

No Mitral Matter

“Get yourself checked if you experience any symptoms. Early diagnosis and treatment will prevent other complications and diseases.”

SHAMSIAH WAN ALI, at 68 years of age, a homemaker, spends most of her days outdoors gardening, babysitting her grandchildren, and taking walks in the park.

This was not the case 14 years ago in 2006 when she first began experiencing symptoms of a disease that we never hope to have, a heart failure.



INITIAL SYMPTOMS. It was about 16 years ago when Shamsiah experienced shortness of breath and was sweating profusely. She could no longer take long walks in the park, and simple household chores became a real chore. The symptoms started to worsen as she began to vomit. Her body became weak after a lot of fluid loss. After admitting to a private hospital and one angiogram, and an ECHO later, it was suspected heart failure. At the time, it was not severe so she was put on a blood-thinning medication, Warfarin.

THE TURNING POINT. Shamsiah was treated in a private hospital for several years before she transferred to a government hospital. After a couple of years of getting treatment in Serdang Hospital, they noticed her mitral valves were no longer working well and needed surgery. Shamsiah got referred to Dato' Seri Dr. Jeffrey Jeswant, at the National Heart Institute (IJN). After the angiogram and ECHO tests, it was a confirmed diagnosis of a leaky mitral valve. He was careful to explain the procedure and what he would do to repair it. Due to the severity of the damaged mitral valve, a replacement was the only option. There are many considerations to make when it comes to choosing a mechanical or tissue valve. Age, health, lifestyle, and diet are just one of the many factors the medical team takes into consideration when assessing a patient. After explaining the options to her, he reassures Shamsiah that the open-heart surgery will be the best option for her, and given her circumstances and overall good health, she was a good candidate.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS. When the diagnosis was confirmed a leaky mitral valve, Shamsiah was still in a little shock. It was foreign to her because no one in her family has had valvular heart disease

(VHD) or any heart diseases. The fear of a stroke and many other heart complications that came with an untreated leaky valve pushed her to consider surgery. Shamsiah was grateful to have a supporting family and a loving husband who helped her decide to have the surgery.

NOTHING TO WORRY. After the valve replacement surgery, Shamsiah walked around the ICU without experiencing any shortness of breath or exhaustion. It was like a brand new heart. "The difference is like night and day, I don't feel tired at all," she recalls. Adding on, "Dato' Dr. Jeswant even sent me the video of the procedure of him fixing and replacing my valve. That was pretty amazing to watch." Shamsiah was kept under observation in the ICU for 24 hours. She was later transferred to the ward and subsequently discharged within the week.

LIVING FOR TODAY. Shamsiah has returned to normal daily activities of walking around the park and babysitting her grandchildren. As she was already on a Warfarin diet before the surgery, she is more careful in what she eats but still finds it hard to resist good Malaysian food. She leaves us with advice, "Get yourself checked if you experience any symptoms. Early diagnosis and treatment will prevent other complications and diseases."

