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Empowered to reach out to cancer patients

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Tan thanking Dr Ng for helping him through his ordeal.

KUALA LUMPUR: When lorry driver Tan Chu Tea, 53, found blood in his stools two years ago, he was unsure what to make of it.

"I didn't feel any pain or discomfort but there was blood.

"I was worried and didn't know what to do," said Tan who lives with his family in Selayang.

Luckily for Tan, non-governmental organisation The Cancer Advocacy Society of Malaysia (Empowered) was carrying out a colorectal cancer screening exercise near his neighbourhood at that time.

"My village head advised me to attend the screening and when the Empowered people detected irregularities, they made arrangements for me to go to the Selayang Hospital," said the father of six.

At the hospital, Tan was found to have second stage colon cancer and what ensued was a surgical procedure and 30 sessions of chemotherapy.

"I was devastated and felt at a loss but volunteers from Empowered made all the necessary arrangements and were there with me throughout my ordeal.

"Empowered also paid for my treatments," said Tan.

Empowered president and [founder Dr Christina Ng](#) said the organisation's sole agenda was to save lives and help colon cancer patients go through their entire journey from the initial screening right up to subsequent treatment, counselling and follow-ups.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2013/5/22/nation/13135812&sec=nation>

Dr Ng, who is an oncologist, said that when screening indicates abnormalities, a referral is obtained from the government health clinics and the person is taken to the Selayang Hospital.

Empowered volunteers, mostly medical students, handle everything and accompany the patients to all the hospital appointments and treatment sessions.

The volunteers also keep tabs of follow-ups and go to the patients' homes to remind them of their treatment schedules.

"They don't come to us, we go to them," said Dr Ng when met at the organisation's community outreach programme recently.

She said they have regular screening exercises in residential areas where low income families live.

Dr Ng said she decided to set up Empowered after realising that the lower income group needed help to go through the entire treatment process.

"It was during my tenure with the Universiti Malaya Medical Centre that I realised the need for us to go into the community to organise early detection exercises as well as guide and support patients throughout their treatment," she said.

Dr Ng explained that Empowered collaborated with a team of specialists to ensure that subsequent treatment after screening such as colonoscopy and cancer treatments are effectively administered.

For details please visit www.empowered.org.my.