

## COMMEMORATING WORLD DIABETES DAY

World Diabetes Day 2014 falls on Friday. We speak to two people with the disease who dealt with it in different ways

# She suffered disease in silence

Report by CHOO MEI FANG  
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**For 13 years, she was afraid of telling people she had Type 2 diabetes. She made excuses as to why she couldn't take certain kinds of food and she would take her medication at work secretly.**

She thought society frowned upon diabetics and she feared being isolated if she admitted she was one.

But one day, she decided she had enough of hiding and sought professional help.

Today, she is a team leader in a diabetes support group, inspiring others to be open about their condition.

Ms Juliana Lim (right), 45, a management information systems executive, was diagnosed with diabetes when she was 18.

She will be at Diabetes Connects, an event organised by Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH) on Nov 15 to commemorate World Diabetes Day 2014, which is on Nov 14. (See other report.)

Before she found the courage to talk about her disease, she spent 13 years hiding it from others.

She was devastated when she was first told she had diabetes.

She said: "I was very unhappy. I had to make changes to my lifestyle and diet, which I was not prepared for."

She wanted to keep her condition a secret, as she did not know how her relatives and friends would react if she told them about it.

Hurtful remarks from people did not help either. In her first full-time job as a data administrator four years after her diagnosis, Ms Lim, who is single, tried to keep her condition a secret.

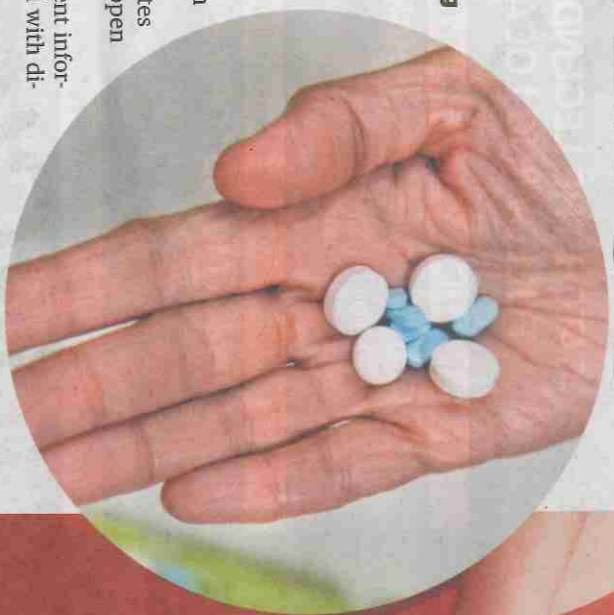
She had to take insulin pills before her meals, so when she ate with her colleagues, she would try not to draw any attention to herself.

"I would do it discreetly, such as popping the pills into my mouth quickly in a natural manner," she said.

During this period, Ms Lim found out about the Diabetic Society of Singapore (DSS) when she went for her routine polyclinic checkups.

She called DSS to find out more, but did not attend any meetings as she was still not ready to talk about her condition in front of strangers.

The turning point came when she realised that the fear of people reacting negatively about her condition was ruling her life.



**BRAVE:**  
Journalist  
Poh Lay Hoon  
(above) wrote  
a book on  
diabetes 20  
years ago  
when she was  
diagnosed with  
the disease.  
(Left) Ms Juliana  
Lim sought help  
for her diabetes.

PHOTOS:  
JEREMY LONG,  
LIANHE ZAOBAO

**I would do  
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— Ms Juliana Lim on  
hiding her diabetes  
from colleagues by  
taking her medication  
discreetly (inset).

She decided to deal with her fears by attending her first support group, in 2000. It was organised by DSS.

"It was comforting to know that people were going through the same situations and I was not alone in this journey.

"I was tired of feeling alone and unhappy. I'm glad I took the step to change my lifestyle."

Through the monthly meetings, she learnt more about managing her condition.

### BECAME TEAM LEADER

She became a DSG team leader in 2010, planning events where diabetics can get together to bond and share their experiences.

The support group has about 300 people.

Ms Lim is now also a committee member in DSS. She hopes that her story will encourage other diabetics to open up and seek support from the community.

She said: "I want to people to have positive reactions towards their conditions and learn how to manage it properly."

Ms Poh Lay Hoon, 46, a senior correspondent from Lianhe Zaobao, can relate to Ms Lim's ex-

periences. She was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in 1994 and found it helpful to attend support groups.

Within a year of her diagnosis, Ms Poh wrote a book about her struggles with diabetes.

Twenty years later, she published a second edition. (See report on right.)

Dr Tan Hwee Huan, a senior consultant with KTPH's Diabetes Centre, said there are patients who will hide the fact that they are diabetic.

She said: "Although diabetes is common, most people are not very knowledgeable about this condition and have their prejudices about people with diabetes." This results in patients feeling judged, shamed, different and isolated, she added.

Ms Lim said: "Now, I realise there was never a need to be ashamed of my condition. There is nothing wrong with being a diabetic.

"You need to fully accept who you are to be truly happy."

Type 1 diabetes commonly occurs in childhood and adolescence, but can occur at any age.

Type 2 increases with age, obesity and lack of physical activity, according to the Ministry of Health.