



About 100 people, including those with HIV, their friends, families and healthcare workers, gathered to light candles and silently walk the grounds of the Communicable Diseases Centre for the last time yesterday. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Last HIV candlelight memorial at CDC

Patients share experiences in yearly event at heritage site before move to nearby centre

Janice Tai
Social Affairs Correspondent

Calvin is 22 and has lived with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) for three years.

When he found out that he was infected, the then 19-year-old stayed cooped up in his room for a week. It took him a year to break the news to his close friends, and two years before he broached it with his family.

Yesterday, he shared his story and experience of living with HIV with members of the public, during a candlelight memorial at the Communicable Diseases Centre (CDC) in Moulmein Road.

According to non-profit groups which work with HIV and Aids pa-

tients, Calvin is believed to be the youngest Singaporean among the few who have publicly talked about their experience of living with HIV.

"I just want to show others that we live lives no different from them, and to encourage other people who have it who might be feeling very alone in the world," said Calvin, a freelance designer. He prefers not to disclose his full name.

Yesterday's memorial, for those living with HIV or who have died from it, was the last one to be held at the current location, as the CDC plans to move to the nearby National Centre for Infectious Diseases soon.

The CDC is a heritage site for HIV and Aids treatment in Singapore.

The first case of HIV in the coun-

try was diagnosed on May 16, 1985, and the patient was warded there.

More than 5,000 have since been treated there. Many remember its colonial British architecture of spacious single-storey blocks and pavilions amid verdant greenery.

Of the 7,548 Singapore residents reported to have HIV or Aids from 1985 to 2016, 1,888 have died.

The number of cases of HIV/Aids in Singapore has fallen.

In 2016, 408 people were diagnosed with HIV and Aids, down from 455 the previous year.

Its incidence has dropped from about 122 persons for each million people in the population in 2012 to about 103 in 2016.

Associate Professor Lee Cheng Chuan, head of the CDC's HIV programme, said the most pressing challenge regarding HIV today is the continuing stigma and discrimination. "This must end for us to end Aids," he said.

BEING ENCOURAGING

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CALVIN, on sharing his HIV story.

HIV attacks the body's immune system and acquired immune deficiency syndrome is the most severe phase of HIV infection.

There is no cure, but people with HIV are expected to have a normal lifespan if they take medication and

adhere to treatment.

Yesterday, about 100 people – including those with HIV, their friends, families and healthcare workers – gathered to light candles and silently walk the grounds of the CDC for one last time.

The memorial has been held at the CDC every year since the 1980s.

Earlier, three people living with HIV, their family members and social workers shared their experiences with the audience.

One of them, who wanted to be known only as Adrian, was diagnosed two years ago.

The 26-year-old said there are many misconceptions about the virus – like how it is transmitted by hugging or the sharing of cups and utensils. HIV is spread mainly through sexual intercourse here.

Adrian said he was dismissed as a service crew member by a food and beverage chain last year for not declaring earlier that he has HIV.

He had declared his HIV status a month after he started work, as he wanted to volunteer for a World Aids Day event.

"I was shocked and disappointed," said Adrian, who is now freelancing in events management.

"They terminated me seemingly because of my lack of honesty, but if I did declare that in my job interview, I wouldn't have known if they would hire me."

Calvin, who has had similar experiences, has also turned to freelancing. "What people say can also be very damaging."

"A friend asked me when was I going to be 'clean' again when I told her I have HIV. It hurts to be viewed as being dirty," said Calvin.

"People with HIV need all the emotional and financial support they can get."

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Police nab 38 for vice, gambling and immigration offences

Isabelle Liew

A three-day islandwide police operation which ended on Friday saw 38 people arrested – including an 80-year-old – for vice, gambling and immigration-related offences.

One woman was arrested for using criminal force against a public servant.

In total, 19 women and 19 men, aged between 21 and 80 years old,

were nabbed during the operation which was conducted in areas such as Jalan Besar, Beach Road, Telok Blangah Rise and Bendemeer Road.

On Friday, The Sunday Times accompanied plain-clothes officers from Central Police Division as they raided a crowded coffee shop in French Road, near Jalan Besar Stadium, at 7.45pm.

The officers found several men holding slips of paper in which they wrote down their bets.

The suspects were lined up – some protesting loudly – before being handcuffed, led to a police vehicle and taken away around 8.20pm.

At around 10.30pm, plain-clothes officers arrested two women at a coffee shop in Syed Alwi Road and another two at a coffee shop in Verdun Road in Farrer Park.

The Sunday Times understands that the women are Indian nationals who are in Singapore on special passes, and were allegedly soliciting at the coffee shops. They are believed to be part of a syndicate.

In all, 11 women were picked up for offences under the Women's Charter.

In a statement, police said they are believed to have been operating from hotels and rented apartments



The police raids were carried out in a three-day operation that covered areas such as Jalan Besar, Beach Road, Telok Blangah Rise and Bendemeer Road. The operation ended on Friday. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

while residing in Singapore on Employment Passes and Short Term Visit Passes, making use of their stays here to provide paid sexual services.

Fifteen men and seven women were arrested for gambling-related

offences and offences under the Remote Gambling Act. About \$2,400 in cash was seized.

The remaining four men were arrested for immigration-related offences.

In the statement, police said they

will "spare no effort and continue to clamp down on vice and criminal activities". "Those found engaging in illicit activities will be dealt with sternly in accordance with the law."

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