

# Spreading

In line with our founding values and mission, we continue to reach out to the marginalised and under-served, from the house-bound and homeless elderly of Singapore to a little girl who travelled far from home to find a cure for a debilitating mystery illness.

## A LIFE OF PAIN WITH NO HOPE IN SIGHT

For five years, six year-old Channey\* lived with severe pain in her legs. She was also unable to pass urine regularly, sometimes going to the toilet only once a day. Doctors in her home country could not diagnose what was ailing her. They concluded that she would lose her ability to walk in a few years' time.

Channey's mum, Thyda\*, a beneficiary of Hagar International, suffered with her little girl – caring for her through the nights when she would wake up crying in pain, shedding tears of sympathy and frustration, and worrying constantly about her health and her future.



## SEEKING HELP IN SINGAPORE

Hoping for a miracle for Channey and Thyda, the team from Hagar International sought help from Mount Alvernia Hospital's Community Outreach Programme. Channey arrived in Singapore in September and was immediately admitted and attended to by Dr Timothy Lee, our on-campus neurosurgeon.



## FROM HOPELESS TO HOPE-FILLED

An X-ray and an MRI scan were ordered but showed no cause for the pain. A subsequent CT scan revealed that little Channey had spina bifida, a congenital spine disorder. However, based on his observation and experience, Dr Lee recognised that Channey could be afflicted with Tethered Spinal Cord Syndrome. His suspicion was aroused when he heard that Channey's pain was neither relieved by any amount of painkillers nor any length of rest – the usual prescription for tired or over-exerted muscles. Furthermore, the unique pattern of weakness in her legs alluded to something more severe.

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The only way to help Channey was with a relatively simple surgery to relieve the pulling of the nerve.

The operation was a great success. Channey was up and walking again with no more pain.



### A HAPPY ENDING AND A BRIGHTER FUTURE

The operation was a great success. Channey was up and walking again with no more pain. She was also able to go to the toilet on a more regular basis before being discharged after five days of hospitalisation.

In his own words, Dr Lee was happy to have helped Channey and fill her with hope for the future. Seeing Channey's happy, smiling face and her mother's profound sense of relief was a reward in itself.

*\*Patient's and mother's names have been changed to protect their identities.*

### About Tethered Spinal Cord Syndrome

Tethered spinal cord syndrome is a neurological disorder caused by tissue attachments that limit the movement of the spinal cord within the spinal column. These attachments cause an abnormal stretching of the spinal cord. This syndrome is closely associated with spina bifida. While fairly rare, this condition can continue undiagnosed into adulthood or cause problems only during adulthood. In such cases, the strain on the spinal cord will increase, leading to increasing sensory and motor problems and occasionally loss of bladder and bowel control. Patients may have unexplained back ache or pain in or weakness of the legs, which may be wrongly attributed to psychological reasons as MRI scan results of the spine are often normal as in Channey's case.

Source:  
<https://www.aans.org/Patients/Neurosurgical-Conditions-and-Treatments/Tethered-Spinal-Cord-Syndrome>

### About Hagar International

Hagar is an international organisation dedicated to the recovery of women and children who have endured extreme abuses. They are working to see communities free and healed from the trauma of human trafficking, slavery and abuse.



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