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## From the Editors

For the first newsletter of 2024, we would like to share with you a quote from the Dalai Lama, which resonates the compassionate acts of our volunteer visitors. *"If you practice compassion, whether you believe in a religion or not, you will come to realize the value of compassion for your own peace of mind. The very atmosphere of your own life becomes happier, which promotes good health, perhaps even a longer life. By developing a warm heart, we can also transform others. As we become nicer human beings, our neighbours, friends, parents, spouses, and children experience less anger. They will become more warm-hearted, compassionate, and harmonious. You will see the world around you change little by little. Even a small act of compassion grants meaning and purpose to our lives."* Isn't that very true.

### Volunteer Spotlight – Jackie YANG & Michael Dong

This issue, we will shine a spotlight on two of our exceptional volunteers. Jackie & Michael share with us how they gradually involved the whole family to volunteer for older people. Read their story on Page 2 and 3.

### Good Oral Health

Do you know that the health of your mouth mirrors the condition of your body? Oral health can affect both your physical and emotional well-being as it can impact upon appearance, interpersonal relations, diet, nutrition and speech. A disease of the mouth can affect the rest of the body and is a contributing factor to a number of secondary conditions. Learn more on page 4 and test your oral health knowledge on page 5.

### Be Medicine Wise

These days, we use more medicines, supplements and herbal therapies than ever, to treat various conditions including chronic diseases, strengthen bones, lift depression, ease pain, cure infections and reduce fever. It is therefore important for us to know the possible side effects of those medicines and supplements and know how to use them safely. Page 6 provides some useful tips on how to use medicines wisely.

### The new Aged Care Act

The first recommendation of the *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report* was a new Aged Care Act, specifically a rights-based Act. The Commission noted the importance of supported decision making to ensure people have control and choice over their own life and care. *"Older persons should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of their lives."*

The new Aged Care Act will introduce a Statement of Rights, outlining the rights that older people in the aged care system should expect when seeking or accessing Government-funded aged care services.

There are upcoming changes to aged care services. The aim is to help ensure that older people and their needs are, and remain, at the centre of the new system.

### Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

The Older Persons Advocacy Network is a national body who aims to help people to work through issues with aged care.

It comprises of nine state and territory members organizations. The network members offer free, independent and confidential support and information to older people seeking or already using Australian Government-funded aged care services across the nation, along with their families and carers. They can give you the advice to find the right aged care services, help you understand and exercise your rights and stay connected to the people you care about. If you require assistance and support, call them for a free and confidential chat on 1800 700 600.

The ACVVS team wishes you and your family a wonderful start to 2024! Keep well and positive and have a happy mind!

Valerie CHU & Jeannie TAM



# “A Journey of Compassion: Volunteering in Nursing Homes”

By Jackie YANG

Shortly after immigrating to Australia in 2016 to join my husband who was already working in Sydney, I became desperately homesick. I felt very lonely and isolated especially when I was left on my own while my husband was at work. I missed my grandparents, my parents, my friends, my job and my lifestyle. I was thinking how my grandparents might have felt if they were here. After some thought, I decided to seek out a volunteer position in aged care, specifically to connect with elderly Chinese individuals. With my husband Michael's help, I applied for a position with the CVS (now ACVVS).

My first visit to an aged care facility was in May 2017, just a year after arriving in Australia. I vividly remember meeting an 82-year-old lady who spoke very little English and was struggling to communicate with the staff. I could sympathize with the challenges she was facing in communicating her needs on a daily basis. Fortunately, I was able to converse with her in Mandarin and share with her news from her hometown, which brought her immense joy. Our friendship blossomed. Encouraged by the positive outcome, I later visited an additional elderly gentleman from Shanghai who spoke primarily Shanghaiese. Although I do not speak the dialect, I found ways to communicate with him, such as reading Chinese newspapers together which he greatly appreciated.

Sadly, after a year, I had to bid farewell to my friends at the nursing home as we had moved to another suburb far away from the Home. But I was excited to build new relationships with another aged care home resident. Thankfully, my previous visiting experience had enabled me to

establish a connection more swiftly, and I soon settled into a routine of regular visits with my new friend.

