

‘We didn’t know if she was coming or going . . . she was very close to death

# Janice claws her way back to life

**NOUR AZHAR**

IMAGINE waking up one morning and finding the person you have known and loved for 10 years is unable to walk or respond because of a simple flu.

It was 2007 and Alan Lee had been married for 1½ years to Janice Auyeung, whom he met at university more than a decade ago.

Ms Auyeung’s flu resulted in viral encephalitis and she was diagnosed later with a hypoxic brain injury, which left her with uncontrollable seizures.

She was placed in a coma for five months.

A year after the initial diagnosis the 33-year-old was moved to the adult rehabilitation unit at Royal Rehabilitation Centre at Ryde, and six months later she was transferred to the Weemala transition unit, where she has remained for 2½ years.

But last week she was finally discharged and allowed to go home – a prospect that seemed inconceivable just a year ago.

Her husband said after she was admitted there were moments where he didn’t know if she was going to make it or not.

“It was very hard for all of us because we didn’t know if she was coming or going . . . she was very close to death and we had to prepare ourselves for that possibility,” Mr Lee said.

Originally from Hong Kong, Ms Auyeung was an accountant who lived with her husband in their home in Ryde. They were preparing for a family together.

That plan is in ruins and, after her illness, the couple have had to sell their home.

“We knew that even if she got better we would not be able to live in our home, which was very unpleasant to think about but we had to think about a better accommodation for her,” Mr Lee said.

“We would be moving into our new home shortly, which is a specially-adapted house or adaptable unit that will encourage her to be as independent as possible and allow her some degree of freedom.”

Ms Auyeung’s stay at Royal Rehab has not been without its share of trouble and headaches for Mr Lee who felt he had to fight to keep his wife there.

“It was very traumatic enough for the family to go through all of this, so we didn’t expect that we had to fight or advocate for government support.

“More funding should be given to the likes of the Royal Rehab, which will result in more success stories like ours.” he said.

The centre’s community relations manager Jim Towers said Ms Auyeung’s story was testament to the conviction that “we should never give up”.

“Janice could easily have ended up in a nursing home at 33 years of age.

“That is definitely not a place for a young woman but her family and the staff rallied behind her every step of the way,” Mr Towers said.

Ms Auyeung’s parents have been living in Australia since arriving from Hong Kong three years ago to care for their daughter.

Her father Sun Auyeung said they never thought she would get to where she was today.

“Janice really needed that extra care and attention, and myself and the family are thankful to all the work the staff has put in,” he said.

Janice’s story has been remarkable, not only because she has responded positively to the physiotherapy and treatment but also because of the love and dedication she received from her husband, her parents and from the staff who believed she could do it.

On her last day at Royal Rehab Centre she thanked everyone for their help. Mr Lee said that those two simple words would have been impossible for Janice to utter only a short while back.

“My hat is off to these guys for all the hard work they do with whatever limited resources they have. They have a great success story on their hands.”



Going home: Janice and her husband Alan Lee prepare to leave Royal Rehabilitation Centre. They were farewelled by (from left) the centre's assistant physiotherapist Shafiei Salahaddin, registered nurse Angela Corfield, independent living co-ordinator Natalie Ryan and Janice's father Sun Auyeung.

Picture: BRENT MCGILVARY

## JANICE'S TOUGH FOUR YEARS

■ **July 2007:** Admitted to Royal North Shore Hospital with the flu. She was placed in an induced coma for five months

■ **April 2008:** Transferred to the Royal Rehabilitation Centre

■ **October 2008:** Transferred to Weemala transition unit for rehabilitation

■ **January 2011:** Discharged but will continue to have seizures because of her condition – hypoxic brain injury



Husband Alan Lee wheels Janice Auyeung from the Royal Rehabilitation centre as she heads home. Picture: BRENT MCGILVARY -PP432253