



Breaking barriers and inspiring hope: an interview with Dr Gary Ng

Dr Ng at the opening ceremony for the HKFHY Jockey Club Sports Inclusion Programme For Persons With Physical Disabilities

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On Dr Gary Ng's 14th birthday, he was greeted with an unpleasant surprise: he had malignant osteosarcoma in his left leg, which required immediate chemotherapy and eventual amputation. However, he was undaunted by the subsequent mobility restrictions—this situation inspired him to devote his life to medicine and volunteering to help others in need. In recognition of his effort and perseverance, he has been a proud recipient of multiple awards, such as the Ten Outstanding Young Persons in 2020, the 8th Hong Kong Volunteer Award 2020, the Outstanding Disabled Persons Award 2002, the Ten Warriors of Regeneration Selection 1996, and many others. In addition, he is the current chairperson of the Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth (HKFHY).

The Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth, established in 1970, aims to promote the spirit of self-help among handicapped young people and allow smooth societal integration of underprivileged groups. It strives to achieve these objectives by providing services to disabled individuals and advocating for policy changes to create a barrier-free society. The HKFHY also collaborates with other organisations to arrange improvements in public facilities, with the goal of allowing handicapped individuals to regain a sense of independence and self-sufficiency while raising public awareness.

Dr Ng's volunteer work began just after his graduation from secondary school, long before he joined the HKFHY. He was invited to give talks at secondary schools and to share his extraordinary experiences with cancer patients who were facing the same challenges as he had. Believing in the balance

between quantity and quality, he was determined to motivate others with his story with different delivery methods. When asked about the effectiveness of his talks, Dr Ng replied, 'If even one person remembers my message after my talk and takes my lessons to heart, I have already succeeded.' He recalled one memorable story involving a tour guide who had osteosarcoma. The guide adamantly refused to undergo leg amputation, concerned that impaired mobility would severely affect his livelihood. In desperation, a volunteer organisation contacted Dr Ng, asking him to persuade the guide to undergo the amputation surgery. After hearing Dr Ng's story, the guide was sufficiently moved by the doctor's cancer journey that he chose to undergo the amputation procedure—this decision both saved his life and improved his long-term quality of life. Dr Ng believes that his volunteer work has provided an opportunity for self-reflection because his unique perspective as both a cancer survivor and doctor makes his stories compelling and relatable to the general public. His journey inspires others to accept themselves, instead of dwelling on their misfortunes, and to face the challenges ahead with vigour and enthusiasm.

Years later, as chairperson of the HKFHY, Dr Ng's outreach has extended beyond the youth population. Notable initiatives include the establishment of social enterprises such as 'First Sense Design' and 'Flower Workshop'. These enterprises offer job opportunities for disabled individuals and provide them with a sense of fulfilment. Recognising that disabled individuals have limited physical mobility and lacks sporting habit, Dr Ng is enthusiastic to promote 'Sports of All'

which encourages disabled individuals to participate and develop an interest in sport. Furthermore, Dr Ng has been an active member of various sub-committees, providing insights from the perspective of disabled users and advocating for practical follow-up measures in areas such as malls and the transportation sector. These include increasing the availability of elevators at malls, or installation of mirrors inside of the elevators for wheelchair user's easy access. Dr Ng's work encompasses a broad range of activities, from serving individual users to persistently advocating for policy changes.

Over the years, although Dr Ng has transitioned from patient to doctor, his unwavering commitment to serving the handicapped community has never faded. While studying medicine, Dr Ng coincidentally discovered that the survival rate for the type of surgery he had undergone is alarmingly low: approximately 3% after 3 years. This finding reinforced his firm belief in giving back to society. Engagement in volunteer services has provided Dr Ng with continuous opportunities for reflection, reminding him of how fortunate he is to have recovered, to have encountered compassionate medical professionals, and to now serve as a beacon of hope for others. Thus, volunteering benefits the individuals receiving services while serving as a means of self-improvement and self-reflection.

Dr Ng's work has not been free of challenges and setbacks, particularly in terms of facilitating employment opportunities for disabled individuals during Hong Kong's economic recessions. Although handicapped individuals exhibit a higher level of loyalty and dedication to their work, as Dr Ng has suggested, some complex considerations and obstacles persist. For instance, employers often express hesitation regarding the termination of handicapped employees who do not meet the required job standards because this termination may be perceived as a violation of anti-discrimination laws. Businesses have also raised concerns about the financial implications of office space renovation to include necessary facilities, such as barrier-free washrooms and elevators. It is particularly challenging for Dr Ng to act as a bridge between the disabled community and the business sector—seeking opportunities for the disabled yet balancing the concerns from the business field at the same time.

With deep gratitude and humility, Dr Ng pledges to lead the HKFHY to new heights, with the goal of increasing disabled community involvement in community planning and design. During visits to explore infrastructures in other countries, Dr Ng was especially impressed to see disabled individuals actively participating in the design process, which resulted in truly inclusive facilities such as lowered check-in counters that can accommodate wheelchair



Dr Ng with other guests at a press conference for a study on the fitness level of people in wheelchairs



Dr Ng and the student reporters, Yuen-tong (left) and Crystal (right)

users. Dr Ng has placed great emphasis on the importance of providing disabled individuals with abundant opportunities to broaden their horizons and increase their knowledge through field trips and continuous visits. By enabling disabled individuals to 'see more' and 'hear more', this approach allows them to acquire valuable insights and experiences that can be effectively applied within Hong Kong. The organisation also aspires to work closely with other regions, such as helping mainland China to develop barrier-free tourism.

Throughout our chat with Dr Ng, he consistently emphasised the importance of inclusivity. As someone who is both disabled and a volunteer, Dr Ng firmly believes that true inclusivity extends beyond merely assisting disabled individuals—it is

the mutual respect between different disabled and the society, and the understanding that everyone could play an important role in society that matters the most. ‘When you have the opportunity to work with someone who is disabled, express gratitude by saying, “Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to better understand you”, instead of “Thank you for giving me a chance to help you,” advises Dr Ng. Ultimately, the deepest motivation arises from a genuine and sincere desire to serve, along with a firm belief in making our beloved city, Hong Kong, a better place.