



SIWEC INSIGHT

SEPTEMBER 2018



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Volunteers from the Sikh Welfare Council and Central Sikh Gurdwara Board collaborated with ACE Seniors and Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) to celebrate National Day with our neighbours – the residents of Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital.



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FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK

Value our Seniors

*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa
Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.*

You will find in this issue of our newsletter stories of active seniors who regularly participate in our senior citizen-focused Sunehri Saheliaan and Sunehray Pal activities.

The same group of ardent young-at-heart volunteers from SIWEC who runs our seniors' groups have also engaged seniors residing at the Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital during the recent National Day celebrations.

In this issue, we also feature another volunteer, Orthopaedic Specialist Dr Gurpal Singh, who takes formal leave from work to reach out to our seniors through health talks as well as a monthly clinic at the Central Sikh Gurdwara premises.

While we are grateful for the many active seniors in our midst, we should also take heed of vulnerable seniors who are less mobile and ailing in health.

Besides all our programmes that reach out to seniors in our community, we always ask ourselves if there is more that we could do to help.

Recently released findings by non-profit suicide prevention centre Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) showed that the number of elderly people aged 60 and above who took their own lives in 2017 increased to 129, up from the 123 cases in 2016.

According to SOS, 23% of the calls made to its 24-hour hotline service last year were by those aged 60 and above.

The common issues highlighted by these callers include the fear of becoming a burden to family and friends, as well as the difficulties faced in coping with their worsening physical or mental health.

These factors could cause some elderly, especially those who are socially isolated, to suffer from depression and entertain suicidal thoughts.

This prompted a spate of readers' letters advocating better support to vulnerable seniors in our community to prevent them from considering suicide. One of the letters even suggested legalising euthanasia or assisted suicide by doctors.

One forum letter writer (*Straits Times 11 Aug, Are elderly lives worth less than others?*) lamented: “when people who are not elderly want to commit suicide, we try to talk them out of it, but when an elderly person wants to commit suicide, we focus on how to make that possible”.

Arguments in favour of assisted dying for the elderly are rooted in the belief that their lives are not worth as much as other people's.

Such a belief devalues the elderly, gives them less protection from their suicidal desires than others, and could also open the door for elder abuse. In the worst case scenario, the elderly person may be pressured to end his life prematurely so that he can stop being a burden to his family, or because someone has something to gain, whether financially or emotionally, from his death.

We at SIWEC unequivocally support the view that all conversations on the well-being of our seniors must move away from how to make suicide possible for elderly people, and instead focus on how to make their lives full of purpose and meaning.

We believe that our community needs to devote more attention to communicating with our elders to ensure they remain psycho-emotionally stable. Doing so keeps them engaged and less isolated as they live their final years, when they may be confronting illness, physical frailty, loss of mobility and emotional isolation.

Family and community support, as well as Sikh spirituality, can be vital pillars in our endeavour to better support our seniors and prepare our families and seniors to embrace death with clarity and positive spirit of Chardi-kala!

The Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a rich resource that helps families and individuals prepare for end-of-life care and embrace passing from this existence as part of Guruji's will. We are grateful that a kind family has contributed personal reflections on their bereavement experience for this issue of Insight.

On a related note, SIWEC members are extremely sensitive and careful when dealing with family bereavements within the community. SIWEC assists with about 80-100 bereavements per year, with about 75% being for our seniors above 60 years of age. We are very grateful to our devoted volunteers who help out with bathing the



deceased, driving the hearse and assisting with cremations in order to help families manage funeral proceedings in accordance with Sikh practices (Sikh Rehat Maryada).

While end-of-life care and death are difficult issues to experience, prepare for and cope with emotionally, SIWEC is indebted to all our volunteers whose devoted seva and unstinting support to bereaved families is commendable.

Beyond providing updates on our programmes and activities, I trust you will find this issue of SIWEC Insight thought-provoking. We hope that our focus on valuing our seniors in their final years and on dealing with bereavement will generate reflection and help to initiate thoughtful conversations on these issues.

