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**THE TEAM**

**Editor-at-large**

Lim Bee Ling

**Editorial Advisor**

Janet Low

**Copy Editors**

Alvina Soh

Jaime Kwek

**Editorial & Design**

Bold Ink Media Pte Ltd



**ON THE COVER**

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# Making Time For Things that Matter

For Dr Melissa Teo, Surgical Oncologist at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital, giving her patients the best possible chance to live life to the fullest is all the inspiration she needs.

For Dr Melissa Teo, having a nurse in her family gave her an early glimpse into the world of healthcare.

“My mom was with a cardiothoracic group, and during my primary 5 school holidays, I asked if I could go and watch a surgery,” recalled Dr Teo fondly. “I got hooked on it, standing there to watch for five or six hours. After that, every holiday I wanted to go back.”

“Eventually, I made my mom bring instruments home, and I started stitching chicken skins at the age of 12,” she laughed.

She might have known her choice of profession early on, but achieving her goals still required years of determination, hard work and family support. Dr Teo also benefitted from generous mentors who willingly offered knowledge and guidance as she advanced through her career.

Fast forward to today, Dr Teo is a General Surgeon and one of the few accredited Surgical Oncologists in Singapore, and widely respected in the region for her expertise in the management of gastrointestinal cancers, sarcomas, melanomas and peritoneal disease.

Her daily schedule sometimes includes as many as 11 surgeries, in addition to rounds at the wards. Yet, she makes it a point to use the time she spends with her patients as a chance to add a personal touch and truly connect.

Dr Teo’s relationship with patients continues far beyond the five-year post-surgery benchmark – the best indicator for long-term health and stability for successful procedures. In fact, many of her patients continue to visit and keep in touch despite being given a clean bill of health.

An example that comes to mind is a Jamaican patient who traveled across the world to seek Dr Teo’s

help. With a 32kg tumour in his abdomen, the patient had to drain his stomach daily. Requiring a complex procedure to remove his tumour, Dr Teo was worried about the patient’s long-term survival even after a successful surgery.

Almost a decade later, she happily reports that her patient is in the pink of health – with a recent photo of him dancing away at a New Year’s Eve party to prove it.

Stories like this come as no surprise. After all, Dr Teo always considers the bigger picture when it comes to her patients. Taking into account the circumstances of their lives, along with the impact that surgery could have on their families and loved ones, her aim is not just to treat, but to give all her patients hope and the promise of a new lease and quality of life.

### **Cancer Care at Parkway Pantai**

"If it's big, bad and scary, or it has a name with more than three syllables, that's when I come in," explained Dr Teo. "Cancer work isn't just prolonging survival, it's about ensuring quality of life. In advanced stages, a multi-disciplinary team is required as you can't treat with just one modality. At Parkway Pantai, you have access to many other specialists who are experts in their own discipline."

#### **MORE ABOUT THE DOCTOR**

Work for Dr Teo is very much a family affair. Her parents were actively involved in setting up her clinic at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital, where her mother regularly helps out. Even the design of her logo of a striking graphic featuring a folded scalpel that mimics a cancer-awareness ribbon was created by her brother.