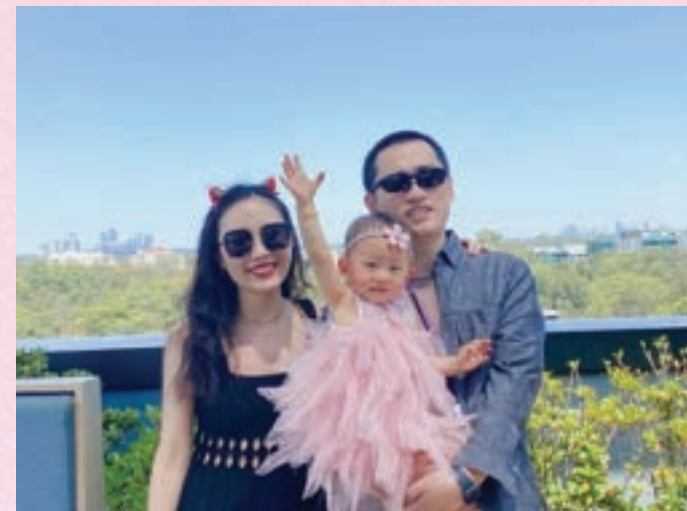
As a dental student, I often reflect on the communication skills I've honed through my ACVVS journey, finding them invaluable not only in aged care but also in my interactions with public patients during my placements. Understanding their needs and barriers better allows me to build trust more effectively.

The pandemic has hit us very badly in the past few years. I was unable to physically visit my friend in the nursing home. I could only send her message cards or talk to her over the phone. I missed her so much that I decided to window-visit her. The first time seeing her again through the window glass and chatting to me via a mobile phone overwhelmed me with mixed emotions. It was quite an experience!



*Jackie 'window-visiting' her friend*

Towards the end of the pandemic, our daughter, Jiaji, came to the world, and I became a new mum. I wasted no time in involving her in visiting my friend through window visits. Undoubtedly, my friend was overjoyed to see my baby girl.



On occasion, my husband would drive me to the facility for visiting my elderly friends. I have been encouraging him to consider joining the ACVVS to engage

with more elderly individuals together. I believe sharing our warmth and friendship as a family, with our elderly friends is immensely rewarding. With the addition of a new family member and a bit of persistence, Michael has finally joined the ACVVS family. And now, we can visit the elderly friends together as a family.

I am deeply grateful to ACVVS for enriching my life and that of my family, and broadening my perspectives on life and family dynamics, particularly in today's digital age. These experiences are invaluable and offer me a profound sense of peace and fulfilment.

## VOLUNTEERING BECOMES A FAMILY AFFAIR

By Michael DONG

My name is Michael, and I am one of the latest additions to the ACVVS family.

Since my wife, Jackie, started visiting an elderly person in a nursing home, I was inspired by her dedication to bringing joy and happiness to her friend. Throughout the eight years of visiting, I often drove her to the nursing home and helped her deliver message cards to her friend during the pandemic.

Our little girl was born during the pandemic. Jackie was keen to share the joy with her friend at the nursing home. She brought the whole family to 'window-visit' the lady and FaceTime with her. She thoroughly enjoyed spending time with us.

Seeing such positive response from her elderly friend, I decided to join the Scheme as well. Initially, I was struggling to find conversation topics to communicate with my elderly friend. I attempted to uncover common interests but eventually realized that engaging in general conversation was enough. Through this approach, we naturally stumbled upon shared interests without prior preparation. This newfound confidence has made my visits a very rewarding experience.

Overall, I find immense enjoyment in those visits as they offer a sense of tranquillity and rejuvenation after a busy day of work.



# Oral Health

Source: [slhd.health.nsw.gov.au](http://slhd.health.nsw.gov.au)



Do you know oral health is a key indicator of overall health, well-being and quality of life.

Oral health refers to the health of your:

- Teeth
- Gums
- Lips
- Tongue
- Muscles and bones in the mouth
- Dentures

## The connection between Oral Health and overall Health

Taking care of your oral health goes beyond just having a bright smile and fresh breath. Research has shown a clear link between gum disease and various chronic conditions.

Studies have found that gum disease is associated with an increased risk of developing chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory infections, and even certain types of cancer.



Poor oral hygiene can lead to the accumulation of bacteria in your mouth, particularly in the gums. These bacteria can then enter your bloodstream and travel to other parts of your body, causing inflammation throughout the body, including the arteries, leading to the narrowing and hardening of blood vessels. This can restrict blood flow to the heart and increase the risk of a heart attack or stroke.

