

# Inside NCIS

JUNE 2025



National University  
Cancer Institute  
Singapore

SCDF OPERATION LIONHEART:  
MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE

## Answering the Call of Duty



# Table of Contents

**03**

Incredible Care

**EXTENDING SUPPORT  
BEYOND OUR CLINICS**

---

**06**

Incredible Care

**NCIS TO TRIAL NEW TREATMENT  
USING MICROBUBBLES**

---

**07**

Incredible People

**ANSWERING THE CALL OF DUTY**

---

**12**

Incredible People

**CHARTING NEW PATHS IN  
ONCOLOGY PHARMACY**

---

**16**

Incredible Research

**DRUG COMBO BRINGS  
HOPE TO NPC PATIENTS**

---

**18**

Incredible Research

**MAPPING STOMACH TUMOURS  
FOR PERSONALISED TREATMENT**





INCREDIBLE CARE

# Extending Support Beyond Our Clinics

The NCIS Wellbeing Centre is now open to provide holistic support to our patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals. Find out how it brings comfort, connection and calm in the story below.



Tucked away in the corner of Level 8, Medical Centre lies a sanctuary of care designed to enhance our support to patients, caregivers, and healthcare staff.

Launched on 19 June 2025, the NCIS Wellbeing Centre underscores the organisation's belief that true care extends beyond medical treatment and encompasses an individual's mental and emotional state.

The Centre offers a quiet, welcoming space that brings comfort and calm. Thoughtful touches — from warm lighting, comfortable seating and a cosy pantry with complimentary drinks to shelves of books and board games — offer simple moments of comfort, while symbolic features invite reflection and bring deeper meaning.

The *Tree of Life*, decorated with handwritten messages of encouragement from patients, families, and staff stands as a reminder of the power of shared strength and resilience.





Patients can ring the *Bell of Hope* to celebrate the end of treatment and the beginning of a new chapter. A piano, generously donated by NUHS Board Member Mrs Tracey Woon, offers visitors moments of calm through the soothing power of music.

Together, these elements combine to create a refuge for visitors to find comfort and connection. NCIS plans to further enrich the space with wellness programmes and seasonal activities to offer continued support at every step and ensure that no one goes through the cancer journey alone.





Photo: Temasek Trust

INCREDIBLE CARE

# NCIS to Trial New Treatment Using Microbubbles

From the second half of this year, NCIS will begin trialling a new cancer treatment that uses precise ultrasound waves to generate microbubbles that destroy tumour cells without the need for radiation or surgery.

This treatment, known as histotripsy, will first be offered to liver cancer patients, followed by those with kidney and pancreatic cancers.

Supporting this effort are the Li Ka Shing Foundation and Temasek Trust, who will be donating a histotripsy machine to NCIS and another to the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS). They have also pledged \$12 million to further histotripsy trials in the country.

Read more [here](#).





INCREDIBLE PEOPLE

# Answering the Call of Duty

Assistant Nurse Clinician (ANC) Nasharudin Bin Abu Bakar was part of the Operation Lionheart contingent deployed to Myanmar in March to assist in search and rescue operations following a devastating 7.9 magnitude earthquake. Read on to find out more about his experience on the frontlines.

## **28 March 2025, 4PM - L9 NCIS Cancer Centre**

ANC Nasharudin was going about his duties when his phone buzzed. It was a text from the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) to standby for activation.

Hours earlier, a powerful 7.7 magnitude earthquake had struck central Myanmar, ravaging roads, destroying buildings and killing many in its wake. As a member of Operation Lionheart, Singapore's overseas disaster relief mission, Nasharudin knew he could be mobilised to assist in rescue efforts.

Still, he brushed the thought aside.

"They'll never call us NSmen\*," he joked to a colleague. "Hari Raya is just around the corner."

But by nightfall, Nasharudin was packing his bags for his first overseas deployment – and his first Hari Raya away from home in a decade.

## **29 March 2025, 4AM – SCDF Headquarters**

In just 12 hours, Nasharudin had swapped the familiar blue of his nursing scrubs for the darker hues of SCDF's uniform. There had been barely any time to process what was happening. His wife and three kids were stunned.

Emotions, as Nasharudin put it, were everywhere.

But support came in swiftly and unconditionally.

"My supervisor was amazing," he said. "I informed her of my deployment while I was on the way to the airport. She didn't just offer prayers for me, but for my family too. And she shared the news with the rest of my colleagues."

