apart from his family to avoid infecting them so that he could volunteer at the migrant worker dormitories during the Covid-19 outbreak.

To many, this may seem like the act of an unsung hero, but to Dr Chen Yongsheng, he was merely responding to his call of duty as a doctor.

With a team of around 15 to 20 medical staff, Dr Chen has been manning medical posts at the dorms since April 23 to ensure that ample healthcare is provided to migrant workers staying there.

The 37-year-old, an orthopaedic surgeon at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital (NTFGH), was overseas on a fellowship training programme at The Royal Melbourne Hospital in March, before the Covid-19 outbreak worsened.

As there were Covid-19 cases at that hospital, Dr Chen, who lives with his parents, his wife and their one-year-old son, decided to voluntarily isolate himself at a hotel for two weeks upon returning to Singapore on March 26.

Stay-home notices had not been mandated for travellers returning from Australia then.

When he came down with a fever during his stay, he headed to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) for a swab test.

He eventually tested negative, but the visit to the NCID left an impression on him. "It was 2am in the morning, yet the team of doctors were fighting hard on the front lines of the pandemic, irrespective of their rank, speciality and seniority, which reminded me that this was simply a doctor's call of duty."

So when the migrant worker dormitories soon became a Covid-19



hot spot, Dr Chen knew that he had to rise to the occasion.

On April 13, he was among the first batch of volunteers who helped to set up medical operations at Tuas View Dormitory.

By the third day, a fully functional medical station was in operation, where patients could be swabbed, screened and treated every day, even on public holidays.

Similar facilities were subsequently set up on April 23 at Toh Guan and Westlite Toh Guan dormitories, where Dr Chen now volunteers three times a week.

As these were among the dormitories initially gazetted as isolation areas owing to the high number of Covid-19 cases, his daily routine included identifying patients at risk of developing a serious infection so that early hospital care could be facilitated. He also monitored the conditions of patients who tested positive for Covid-19 but did not require hospitalisation.

"I think above all, we served as a comforting presence to these workers – when the entire dormitory is locked down, people are scared and anxious, so having the medical post there reminded them that we're there for them and we will attend to their needs to the best of our efforts," said Dr Chen.

For two months while he was vol-



unteering at the dormitories, Dr Chen stayed in a rented apartment so as not to risk infecting his family.

"It was a very miserable period, but I'm thankful for WhatsApp and Zoom, where I still get to stay updated on my family's lives."

He added: "I hadn't seen my boy much since I was away in Australia. When I drove home on one occa-

sion to restock supplies, I could see him only through my car window without being able to hold him. It was so difficult spending time away from him."

As the Covid-19 situation began to stabilise, Dr Chen and other volunteer doctors could extend medical treatment to dorm residents for other ailments, from diarrhoea and gastric to chronic diseases.

As he began to understand more about the virus and was assured by the personal protective equipment that he wore daily, Dr Chen finally felt that it was safe to have his wife and son move into the rented apartment with him last month – a long-awaited family reunion.

To ensure that he keeps them safe, Dr Chen continues to adhere to a strict hygiene routine upon returning home each day.

He is now making up for lost time with his wife and son, when he is not working at the dormitories or seeing his orthopaedic patients at the wards and clinics in NTFGH.

Admitting that he had not realised Father's Day was around the corner, Dr Chen said: "(As parents), we just hope our boy will be able to chase his own dreams and shape his own destiny, and we will support him wherever we can."

Above: Dr Chen Yongsheng now volunteers at Westlite Toh Guan and Toh Guan dorms three times a week, manning the medical posts there.

Left: After two months of living apart from his family to keep them safe, Dr Chen reunited with his wife Jocelyn Chen, a 38-year-old lawyer, and their one-year-old son Joel last month by having them move in with him in his rented apartment. PHOTOS: NG TENG FONG GENERAL HOSPITAL, CHEN YONGSHENG

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