The overgrowth of bacteria in your mouth can also be inhaled into your lungs and cause respiratory infections such as pneumonia. The bacteria can travel through the respiratory tract and reach the lungs, where they can cause inflammation and infection.

## The importance of good Oral Hygiene Practices

Practicing good oral hygiene is essential for maintaining healthy teeth and gums.



It involves:

- **regular routine of brushing your teeth and flossing** – to remove plaque and food particles that may be trapped between your teeth and along the gumline. The build-up of plaque can eventually harden into tartar and cause gum disease.
- **regular dental check-ups** - Your dentist can provide a professional teeth cleaning and detect any issues early on and provide appropriate treatment before they worsen.
- **Balance diet** – Consuming a variety of nutrient-rich foods can help support healthy teeth and gums. Foods rich in calcium, such as dairy products and leafy greens, contribute to strong teeth and bones. Vitamin-rich foods, particularly vitamin C, can help support healthy gum tissue.
- **Limiting sugar intake** – when sugary foods and drink are consumed, the bacteria in your mouth feed on the sugars and produce acid as a byproduct that can attack the enamel of your teeth, leading to tooth decay and cavities.

# Oral Health Quiz



DENTAL HEALTH

How many teeth do adults have?

32

What is the main cause for tooth decay and gum disease?

Germs or bacteria commonly known as plaque. When germs are not removed everyday by brushing and they start to grow in large numbers and cause tooth decay and gum disease.

True or False: Having dry mouth does not affect the teeth?

False.

Dry mouth also known as Xerostomia is when there is not enough saliva in the mouth. It causes difficulty in swallowing, in speech, in wearing denture, pain and soreness in the mouth and tooth decay. Most common causes of dry mouth are not drinking enough water, medicines, diabetes and health conditions (cancer treatment, Sjogrens disease).

What type of brush should one use for brushing (soft, medium or hard)?

A soft or medium brush is recommended. If the brush is very soft, then they do not remove the germs completely. If the brush is very hard it can damage the tooth surface and cause tooth sensitivity.

What is the role of the toothpaste?

Toothpaste contain fluoride and fluoride helps to repair the tooth under 'acid attack' by germs. Adults need only a pea size amount of toothpaste and children 5 years or younger need a rice grain (or a smear) of toothpaste for cleaning the teeth. Spit out all the toothpaste after brushing but do not rinse the mouth with water. This allows the remaining fluoride to help harden the teeth. Do not eat or have any sugary drinks for at least half an hour after brushing.

How often should one brush and when?

Brush your teeth twice a day. In the morning (after breakfast) and at night (before going to bed).

How long should one brush for?

Brush for 2-3 minutes. Brushing for more than 2-3 minutes can damage the teeth and cause sensitivity.

What are the two best drinks for your teeth?

Water and plain milk.

Tap water has fluoride which helps to harden the teeth.

Plain milk is rich in calcium and is very refreshing. They are the only two drinks that are not acidic.

True or False: Sugar free or diet drinks can damage your teeth?

True.

Sugar free or diet drinks may not have sugar, but they are acidic and can damage the outer layer of the teeth (Enamel) and cause tooth sensitivity. When consuming acidic drinks (like juice, soda, wine and other alcoholic drinks), do not sip them over a long period of time as that can be more damaging.

True or False: Bad breath is a sign of gum disease?

True.

When teeth and gums are not cleaned every day, germs / plaque build-up along the gum line making the gums red and puffy, and causing bad breath.



# Be Medicine Wise

Medicines can treat health problems and help you live a healthier life. When used incorrectly, medicines can cause serious health problems. Below are some tips to use medicines wisely.

## 1. TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

- Keep an up-to-date list of all medicines (prescription and over-the-counter) and dietary supplements including vitamins and herbals.
- Share the list with your health care professionals.
- Tell them about any allergies or sensitivities that you may have.
- Tell them about anything that could affect your ability to take medicines, such as difficulty swallowing or remembering to take them.
- Always ask your health care professional questions about any concerns or thoughts that you may have.