In Guru Ji's Seva

Gurdip Singh Usma

Chairman, Sikh Welfare Council

Eldercare Group Activities - Sunehri Saheliaan and Sunehray Pal

The Eldercare Programme has two components. Sunehri Saheliaan is held at Central Sikh Gurdwara on Tuesdays while Sunehray Pal is held at Silat Road Gurdwara on Wednesdays. The programme is organised by our team of dedicated volunteers and held over three terms per calendar year. This year, the programme saw its highest enrolment ever – 174 participants in total!

The sessions typically commenced with light exercises for about an hour. This is usually followed either by talks, film screenings, or hands-on activities such as arts and crafts, games, or healthy cooking sessions.

We also aim to organise one outing every term although these require more coordination and logistics planning. These outings have proven to be a hit with our members as most of them would otherwise been unable to visit places such as the MediaCorp studios, Gardens by the Bay, Sikh Gurdwaras in Malaysia, experience dragon-boating, discover the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore's Maritime Trail, and many more.



The second term in 2018 for both Sunehri Saheliaan and Sunehray Pal, comprising 12 weeks of fun-filled activities, was conducted from 8 May until 31 Jul 2018.



Keeping the body & mind active through exercise, yoga, meditation and stimulating games.



The photo montage across these pages recalls the fun our seniors had while connecting, learning and spending meaningful time among friends.



Trip to Singapore Discovery Centre on 31 July 2018 with 25 seniors!



The third term of 13 weeks commenced on 28 August 2018 and will last until 21 November 2018.



Collaboration with Kallang Community Centre for a games & drumming session on 17 July 2018.



A conversation with Dr Gurpal Singh,

who runs an Orthopaedic Clinic for seniors and conducts regular talks at Central Sikh, Silat Road, Khalsa Dharmak Sabha and Yishun gurdwaras.



What was your motivation in starting the Orthopaedic clinic at Central Sikh Temple? What inspired you to devote your personal professional time to this programme?

Prior to 2016 I had been involved in giving talks occasionally at community centres. I had always yearned to reach out to elders in the community in a more focused and sustained manner. I noted that there was a dearth of understanding about arthritis and bone health; perhaps these conditions are lesser known and therefore not taken as seriously as chronic illnesses like diabetes or hypertension, which are better known for their impact on kidney and heart disease.

My sense is that arthritis is actually an epidemic that does not get the attention it deserves. Research indicates that in a minority of patients, joint pain may be due to more sinister causes such as an infection, or bone cancer. The symptoms may be similar to arthritis. Early intervention to properly diagnose and manage arthritis among our seniors is vital to altering the course of further decline and enhancing the quality of life of seniors. I find that many of our seniors tend to live with arthritic pain, with many families accepting it as an inevitable part of physical decline due to age. In fact, there are seniors in wheelchairs whom I have treated, who should not have been confined to wheelchairs had their condition been diagnosed and managed early.

Please elaborate on how your clinic got started, how it works, and how it serves Sikh seniors.

It's quite serendipitous how things all fell into place soon after I shared my desire to do something practical yet impactful for the Sikh community. I was contacted by the team of lady volunteers who run Sunehri Saheliaan & Sunehray Pal, who invited me to deliver awareness talks on bone health and arthritis at Central Sikh Temple and Silat Road for members of Sunehri Saheliaan and Sunehray Pal. Many of the seniors who attended appreciated hearing about the condition and its management, explained and simplified in Punjabi for them to easily understand.

Dr Gurpal Singh is an Orthopaedic surgeon sub-specialising in bone and soft tissue tumours, and complex joint replacement of the hip and knee. He was awarded the Ministry of Health Scholarship for advanced specialty training. He was in Germany for two years to work with world leaders in Musculoskeletal Oncology and Hip and Knee Surgery. He completed two fellowships in complex joint replacement/hip and knee surgery and musculoskeletal oncology at the Otto-von-Guericke University, Magdeburg, and at University Hospital Muenster. Dr Gurpal has a special interest in new technologies in joint replacement surgery and pioneered robotic-assisted hip replacement surgery in Singapore. He led a team of orthopaedic surgeons to successfully perform the first two cases of robotic assisted hip replacement surgery in December 2016 and January 2017.

I now set aside a couple of Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons every month, when I'm on leave from my work, to run the consultation sessions at either of the three Gurdwaras.