More messages of encouragement soon followed.

"Some of my colleagues even offered to help take care of my family if needed. I have the best colleagues in the world," admitted Nasharudin.

*\*An NSman is a male citizen or permanent resident who has completed his full-time National Service and is now part of the reservist force, undergoing periodic training and call-ups for a set number of years.*





### **A Mission of Grit and Grace**

In Myanmar, Nasharudin joined the SCDF's Disaster and Rescue Team (DART) to search for survivors. This later shifted to extricating the dead from the rubble and setting up medical outposts to provide care to affected locals.

The unrelenting heat made their mission more challenging. Temperatures soared as high as 45 degrees, and the officers' rescue gear offered little relief. But giving up was not an option.

"I just persevered as I felt that the people there needed our help," said Nasharudin.

Strict hydration routines were put in place to protect the team from heat exhaustion. Drawing on his nursing experience, Nasharudin also made it a point to constantly check on his teammates' physical and mental state.



## **Raya amidst the Rubble**

Two days into their deployment in Myanmar, Nasharudin and his teammates marked the morning of Hari Raya Aidilfitri quietly.

There were no new clothes to put on. No festive feasts to enjoy. No family members or relatives to visit.

In the stillness of that morning, the men made a request to their commanders to hold Eid prayers together before resuming their mission. It was granted.

“During Hari Raya, I will usually go to the mosque to pray and come home. The experience that morning was different and I’ll never forget it,” he said.







### **Lessons that Linger**

When the mission ended, Nasharudin returned home to Singapore with a renewed purpose shaped by what he had seen and how he had served.

He resumed his duties at the Cancer Centre with a clearer understanding of what it means to show up for others in their most vulnerable moments. The experience also left him with a deeper appreciation for his family, friends and colleagues who had supported him from afar.

What began as an unexpected call-up became a reminder of what truly matters, and what's always worth returning to.





INCREDIBLE PEOPLE

# Charting New Paths in Oncology Pharmacy

Over the past 14 years, Constance Teo has built her career in Oncology Pharmacy, progressing from Pharmacist to Senior Principal Clinical Pharmacist and the Head of Department. We spoke with her to learn more about her journey, leadership insights and vision for the future.



**You've been with Oncology Pharmacy for 14 years. What has kept you inspired all these years?**

Oncology Pharmacy is at the forefront of cancer therapy, with new treatments and clinical trials emerging regularly. There's never a lack of new things to learn. The multifaceted nature of our work continues to challenge and engage me.

Over the years, what's kept me going is the sense of purpose — knowing that the work we do, whether directly with patients or behind the scenes, truly makes a difference in their treatment journeys.



**What have been some of the most defining moments of your career?**

Some of the most defining moments in my career have centered around pioneering innovative projects that have transformed patient care delivery at our institution.

I was privileged to be given the opportunities to lead the establishment of the outpatient EPOCH chemotherapy initiative and was involved in the set-up of NCIS On the Go. Being part of the NCIS Right Siting Committee, where we continually work on optimizing processes to improve patient care, continues to be a very meaningful part of my career. Working alongside a passionate team of doctors, nurses, and operations colleagues, challenging the status quo and implementing changes that have a tangible impact on patient care, makes all these moments truly defining.

