



Senior staff nurse Li Pei treating Mr Wong Yek Wan, who was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndromes, at his home in November. Mr Wong, who needs repeated cycles of medicine, says the home cancer treatment is less painful and more convenient than at the hospital. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

## Cancer treatment in the comfort of home

Mr Wong Yek Wan, 71, used to swim about six laps in the public pool near his home in Jurong East every morning. But one morning in August, the former factory manager was so breathless that he could not even complete two laps of the pool.

He got out and walked home but even that short walk had him gasping for breath. His immediate thought was that he had either been hit by a bad attack of asthma, which he had when he was young, or perhaps suffered a heart attack.

He went to the nearby Ng Teng Fong Hospital where they found an extremely low blood count, gave him a blood transfusion, then sent him to the National University Hospital (NUH).

He was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndromes, a cancer where his bone marrow is unable to produce enough healthy blood cells. He needs a 45-minute infusion of medicine every day for seven days followed by three weeks of rest before the next cycle starts again.

When he first started doing it at the hospital, it would take five to six hours, including the hour it takes to travel to and from the hospital. Now, he only needs to go for the first infusion of each cycle, when he is also seen by the doctor. The rest of the treatment is done by a qualified nurse at his home.

Mr Wong said that it is not only more convenient, but also less painful because senior staff nurse Li Pei, who visits his home to administer the treatment, "does it carefully

while, in the hospital with so many patients, they are always in a rush".

He is one of about 50 patients getting home cancer treatment under the National University Cancer Institute Singapore (NCIS) community and home care programme. NCIS nurses make more 1,000 trips a year to treat cancer patients outside of the hospital. The majority are home visits, with the rest done in the community, such as at polyclinics.

**Salma Khalik**