The team that coordinates these clinics are the dynamic volunteers who run Sunehri Saheliaan & Sunehray Pal. The team of volunteers is so dedicated and has been such a blessing. They do the outreach to identify seniors with aches and pains, and urge them to turn up for the clinics at one of the Gurdwaras. They also take notes and arrange for the seniors to get X-rays done at the clinic next door to Central Sikh Temple. I review these X-Rays at their next consultation.

How have the clinics made significant impact?

In most of the cases I've seen, I prescribe relevant exercises and urge them to remain active as far as possible. There are at least five to six serious cases that I've followed-up and treated at the Orthopaedic Specialist Clinic, including seeing them through to surgery and rehabilitation. They are all doing rather well now.

What's been the most fulfilling aspect of volunteering your time in this way?

Honestly, I derive a high degree of fulfillment from running these community clinics outside of the hospital environment. The cases I highlighted are examples of when I've had the opportunity to make a difference in enhancing the quality of life of people who had been suffering pains prior to their appropriate diagnosis and treatment. None of this would have been possible without Guruji's blessings. To be able to do this seva is a huge blessing by itself.

Do you have any suggestions on how more Sikh healthcare professionals can come together to impact seniors in our community?

I am considering forming a group of like-minded doctors and nurses who've indicated an interest to be involved in community outreach work beyond the hospital setting. I look forward to realising that, hopefully in the not too distant future.



SIWEC's Bereavement Service

The initial period after losing a family member or a dear friend is a painful one. SIWEC offers a service that will help you tide through this difficult time.

We have a 24-hour hotline manned by a welfare officer, whom you can call at 62999234. SIWEC also maintains a hearse for members of the Sikh community to use during bereavements.

Our staff members provide the bereaved family with social, emotional, spiritual and financial support (if required). During the time of bereavement, the SIWEC representative will assist the family on cremation arrangements, provide guidance on its ceremonial aspects, and clarify any doubts regarding conduct of the final rites for the deceased.

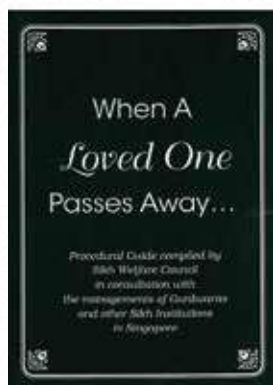


SIWEC volunteer Surinder Singh, who has been performing bereavement seva since 2009.

SIWEC staff would normally invite family member(s) to our office at Level 6 of Central Sikh Temple to go through the arrangements. Two reference documents are given to the family:

- (i) A detailed checklist; and
- (ii) A procedural guide book on bereavements.

Both are available for download at <http://siwec.org/downloads/bereavement-downloads>



In the event that the family is unable to meet at the SIWEC office, our welfare officer will advise the family via phone (with reference to the checklist) on the details of body washing or embalming arrangements, cremation slot bookings, placement of obituary notices, coffin and hearse bookings, transport arrangements and items to be bought for the funeral.

Our staff will also arrange to contact our volunteers to assist with driving the hearse, facilitate the body-washing process at the mortuary, and make arrangements for the cremation service at Mandai crematorium.

The family is normally urged to themselves coordinate with the available Sikh priests at their affiliated Gurdwara on timings for transport to the cremation at Mandai, and for remains collection and ash disposal the following morning.

Mr Ranjit Singh, Manager of SIWEC, reflects that: “We try to set the families’ minds at ease by providing a comprehensive checklist with contact numbers and addresses of all the agencies or suppliers of materials required for a Sikh funeral. In cases where the family has few people to perform the body washing, we mobilise our staff and volunteers to assist.”

SIWEC also helps to advise employers and families of Sikhs who pass away while working or visiting Singapore. Mr Ranjit elaborates: “In such instances, SIWEC helps to coordinate with casket companies for repatriations as only they are authorised to obtain a permit to send the remains out from Singapore, or to receive remains returned from overseas.”

SIWEC also provides bereavement support to all Sikhs, including converts. However, documentary proof of conversion, such as showing that Singh or Kaur is reflected in their names on their NRIC, is required.

