

Hospital trio find homes for needy patients

■ BY JUDITH TAN

FOR one group of medical workers, rehabilitation goes beyond the hospital.

They also find homes for patients after they are discharged. Medical social worker Grace Tan, 29; physiotherapist Pauline Koh, 24; and nurse Ye Tun Thaug, 41, have re-housed about 50 destitute patients from the Ang Mo Kio-Thye Hua Kwan Hospital (AMK-THKH) in private- and public-assisted homes in the past year.

This, outside of already long working hours getting patients at the hospital well enough for independent living.

"Call it our calling," said Ms Tan, who has been a medical social worker with the hospital for the last two years.

She chose to get her degree in the field after she was touched by a hospital social worker when her own mother was ill in 2004.

Ms Tan was so inspired by the social worker's dedication and genuine nature that she made a career switch from church pastoral care to her present job.

She even opted to work at AMK-THKH so she could focus on long-term care of patients. Working with a similar dedication now, she says, "is my way of paying it forward".

Most recently, the team worked over the Christmas period to get a place at a shelter for Mr Teo Boon Wah, 65.

He had been living with a friend since he stopped working about six years ago. Last year, he fell and fractured his hip.

The injury was so serious that Mr Teo had to spend about six months at AMK-THKH for treatment and rehabilitation - "much longer than the average one month", Ms Tan said.

After his discharge, he needed constant care, which his friend could not provide.

The trio of medical workers sprang into action, even dipping into their own pockets for Mr Teo's admission fees. This, on top of subsidies he was already getting at AMK-THKH.

"Sometimes we help by paying be-



Going beyond the call of duty, (from left) Mr Ye, Ms Koh and Ms Tan have re-housed about 50 destitute patients from AMK-THKH in the past year. They sometimes have to dip into their own pockets, but the joy of helping others is reward enough. ST PHOTO: SAMUEL HE

tween \$100 and \$300 out of our own pockets. Some families pay us back," Ms Tan said, admitting that at other times, they do not get the money back.

But the rewards of helping people come in other forms.

Ms Koh, who got into the physiotherapy profession because she feels "fulfilled whenever a patient becomes healthy enough to go back to the community", is moved by her patients.

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FULFILLING JOB

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Physiotherapist Pauline Koh, on how fulfilling it is to see a patient she has helped become healthy enough to return to the community

But there are downsides as well. Dealing with the frustrations of patients - many of whom are at their wits' end when they have no means of providing for themselves - is something that Mr Ye has to cope with.

The nurse from Myanmar says he understands their pain, and even lets them vent their frustration on him. The end result is worth it, he adds.

"To see someone like Mr Teo happy and comfortable at a home, where he will be taken care of and have his meals provided for, is enough."