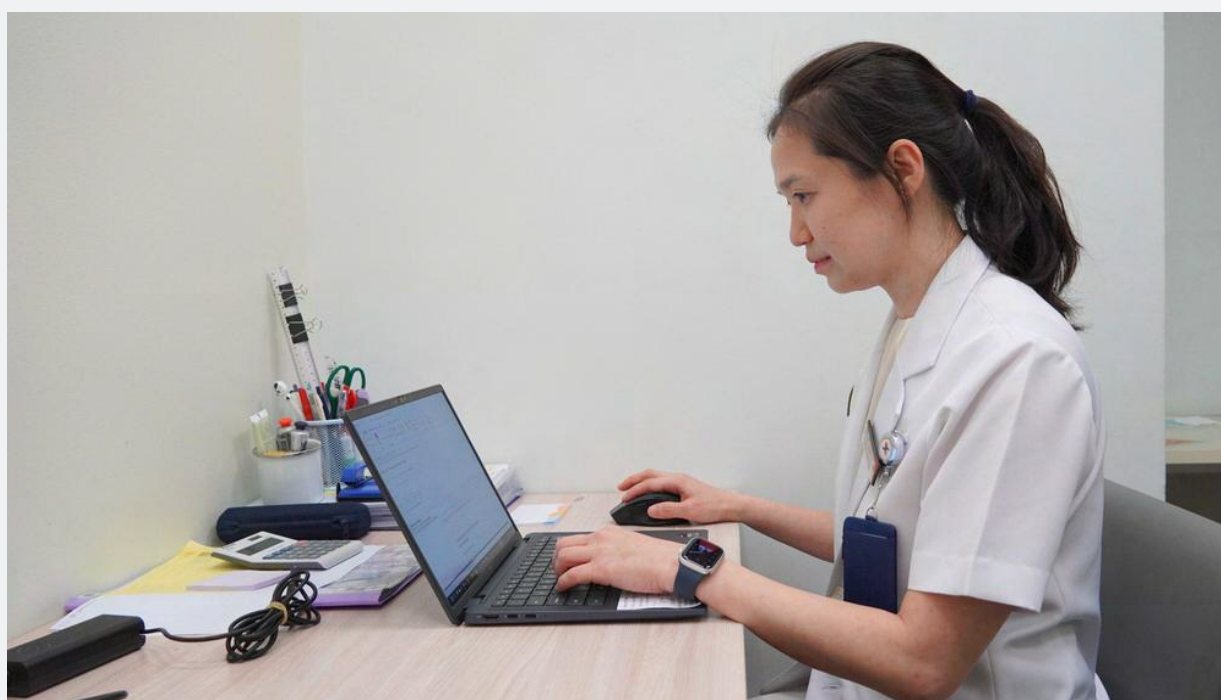
**You took on the role as Head, Oncology Pharmacy in August last year. What have been the top 3 highlights of leading the team?**

Three key highlights stand out: First, we've made significant strides in operational efficiency, including a notable \$3 million reduction in inventory costs in the past year. Second, we've begun reimagining future workflows to prepare for the upcoming compounding hub, ensuring we're ready for the evolving landscape of cancer care. Lastly, we've also started focusing on creating new career paths and roles for our pharmacy technicians and assistants, fostering growth and development within our team.

**Looking back at your career, is there a particular moment that has stuck with you and reminded you of why your work matters?**

One experience that stood out involves a patient undergoing EPOCH chemotherapy. This patient was experiencing recurring leaks with their infusion pump, causing significant distress and potentially compromising their treatment.

Together with the nursing team, I investigated the cause of the leakage and provided targeted patient education on proper pump management. Even though we had been using the same infusion set up for a few years by then, we explored trying a different infusion set. We used samples and did experiments with the new set, leaving it overnight to test for leakage that ultimately prevented future occurrences. This experience reinforced the importance of collaborative problem-solving and continuous improvement in oncology pharmacy, reminding me that we can always do better for our patients.





**In what ways do you think Oncology Pharmacy has changed the most since you began your career?**

The scope of Oncology Pharmacy has expanded tremendously. Digital tools, immunotherapy, and value-based care have redefined how we practice, requiring us to be more adaptable and tech-savvy than ever.

**How do you see the role of pharmacists evolve in the future of cancer care?**

Oncology pharmacists will be involved in tailoring treatments to individual patients' genetic profiles, optimizing efficacy while minimizing side effects. We will also contribute to shaping cost-effective treatment plans and leverage technology in medication management, drug interaction screening, AI-assisted patient counselling and education, and chemotherapy reviews. We will become even more integral members of the oncology care team, collaborating closely with physicians and other healthcare professionals to drive innovation and improve patient outcomes.

**What is one mantra you live by every day? Why?**

"Progress, not perfection. One step at a time..."

In a complex, demanding work environment like oncology pharmacy, it's easy to be hard on ourselves or to let fear of the unknown future paralyze us. However, we must consistently strive to be better. Small, consistent steps forward are more valuable than waiting for the perfect moment or solution.

**What's one piece of advice you always share with younger pharmacists?**

Don't be afraid to ask questions or seek guidance. Oncology pharmacy is very complex, and it's okay not to have all the answers. Reach out to colleagues and seniors when you need help.

**What's the legacy you look to leave behind in Oncology Pharmacy?**

I hope to inspire my team to be empowered, resilient, and future-ready - one that champions innovation while never losing sight of empathy and patient-centric care.

