

Book Review

by Dr. Chew Nee Kong

Hero Teo – Chronicles of a Parkinson’s Fighter

At one glance, the photograph on the front cover of this book may mislead you to believe that you are looking at Wong Fei Hung, the legendary Chinese Kungfu master.

Well, this 70 year-old gentleman is actually Mr. Hero Teo, who has suffered from Parkinson’s for ten years. He is one of the most outstanding Parkinson’s patients in Malaysia.

The most remarkable characteristic of this book is the unique way in which Mr. Hero Teo shares with the readers about how he copes with his illness. He is very different from other Parkinson’s patients whom I have met. In fact, the whole book is centered around his “unorthodox” personality.

Parkinson’s is associated with a certain type of personality – Parkinson’s patients tend to be introverted, morally rigid, punctual and “self-controlled”. In addition, Parkinson’s patients also have a lower tendency to novelty-seeking behaviour (i.e. tendency to seek excitement in response to new experience). In other words, they are generally not very adventurous or outgoing. Most of the time, their daily activities are confined to their homes, and they keep a distance from the society in order to hide their illness. They are not the type of people who take the initiative to do something new.

What are the unique characteristics of Mr. Hero Teo?

Mr. Hero Teo has created history by being the very first Parkinson’s patient in Malaysia who has:

- a) started a personal blog (www.heroteo.com), a very illustrative and comprehensive “Chronicles of a Parkinson’s Fighter”
- b) published a book that shares his experiences on how he overcomes his illness with optimism and confidence
- c) embraced a very “physical” approach in coping with his illness, as explained below; in fact, I have not met any other Parkinson’s patient who is as “physical” as Mr. Hero Teo

An extraordinary feature of Mr. Hero Teo is his openness in facing his illness. In his personal blog, which was started in 2005, Mr. Hero Teo has included almost every aspect of Parkinson’s. Despite not having any medical qualification, he has

discussed many medical issues which are considered to be difficult for the general public.

Mr. Hero Teo's blog is filled with questions posed to the doctors. He is the most knowledgeable Parkinson's patient I have ever known. He believes in asking questions in order to learn about the illness as much as possible, so that he can overcome every single problem associated with the illness. The question and answer section in this book has picked most of the questions from Mr. Hero Teo's blog. It is a reflection of the trademark of "Hero Teo".

When I asked him why he had decided to set up a blog, he said, "I have always wanted to tell the world how I fight my Parkinson's. By creating a blog, I hope to send a strong message to all the readers that there are people suffering from Parkinson's who need the support of the general public. Malaysians need to be aware of the existence of Parkinson's, and its physical, emotional and mental complications. Through this blog, I can share my experience on how I cope with and understand my illness."

"Are you worried about revealing your illness to the whole world? I am sure that you know about the social stigma associated with Parkinson's, and the prejudice that people might have against you," I asked.

"Even though I have Parkinson's, I don't consider myself to be a disabled person. I know that nowadays we have effective treatment for Parkinson's, which can help me to attain a fairly good quality of life. Furthermore, by revealing my illness to other people, it enables them to understand and help me solve my problems. These are the reasons why I don't feel embarrassed to tell the whole world that I have Parkinson's," he replied.

Mr. Hero Teo is clearly different from many other Parkinson's patients. He has a positive perception of his own illness – he does not consider the revelation of his illness as a sign of weakness. Unlike many other Parkinson's patients, he does not care about the social stigma. All he cares about is getting better and going on with his normal life. He is more focused on the brighter side of his illness.

Right from the first time that I met him, I have noticed some remarkable characteristics in him. The most obvious is his strong optimism in coping with his illness. Just like other Parkinson's patients, Mr. Hero Teo has experienced many complications such as dizziness (due to low blood pressure), insomnia and nightmares. Last year, he was admitted to my hospital for a sudden onset of slurring of speech, dizziness and limb weakness. The brain scan confirmed that he had suffered from stroke. Despite this, he persevered and recovered completely within one week. His "never-say-die" attitude has helped him to pull through all these complications.

Mr. Hero Teo is my very first Parkinson's patient who has adopted a very "physical" approach in coping with the illness. I have met many Parkinson's patients who are involved in relatively light physical exercise programs, such as Tai-chi and Wai-dan-gong. In contrast, Mr. Hero Teo attends a more strenuous physical exercise program for five days in a week at a gym. During each session, he carries out a variety of exercise programs, from muscle stretching, running on the treadmill, balancing on the "fit-ball", kick-boxing and spinning (i.e. stationary cycling).

"I believe that in addition to the Parkinson's medications, complementary treatment such as physical exercises is useful in maintaining good muscle tone, strength and posture. This is why I attend the gym and have professional trainers to help me with my exercise program. One of them trains me in Yoga to help improve my flexibility and posture. Another trainer concentrates on building my muscle strength by carrying out exercises using weights and gym equipment. Another trainer specializes in building up my endurance, stamina, balancing, co-ordination and speed, through kick-boxing," explained Mr. Hero Teo.



Don't mess with me – Mr. Hero Teo doing his kick-boxing exercise

I very much doubt it that you would meet another Parkinson's patient of the same age, who is as aggressive in carrying out the physical exercises as Mr. Hero Teo.

"I hope that my book will send a strong message to the Parkinson's patients – that they can still be physically active despite having the illness. With the effectiveness and advances in the treatment of Parkinson's, they can live almost a normal life, just like other healthy people," concluded Mr. Hero Teo.

Yes, Mr. Hero Teo is certainly right. Through his book, he has brought hope and optimism to the Parkinson's community, in a "heroic" manner.