



UNDERSTANDING THE PATIENT'S JOURNEY

Sue Lee, CEO of Ara Damansara Medical Centre, brings Chan Li Jin behind the scenes to see how the hospital is not a “me too” medical provider.

Truth be told, I am no stranger to the Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care's Ara Damansara Medical Centre. As part of my work as a writer, I visited the place frequently in 2010 when it was still undergoing renovations. Upstairs where the management team was located two years ahead of its opening, the wind whistled through the cracks of far-ended windows while drills and hammers rocked the lobby downstairs. Tucked away on a slip road branching out from the main road leading to Skypark Subang terminal, it seemed to me then that the red-brick building peeking out of an island of greenery was more suited as a hotel or holiday retreat.

Even when the hospital doors were opened for business in 2012 (officiated by the Sultan of Selangor, no less), it didn't strike me as a one-of-a-kind hospital. Granted, the lofty glass ceilings where natural light flooded the lobby was delightful but the place was almost always empty. Where is everyone, I often wondered?

Needless to say, I wasn't really over the moon when Sue Lee, the CEO of Ara Damansara Medical Centre, invited me over for a chat. Surely there was nothing exciting that I didn't know of? How wrong I was.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Even at the start of the interview, I felt that something was different. Sue spoke of the centre with such fondness, referring to intimate details from the time it was conceptualised to what it is today, that it felt as though she was referring to a home she built from scratch. And in many ways, it was. A second home, that is.

Contrary to what I thought, the building was built as a medical centre in mind, a neurology and cardiac centre to be exact, she revealed. The original owners, planned at creating a top-notch medical centre targeted for heart and brain cases. When the original owners decided to sell the property, it was Dato' Dr. Jacob Thomas, who was the Sime Darby Healthcare Group Medical Advisor at that time, got wind of it and recommended taking over the project.

Although the facilities for cardiac and neurological services were already in place, the building set-up and processes were too traditional, “built for the convenience of the employees rather than patients,” said Sue. One example was the registration table on the ground floor, a typical set up in any hospital.

“We decided right from the start that we don't want the hospital to be just another medical centre in town.



Taking lessons from Subang Jaya Medical Centre, we wanted the centre to be entirely patient-oriented, something that will make a patient's journey throughout treatment a breeze," she shared.

With that in mind, they got the medical planner and interior designers cracking. One of the innovations they introduced was having bedside admission and discharge, where admission and discharge procedures were conducted in the comfort and convenience of patient's room instead of a registration desk downstairs at the lobby. On the ground floor, there are inner corridors so that patients could enjoy privacy while moving from one end of the hospital to another in their hospital gowns when undergoing multiple procedures or screenings.

I was awestruck when Sue took me to the patient rooms on the second floor. Each of the seven rooms comes with a private little garden (with real plants!), where patients and families can get some fresh air and sunshine during their treatment process. Knowing how some surgeries can require long stays, the rooms are also equipped with a day bed for accompanying family members.

We went to the bathrooms, where Sue told me to touch the grab bars that are made of a special material

so that they are not cold to the touch. She pointed to the foldable shower seat, another imported investment, where patients can shower seated especially if they are too tired or weak to stand. Seemingly small and significant, I imagine they would be immensely appreciated by someone who was cold and struggling with the pain and discomfort after a surgery or procedure.

"We've had many elderly patients who were initially afraid before they came, but their fears vanished as soon as they walked into our hospital. We also had patients from the other Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care hospitals requesting to stay here for recuperation after their surgeries instead of a hotel," she said laughing.

Even right down to the operation theatres, they are fully equipped with the latest technology and equipment such as laminar air flow system, image guided system for neuro and neuro-spine surgeries. Besides the operating theaters we also have a well-



Sue Lee, CEO of Ara Damansara Medical Centre

equipped intensive care units to support patients with telemetry as well as patient monitoring system which allows doctors to view patient's vital signs off site for quick response to changes in patient's condition for better outcome.

