

# An Interview with a Man Who Recovered From Hepatocellular Carcinoma

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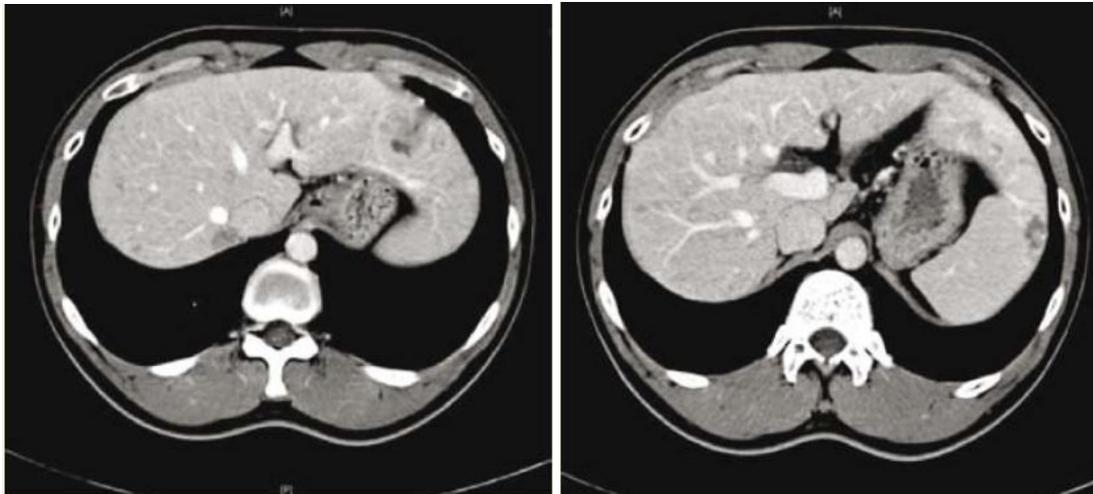
People often view cancer as a death sentence, that there is no hope beyond diagnosis. However, with various surgical and medical interventions, it is possible to receive a new lease of life despite suffering the fate of cancer. The following is an account of an interview with one such person who had recovered from his hepatocellular carcinoma.



*Mr Lee who recovered from HCC (Center) with wife (Right) and Dr Stephen Chang (Left).*

Mr Lee is a 34 years old Malaysian Chinese gentleman who leads a healthy lifestyle and had no past medical problems. He does not smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or gets involved in any form of drug abuse. However, he is a Hepatitis B carrier as it was transmitted to him congenitally during his mother's pregnancy.

Mr Lee did not know about his Hepatitis B carrier status as he felt well all along, and discovered it only by chance during a health checkup required for insurance in 2001. He did not think much about it then as he felt fine. In 2004, he repeated a health check-up and was told that his liver was in a bad condition via ultrasound scan. He was then started on lamivudine, which tolled heavily on his pocket.



By 2006, he was scheduled for a CT scan of his abdomen, which showed a small mass in his liver. His alpha fetoprotein level at that time was also raised, highly suggestive of hepatocellular carcinoma. He was recommended to seek further medical treatment in Singapore. He heeded their

advice and was hence referred to National University Hospital, Singapore. He did not worry much then as he was still asymptomatic and did not think the illness would be very serious. A repeat CT scan was performed in Singapore in January 2007 and decision was made for resection of his tumour. His doctor raised the option of a liver transplant as a cure for his HCC.

However, Mr Lee started having several worries then. First, a liver transplant is a major operation which is not without its risks. Next, the risk factor doubled as they had suggested testing his wife as a potential donor for him. Other than medical issues, financial issues were staring at him as well. A liver transplant costs at least S\$100,000. Both Mr and Mrs Lee are blue-collar workers and they have three young children to take care of in Malaysia. As a Malaysian cum Permanent Resident of Singapore, getting a medical subsidy was also another issue. Hence, with the multiple considerations and worries in mind, Mr Lee put aside the idea of a liver transplant, especially when he had still felt very healthy physically.

However, in a follow up CT scan in 8 months after his liver resection, recurrence of his liver cancer was noted. He was once again offered the option of a liver transplant, and this time, Mr Lee decided to go for it despite his multiple worries as the risk of future recurrences then dawned upon him. It was not just his own life at stake; he has a wife and 3 young children whom he cannot afford to abandon. He was then placed on the waiting list for the transplant. Meanwhile, he underwent TACE (Transjugular Arterial Chemo Embolism) while waiting for a suitable donor.



Fortunately, in December 2007, a suitable donor was found. Mr Lee was very confident and optimistic about the whole operation then as previous doctors from Malaysia told him the success rate for liver transplant is 75%, while his surgeon had mentioned that the success rate was about 80% for his situation. He was thus given the confidence that he was in good hands. Financially, he obtained the assistance of a medical social worker, who managed to obtain a subsidy for his medical fees.

Mr Lee recovered well after the transplant and is now walking around like any other person in the streets. He feels very fortunate and lucky that he is able to recover from what is deemed to be a terminal illness.