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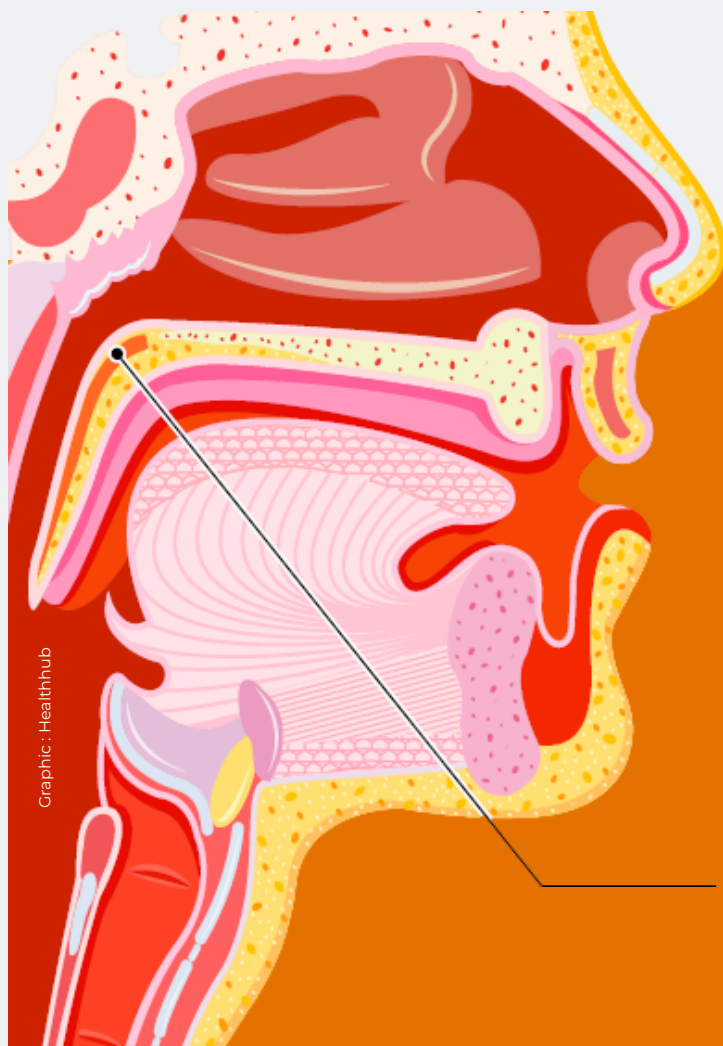


INCREDIBLE RESEARCH

# Drug Combo Brings Hope to NPC Patients

A randomised clinical trial in Singapore led by Prof Goh Boon Cher and Dr Chong Wan Qin to use a combination of two targeted therapies — pembrolizumab and bevacizumab — is showing promise for patients with advanced platinum-resistant nasopharyngeal cancer (NPC).





Nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC) is a type of cancer that begins at the back of the nose in an area called the nasopharynx.

The standard treatment usually involves chemotherapy with platinum-based drugs. However, in some patients, the cancer returns or spreads — a condition known as platinum-resistant NPC. When this happens, doctors may turn to other treatments such as pembrolizumab, a form of immunotherapy that works by helping the immune system recognise and attack cancer cells.

As NPC is endemic to Southeast Asia, it is one of NCIS' main focus areas for research.