"We understand that OTs can be a highly charged environment especially for complex surgeries. So to aid our surgeons we ensure to provide highly qualified and specialised medical team, allowing the surgeon to focus fully on the patient", she explained.

RECOGNISING AND REWARDING

Amidst the state-of-the-art facilities, Sue insisted that human capital development is still the most challenging. Having updated facilities and leading edge technology means little without the experienced specialised nursing team to support and provide personalized care for each patient and family. Although the hospital's location amongst greenery and semi-jungle is a boon for the healing process of patients, it poses inconvenience to patients' family members and the employees in terms of food and shopping for essentials. That's where the staff will need to go beyond their call of duty.

"There was once a little boy who wanted a banana badly, and a foreign patient who needed a pair of sports shoes so that he could do his rehabilitation therapy. One Chinese family from Indonesia had a special craving. Our staff go the extra mile to ensure our patients' needs are met.

Sue added, "I'm pleased and proud whenever I hear that one of our staff members had gone the extra mile to make patients happy. I want our employees to feel at home here too, to feel a sense of belonging where their contributions are recognized and they can grow together with the hospital."

She prefers employees who err on the side of generosity rather than those who do not try any harder. If a patient is admitted and there is no room of their entitlement, for instance, she sees nothing wrong in providing the patient with an upgrade room. And if the patient checked in late at night when their kitchen is closed, she would applaud the employee who went to the nearest mall to get food for the patient. "It's these little acts of kindness that will give us the 'wow factor', not just our facilities, no matter how good they are! I appreciate employees who are proactive, compassionate and are discerning with patient's needs on a daily basis," she disclosed, adding that the Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care culture of 'People caring for people' is inculcated in everything we do. It is important that we care and respect each other and this will translate in the staff being caring and compassionate towards our patients.

THE HOMECOMING

Having graduated with a degree in accountancy and



worked in medical institutions in the United States including the Doheny Eye Institute at the University of Southern California, what made Sue return to Malaysia? "It was a natural life progression, I guess," she said, recalling how she was invited to join Subang Jaya Medical Centre in the 1990s when she returned home for holidays with her family. It was a difficult decision to make at that time because she had a good job as a financial controller in one of the hospitals in US.

Her father-in-law have had stroke a few years earlier and she had seen how her mother-in-law struggled to care for him. "There was no dedicated stroke centre with rehabilitation facilities back then. In the US, physiotherapy and speech therapy are part and parcel



Elaine Cheong, CEO of RSDH (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, to join Sime Darby Healthcare (as known then) as they are in an expansion mode. She then had the opportunity to spearhead the new medical centre at Ara Damansara. "I decided it was time for me to leverage on my experience and get a meaningful job that touch lives."

The mother of two boys added, "I cannot describe how it feels when I see little children who come in very sick with brain tumours or heart problems, but walk out normal and pain-free. They are the future of the country, so I'd like to think we have contributed towards nation-building in our small little way."

During my tour of the Medical Centre, I was brought to the open garden space on the third floor, where patients and employees can enjoy the cool breeze and surrounding greenery.

As we left the garden, I told her that my previous

treatment for stroke patients, but here there were none in the late 1980s," she said in recollection.

In the end, the family settled for a blind masseur and a nurse to come to the house daily to help care for the father-in-law. The five years of caring for him took its toll on her mother-in-law and family, who fell ill later. After much thought and prayer, the family decided to return to Malaysia so that they would be around during the matriarch's last leg of her life journey.

After joining SJMC for four years, she left for an insurance company. With her exposure and experience, she rose the ranks, leaving as the Vice President of Sales and Marketing after spending eight years in the insurance industry. In 2008, she was approached by

employer's daughter was the hospital's very first patient when it opened in 2012. Looking at me puzzled, she said that their first patient was an elderly VIP.

It was a moment of truth as I suddenly realised what had happened. The staff on duty had probably whispered to my previous employer that her precious little girl was the hospital's privileged first patient, making her day.

The legendary author Maya Angelou had once said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." If Ara Damansara Medical Centre could achieve that, it would truly be a hospital with a difference. ■