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Jail, caning for man in 1992 knife attack

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Coffee good for cirrhosis patients

By JANICE TAI

MOST Singaporeans want to die at home and not in a hospital, yet not many of them eventually do.

That is the finding of a survey which asked more than 1,000 people for their views on death. Commissioned by the Lien Foundation, it showed 77 per cent of them preferred to die at home.

But according to the latest data from the Registry of Births and Deaths, only 27 per cent of Singaporeans would have achieved that wish last year.

Not many people are spending their last days at home despite the national push to age in the community, because some health conditions may take unexpected turns, said Dr R. Akhileswaran, Singapore Hospice Council chairman and chief executive of HCA Hospice Care, the largest home palliative care provider.

In such cases, patients may need treatment for complications, even if the diseases are incurable.

Still, in many other cases, terminally ill patients can receive palliative care, which alleviates pain and symptoms, at home rather than in hospitals or hospices.

Yet, as family sizes shrink, some may fear caring for their loved ones at home as they do not have adequate family support, experts said. Families may also be unaware of home palliative care services or mistakenly perceive these to be expensive.

The survey found that while three in four respondents were open to receiving palliative care, more than half felt it was expensive. Medical cost was their greatest fear about dying. Currently, home palliative care is free, and patients in hospices receive subsidies.

Dr Jeremy Lim, partner at global consulting firm Oliver Wyman who helped draft the report on the national strategy for palliative care in 2011, said many people think palliative care is costly part-

Many prefer to die at home, but few do: Poll

Families unaware of home palliative care services or think they will be costly, say experts



As family sizes shrink, some may fear caring for their loved ones at home because they do not have adequate family support, experts say. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

ly because those who need it have depleted their finances for chemotherapy and hospitalisation.

Yet, it is far cheaper for such people to be cared for at home. It costs HCA Hospice Care about \$1,500 a year to care for a patient at home – a fraction of hospitalisation costs, which can come up to about \$500 a day.

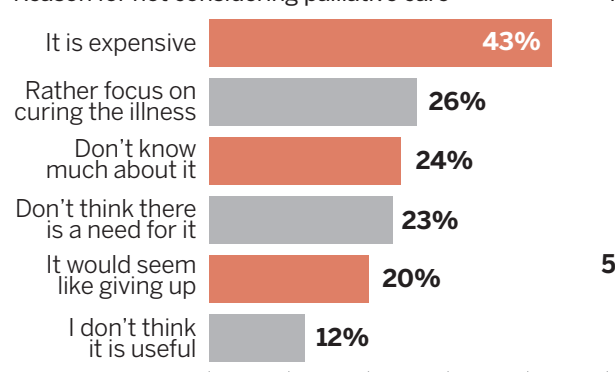
Dr Akhileswaran said caregivers could be trained to care for patients at home.

Lien Foundation's chief executive, Mr Lee Poh Wah, said: "We need to turn the tide of people dying in institutions unnecessarily."

There could be better support for palliative care, he said. For example, a care coordinator could

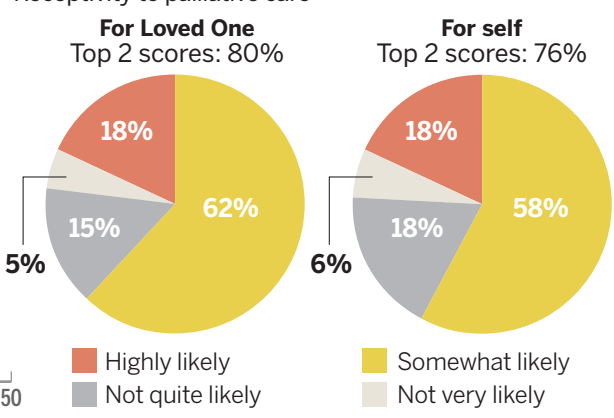
Attitudes of Singaporeans towards palliative care

Reason for not considering palliative care



Base: All who are not likely to consider palliative care (276 respondents)

Receptivity to palliative care



Base: All 1,006 respondents

Source: LIEN FOUNDATION

help liaise with the hospital to arrange for the patient's discharge, link him up with home palliative care providers and help him work out his end-of-life preferences.

Customer service deputy manager Ann Lee, 37, whose husband died of soft tissue cancer at the age of 39 three years ago, said having a team of doctors, nurses and social workers from Assisi Hospice visit at least once a week at home made the difference.

She said: "We were grateful for their medical and emotional support. It enabled my husband to spend quality moments at home with our then four-year-old daughter and one-year-old son."

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