

Battling cancer: This survivor reveals importance of early detection, positive mind

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George Chong Young Peng, 71, a cancer survivor says that keeping a positive attitude is one of the things that helped him through his battle with colorectal cancer. — Picture by Mark Ryan Raj

PETALING JAYA, June 4 — Diseases can creep up on you when you least expect it.

Many people are diagnosed with a disease when it is already too late because they ignored or brushed off the symptoms they were experiencing and reasoned with their logic that “it’s only a small problem”.

This is exactly what 71-year-old George Chong You Peng went through during his battle with cancer.

Chong, who is from Cameron Highlands, Pahang, has always been a healthy and active man.

He never faced any major health issues other than diabetes, which is hereditary.

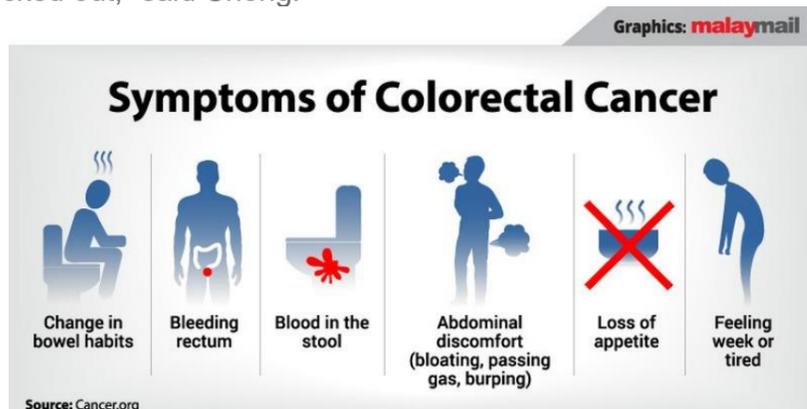
Because of this, he failed to realise the many warning signs of cancer, attributing them instead as side-effects from his diabetic medication.

“When you’re in good health, you are your own worst doctor,” said Chong in an interview with *Malay Mail*.

Chong was diagnosed with Stage III Colorectal Cancer in late 2017, a type of cancer that is notorious for being hard to detect without proper screening or consultation.

He felt like “kicking himself in the back” for not connecting the dots to the seven symptoms that he experienced which now seem like a clear indication that he was suffering from cancer.

“Cancer was never on my radar. I gave excuses for whatever symptoms I had and attributed a lot of it to old age and my diabetes, so don’t be like me anything out of the norm, just go and have it checked out,” said Chong.



Potential symptoms of colorectal cancer which often go unnoticed and unchecked.

Chong experienced symptoms like weight loss, deterioration of sleep, loss of appetite, change in his bowel habits, increased frequency of burping and passing gas, but only came to the realisation that it may not be his diabetes when he saw blood in his stool.

It was then that he decided to go in for a check-up and went to the Tung Shin Hospital in Kuala Lumpur, where he was diagnosed with the disease.

He was told that he would have to undergo surgery to remove the cancerous part of his intestine in December 2017, which luckily for him was located seven inches away from his posterior.

This made it easier for surgeons to operate as they had more room to work with.

Staying positive

Despite the successful procedure, Chong still had to go through chemotherapy fortnightly, which many cancer patients dread because of its “terrible” side-effects and he was not too keen on doing it at the hospital.

But even though his journey had only just begun, he never grumbled about his illness.

“I used to be a sportsman, and I don’t like to lose, so I thought if other people can survive, why can’t I?” added Chong.

Instead of accepting defeat, he reached out to an old friend and colleague who was also suffering from the disease.

According to Chong, his friend coached and gave him some crucial advice on how to keep himself motivated when battling the disease.

“He said you must have milestones, something to keep you going, cancer is as much a disease of the cells as it is of the mind,” said Chong.

For example, when his friend was first diagnosed with cancer, he was unsure if he would be able to cast a vote for the Malaysian general elections in 2013.

But, he did.

So, he gave himself another milestone which was to cast a vote for GE14, he managed to do it too and even got to be part of one of our nation’s most historic moments.

He took those words of advice to heed and realised that he could not die just yet.

Chong said that he could not leave his older sister behind because she was alone in the world with no husband and a rocky relationship with their own family.

Now cancer-free for the past nine months, Chong added that he was also glad to have sought treatment under Dr Christina Ng at the Onco Lifecare Centre because she went the extra mile for her patients.

Chong said: “Cancer is not the end of the road, it is just a roadblock.”