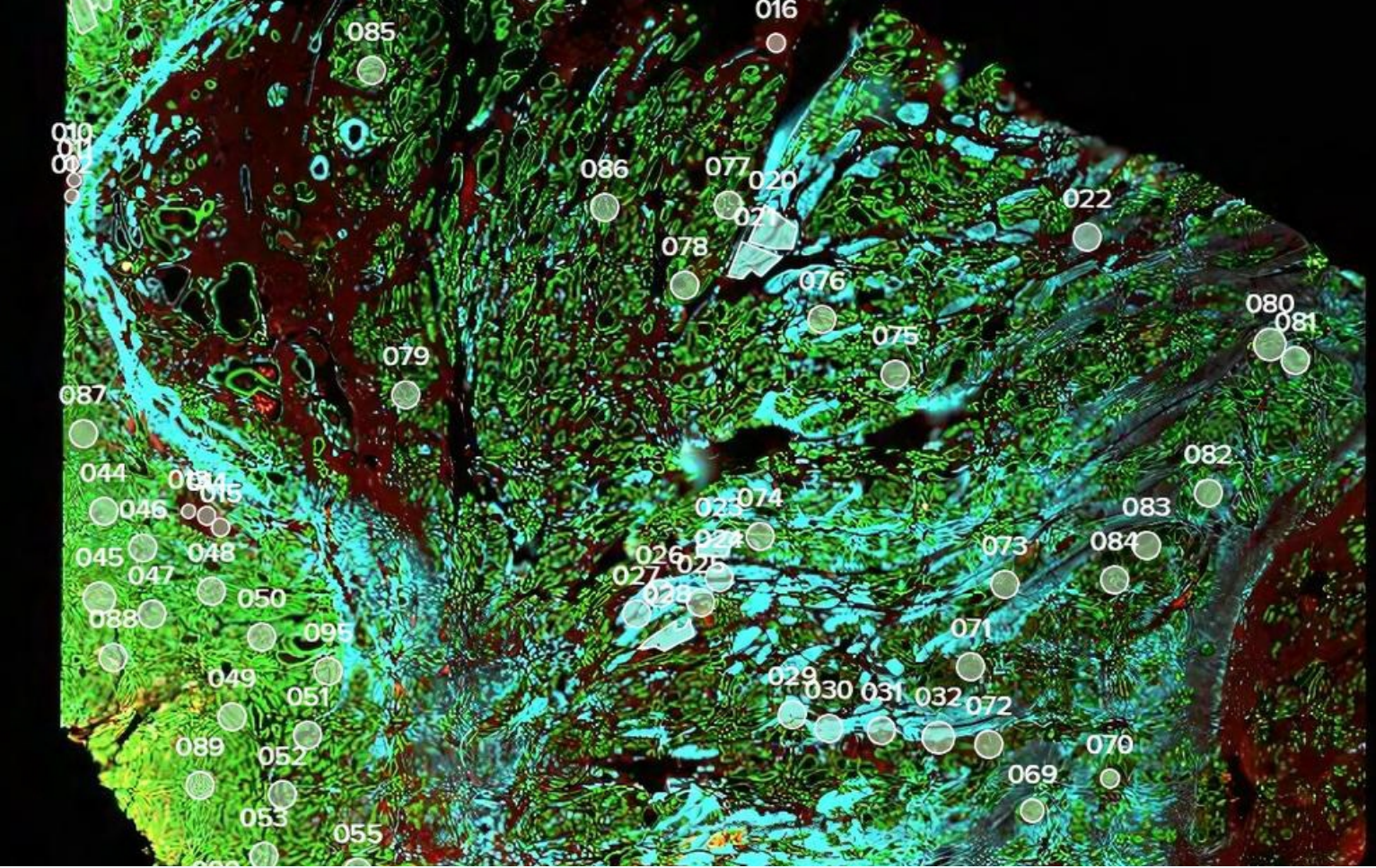
The clinical trial involved 48 patients with platinum-resistant NPC. Half of them received pembrolizumab alone, while the others received both pembrolizumab and bevacizumab.

The results were encouraging. Tumours shrank in 58% of patients who got the drug combo, compared to just 13% of those who received pembrolizumab alone. Patients who were given both drugs were also able to keep their cancer from worsening for about 14 months on average, compared to just 1.6 months for those who were on pembrolizumab alone.

Analysis of the tumour samples obtained from the patients on this trial revealed bevacizumab enhanced immune cells infiltration into the tumour to perpetuate an immune active milieu for pembrolizumab to induce an anti-tumour response.

If validated in a phase 3 trial, the combination therapy could be a new standard of care in this population of patients.

Read more about the study [here](#) in The Lancet Oncology.



INCREDIBLE RESEARCH

# Mapping Stomach Tumours for Personalised Treatment

A team of researchers from the Singapore Gastric Cancer Consortium comprising doctors and scientists from NCIS, NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and Duke-NUS Medical School has developed a comprehensive atlas of stomach tumours using advanced mapping technologies. This allows the team to pinpoint exactly where the cancer cells are in a tumour, how they behave, and how they interact with surrounding cells.

The insights gleaned from this study can pave the way for more precise, personalised treatments that target the unique features of each patient's tumour. Find out how by clicking [here](#).



# Thank You for Reading!

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