## 2. KNOW YOUR MEDICINE – Prescription and Over-the counter

- The brand and generic names.
- What they look like.
- How to store them properly.
- When, how, and how long to use them.
- How and under what conditions you should stop using them.
- What to do if you miss a dose.
- What they are supposed to do and when to expect results.
- Side effects and interactions.
- What other medicines or foods should I avoid.
- Whether you need any tests or monitoring.
- Always ask for written information to take with you.

## 3. FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

- Make sure you understand the directions; ask if you have questions or concerns.
- Always double-check that you have the right medicine.
- Keep medicines in their original labelled containers, whenever possible.
- Never combine different medicines in the same bottle.
- Read and follow the directions on the label and the directions from your doctor, pharmacist, or other health care professional.
- If you stop the medicine or want to use the medicine differently than directed, consult with your health care professional.

### Avoid Common Problems

- Don't share medicines.
- Check the expiration date on your medicine. It may not be safe or work after it has expired.

## 4. MONITOR YOUR MEDICINES' EFFECTS

- Ask whether there is anything you can do to minimise side effects, such as eating before you take a medicine to reduce stomach upset.
- Pay attention to how you are feeling; note any changes. Write down the changes so that you can remember to tell your doctor.
- Know what to do if you experience side effects and when to notify your doctor.
- Know when you should notice an improvement and when to report back.

# Tips for Successful One-on-One Visits

One-on-one visits allow visitors to develop rapport and trust with individual residents and break the isolation, which is so important in their emotional wellbeing.

## 11 Tips for Successful One-on-One Visits

### 1. Morning is Best

Schedule visits for mornings when residents are more alert. Alternatively, visit mid-afternoon after lunch and rest time.

### 2. Put Yourself in Their Shoes

Prepare yourself mentally beforehand by spending a few minutes thinking about the person; try to put yourself in their shoes and be flexible. We all have good and bad days, and so does your friend.

### 3. Eye Contact is Important

On arrival, set the right tone with a warm greeting and then sit down in front of the resident at eye level. Look your resident in the eyes and give them a hug (if it's appropriate and is expected).

### 4. Tune In to Their Needs

Dedicate time to listen attentively. Genuine, undivided attention is a precious commodity.

### 5. Take something with you

You may consider to bring along a 'helping hand' such as a magazine, newspaper and some interesting media headlines. Read out interesting articles or do a quiz together. Take cards for special occasions like Father's/Mother's Day, birthday of the resident, old photos or postcards. These props can trigger reminiscing and help start conversations.

### 6. Reduce Background Noise

Turn off the TV and radio and close the door if loud noises are coming through.

### 7. A Change of Scenery Can Be a Good Thing

If your meetings are always in the bedroom, try a change of scenery. A veranda or/if mobile garden setting are good alternatives.

### 8. Silence is not a Negative Thing

Try to learn to enjoy quiet times. Some residents get tired from a prolonged conversation.

### 9. Pay Attention to Body Language

Pay attention to your resident's body language as well as your own. If you are wringing your hands or looking at the clock, it sends a message that you don't want to be there. Be genuine, your attitude will make or break a visit. If you are not there in body and soul, they will sense it and become indifferent. On the other hand, if they are nodding off to sleep or avoiding eye contact, make an excuse and come back when the resident is more receptive.

### 10. Be Patient

If the resident has dementia, be prepared to repeat conversations as needed; look at pictures in the room and ask questions, admire clothes and hair.

### 11. Make a Life Book

This is a wonderful way of validating the life journey of your friend and remembering accomplishments. Work through it on your visits. This project can make your time together even more enjoyable and special.



## Languages our Visitors are speaking

(March 2024 Statistics)

### Language Groups

Arabic

Assyrian

Bosnian

Chinese - Cantonese

Chinese - Hokkien

Chinese - Mandarin

Chinese - Shanghainese

Chinese - Teo-Chow

Croatian

Czech

English

Filipino

French

German

Hindi

Indonesian

Italian

Japanese

Korean

Lithuanian

Macedonian

Polish

Russian

Serbian

Spanish

Tamil

Ukrainian

Vietnamese



Do you have any friends who can spare some of their time to keep older people company in residential aged care homes?

- to share stories over a cup of tea
- to work on a joint hobby
- to listen to music or enjoy videos online

We would need people who can speak a second language, in particular **Cantonese** (Canley Vale & Rosehill), **Korean** (Strathfield), **Mandarin** (Penshurst) and **Turkish** (Berala).

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