Mr Ranjit adds: “We have had instances where families requested for funerals to be done by Sikhi rites where the deceased had undergone the Amrit ceremony but had not subsequently made the name change to include the Sikh name. This led to a delay in the cremation as well as added cost and anguish to the family.”

Funerals are sombre affairs and often difficult times for the bereaved family. We are truly indebted to our dedicated volunteers who have stepped forward to offer their selfless seva when a beloved fellow Sikh passes away. We have included below a couple of messages of gratitude from families we have assisted during recent bereavements.

THANK-YOU NOTES FROM APPRECIATIVE FAMILIES:

“Thank you so much for your help and advice with my grandma’s passing.

“Today, I experienced first-hand how thoughtful the bereavement team of SIWEC is!

“Thanks Jaspreet for attending the call sensitively and guiding with the documentation requirement.

“Appreciate your help, Baldev, to meet our family’s needs and expediting the whole process as per my father-in-law’s wishes.

When a Loved One Passes Away

Editor's Note: We interviewed a Sikh family who had recently lost a loved one. We respect their wish to remain anonymous and are grateful for their willingness to share.

How prepared was the whole family for your loved one's passing?

In my observation, death is still invariably a taboo subject in the Sikh community and is rarely discussed openly. Even though the younger generation may be open to broaching the topic, out of respect for the elders, the topic is seldom addressed and discussed for and with one's own parents. However, my father-in-law had not only given it thought but also penned it down and shared it when he was in his 60s. He got the family together and shared with them details of how he would want his funeral arrangements done, suggesting who he wanted to be involved, along with their contact numbers, and specifying details of other matters relating to the Sikh funeral rites. The topic of death wasn't discussed frequently but my father-in-law's wishes on the arrangements were expressed clearly to the family members. This minimised confusion when the time came.

ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਮ੍ਹਾਲਿਹ ਪੰਥੁ ਨਿਹਾਲਿਹ ਅਸਾ ਭਿ ਓਥੈ ਜਾਣਾ ॥

Saahib Samhaalih Panthh Nihaalih Asaa Bh Outhhai Jaanaa ||

Let us remember the Lord and Master in contemplation and keep a watchful eye on the Path. We shall have to go there as well.

How did you go about fulfilling your loved one's wishes on funeral arrangements including the post-cremation prayers?

When my father-in-law passed away, we all experienced a sense of deep loss. However, the family's grief was relieved somewhat as we had a 'roadmap' to follow, in accordance with his expressed wishes.

We called SIWEC for assistance. Close friends and relatives were informed. It was my father-in-law's wish to be cremated the same day if possible, and we were able to fulfil his instructions. Post-cremation Paath (prayers) was done by the family members and close friends in the form of Sehaj Paath in the Gurdwara sahib.

Did you face any confusion concerning what is essential for funerals in accordance with Sikh Maryada?

Being a learned Sikh, my father-in-law was well acquainted with the Sikh Maryada and had desired to strictly adhere to it, thereby doing away with insignificant ceremonial rituals. Despite that, a relative insisted on buying ghee while another well-meaning relative insisted on buying flowers for the pre-cremation proceedings.

What helped your family deal with their grief after your father-in-law's passing?

The fact that family members and friends did Sehaj Paath

together made a difference. A sense of comfort came from reading and understanding the Bani and reflecting on the significance of Guruji's message even as we struggled with our raw emotions after a close family member's passing.

ਅੰਤੋ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਬੋਲਿਆ ਮੈ ਪਿਛੈ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਕਰਿਅਹੁ ਨਿਰਬਾਣੁ ਜੀਉ ॥

Anthae Sathigur Boliaa Mai Pishhai Keerathan Kariahu Nirabaan Jeeo ||

Finally, the True Guru said: "When I am gone, sing Kirtan in Praise of the Lord, in Nirvaanaa."

The Gianiji and members of the gurdwara jatha were at hand, guiding and speaking to us. This provided us a sense of solace too. In addition, the mental preparedness of what to do in accepting Waheguru's will made coping with the departure of the senior member of the family easier to eventually embrace.

What have you learnt most from the experience; both individually and as a family?

