

**NADINECHUA**

Mrs Divine Garcia was told on her 39th birthday that her 15-year-old daughter has cancer.

Mary Jade, now 17, had felt a lump in her neck, which she thought nothing of until it grew bigger.

Mrs Garcia, who works in human resources, now 41, told *The New Paper*: “I took her to a general practitioner, who advised us to go to National University Hospital.

“She had to get an X-ray done, and we were anxiously waiting for the results.”

That day in December 2019, Mrs Garcia’s world fell apart.

The lump in her daughter’s neck was a cancerous tumour. Further checks led doctors to diagnose Mary Jade with stage four mesothelioma.

Mary Jade’s doctor, Dr Miriam Santiago Kimpo, a consultant at NUH’s division of paediatric haematology and oncology, told TNP that mesothelioma affects the membrane lining the different organs of the chest and abdomen.

“From 2010 to 2020, we saw three cases in NUH. In adults, there were 16 cases seen at the Singapore General Hospital from 1996 to 2001,” said Dr Kimpo.

“In adults, the average length of survival is 12 to 15 months. There have been reports of patients who survived much longer to eight years. Age younger than 40 years and having genetics that impact response to treatment are associated with better prognosis.”

Mrs Garcia told TNP: “When I broke the news to my daughter, she did not cry nor did she pity herself.

In fact, she comforted me and told me it was going to be okay.

“She kept asking the doctors

# After finding out she has rare cancer, teen comforts mum

To help pay medical bills, mum’s friend sets up Give.asia campaign that has raised over \$82,000



(Above) Mary Jade with her mother Divine Garcia last year. (Right) Mary Jade in NUH in May last year. In the months after she was diagnosed in December 2019, she had four operations, one of which was the removal of a 13cm-long tumour from her abdomen.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DIVINE GARCIA

questions on the type of treatments she had to go through. She just wanted to get better.”

## OPERATIONS

What followed over the next six months were four operations, the first of which took six hours, where a 13cm-long tumour was removed from her abdomen.

Then came six chemotherapy sessions and six immunotherapy sessions. She lost some weight but was thankful not to have experienced hair loss.

“Mary Jade completed her most recent immunotherapy

session in April this year, and she is currently undergoing oral chemotherapy by taking pills daily,” said Mrs Garcia.

Mary Jade’s medical bills quickly piled up for Mrs Garcia and her husband Mark, 39, an engineering administrator, with the total sum amounting to about \$240,000 so far.

The couple are both work pass holders from the Philippines.

When Mrs Aira Bachoco, 35, who is a principal IT analyst and colleague of Mrs Garcia, heard about the family’s situation, she was spurred to start a Give.asia



campaign to raise funds.

The campaign, which was launched in December 2019, has raised over \$82,000 as of last Saturday. A Give.asia spokesman said the campaign will run until the goal of \$100,000 has been raised.

## SCHOOL

Mary Jade’s international school, Heritage Academy, also pitched in.

“Understanding that Mary Jade’s wish is to continue her study amid her battle with cancer, the school offered academic

support without school fees.

“Mary Jade’s teachers also willingly extended help and encouragement via online teaching,” said a spokesman for Heritage Academy, where Mary Jade is in ninth grade.

Mrs Garcia said her family “could not be more grateful” for the help extended to them.

“We are just trying to cherish every moment we have with her. We still believe she will get better so she can have a good, long life ahead of her.”

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