

Bringing your Helper into the Care System

Madam Lee*, in her early 70s, had always been resistant to having a domestic helper caring for her 90-year-old mother.

The years we had come to know Madam Lee as a caregiver, she would exemplify “The Twenty-Four Paragons of Filial Piety”. As with the exemplars of these stories, while we applauded her love and commitment, they were also presented as a double-edged sword as she was very determined to care for her mother all by herself.



However, as Madam Lee became increasingly frail, the physical demands of caring for her bedridden mother took a toll on her. After much deliberation, she finally agreed to be supported by a domestic helper so as to avoid admitting her mother into a nursing home.

As Madam Lee was very particular and meticulous in her care routine for her mother, she could not accept the new domestic helper Yati*. While Yati came into the family initially with willingness to be a caregiver, she was quickly disheartened as she felt unaccepted by the family. In addition, she was homesick in a foreign land and missed her five-year-old daughter in Indonesia.

This initial adjustment period for Madam Lee, Yati and the care recipient was critical in laying the “ground rules”. As a professional team in the community care sector, the Hua Mei Elder-Centred Programme of Integrated Comprehensive Care (EPICC) team was heavily involved in helping to train Yati to be an able carer. However, the mediation of expectations for all parties involved was probably the most challenging aspect of our work for this case.



Our experience in community care management has instilled in us the knowledge that having a domestic helper to care for your loved one works best when she is accepted as part of the family and given support in her work. However, cultivating and maintaining such a positive relationship between employer and family, and a pseudo-family member is never easy. Unfortunately, the helper is often blamed when caregiving is not delivered to the family’s expectations.

If you are reading this little write-up to this point, you will probably be asking how we can go about bringing a domestic helper into the care system. You may be disappointed to hear that there is no magic formula. Nonetheless, we strongly believe that we start with respecting the caregiver, including the domestic helper.

Respect, to us, is showing love and concern which we may articulate in our caregiving process. And if we expect our loved one to be well cared for, then it starts with ourselves being respectful to our domestic helpers. It really just goes around that way.



As for Madam Lee and Yati, the team at EPICC tried to intervene and counsel both towards building a trusting and cordial relationship. Yati persevered and continued to care for Madam Lee’s mother to her last day. For Madam Lee, she learnt to accept and appreciate Yati after the initial struggle as well. Though she was financially tight and did not require Yati after her mother passed on, she made a painful decision to have Yati continue to work till the end of her contract so that she can have more savings before returning back to Indonesia.

Such a successful case motivates our team to overcome future challenges in delivering vital care for older people who chose to age in their community.

** Names in article have been changed*

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