Death is inevitable. Yet, family members will naturally be in a quandary immediately after the loss of a loved one. As Sikhs, we are called to accept that it is Waheguru's will – sukh dukh sam kar jaaneeye. Personally, we acknowledge that it is best to be proactive in preparing for a death in the family, openly discussing the way one would like to be sent 'Home'. Setting one's wishes in order helps to 'uncomplicate' the funeral procedure and gives the bereaved family a sense of 'one issue less to worry about'.

Such clarity helps unify and comfort the family at the time when all family members are handling their individual emotions.

There are many traditions and rituals associated with funeral arrangements which have come about with time. When a family is unfamiliar with Sikh Maryada guidelines, confusion results when well-meaning relatives insist on performing insignificant rituals. Some families give in when differing views arise on what is essential, performing ceremonies which are not in compliance with the pragmatism and simplicity espoused in Sikhi.

What advice would you offer to Sikh families who may be at a loss as to what to do when a loved one passes on?

However forbidden the subject of death may be, a discussion about it when one is still alive makes it easier for the whole family. In addition, the remaining members of the family are reassured that all that is being done is as per the wishes of the loved one, irrespective of what the social pressures may be from other relatives to perform certain rituals.



National Day Celebrations!

Volunteers and members of Sunehri Saheliaan and Sunehray Pal celebrated National Day at Central Sikh Gurdwara on 9 August 2018 from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm. The langar hall was abuzz with exciting activities, games, and cake-cutting. A total of 200 fun-packs were given out to our beloved seniors!

On 17 August, SIWEC volunteers and members of Central Sikh Gurdwara (CST) joined volunteers from ACE Seniors and SIT to co-host a National Day celebration and bring cheer to our neighbours across Towner Road – the seniors residing at Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital.

Besides performing a Giddha and Bhangra dance, volunteers from the Sikh community also hosted two booths: water colouring and henna. The seniors enjoyed a heartwarming sing-along of national day songs and feasted on food and drinks, including vegetarian food provided by CST. By the end of the event, every senior had their bags full of prizes won through participation in the various carnival games!



First Responders Training held for 200 Sikhs

SIWEC organised two DARE (Dispatcher Assisted First Responder) workshops in June for members of Sikh institutions to learn and understand cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) as well as to employ an automated external defibrillator (AED) in an emergency.

200 participants have been trained, including employees and volunteers from Gurdwaras across Singapore as well as seniors from our Sunehri Saheliaan and Sunehray Pal groups.

85 participants attended the first session held at Silat Road Gurdwara, the Sikh Centre, on 6 June 2018, with 115 attending on 18 June 2018 at Central Sikh Gurdwara.



OUR SERVICES

Academic Excellence
& Education Support
Programme

Community Meditation
Programme

Eldercare
Programme

Family Bereavement
Services

Financial Assistance &
Food on the
Table Programme

Home Visit &
Family Support
Assistance

Hospital Visits &
Healthcare Ambassador
Programme

Outreach Activities

Prisons Counselling &
Aftercare Programme

YOU CAN HELP AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Donations

A small contribution from you translates into huge benefits for the less fortunate. You can donate by:

- A one-time Donation – in Cash, by Cheque or Bank draft.
- GIRO - Making a GIRO application to provide monthly (recurring) donations.
- A Bequest (Will) - Leave a legacy in support of SIWEC's clients.
- A Memorial Donation - A thoughtful way to remember a loved one while giving support to others.

Donors will be able to claim tax deduction, 2.5 times of the amount donated to SIWEC.

Volunteers

Your efforts as a SIWEC volunteer enable us to successfully run programmes and hence, make a difference to the community. We are looking for volunteers to strengthen our services and contribute to the community at large. To find out more, kindly contact us at info@siwec.org today!

WHOM WE SERVE

SIWEC is here to help; we serve everyone! If you or someone you know requires assistance or is interested in our services, please call, email or come down to meet us at:

Sikh Welfare Council

2 Towner Road, #06-02, Singapore 327804

Opening Hours: Monday - Friday, 9am - 6pm

Email: info@siwec.org / 24-hour helpline @ 6299 9234

Website: <http://www.siwec.org>



Sikh Welfare Council