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WE REALLY
ALL NEED

Somebody

Text by Dr Tan Su-Ming

One morning, I saw a 75-year-old lady – I'll call her "Madam Halus".

This tiny woman who is about four feet tall was weeping in a desperate, pitiful manner, saying "*tolong lah, tolong lah, doctor*" ("help me, help me, doctor").

She was running a fever and her whole body was racked with pain; she also said she could barely eat as she felt anorexic.

I suspected that she might have dengue fever and asked if I could send her to the hospital. That question triggered another fresh

bout of weeping stemming from her physical discomfort, fear and what seemed like a deep sorrow she felt.

It transpired that she lived alone and felt all alone. I didn't know the circumstances by which she had become estranged from her children and I didn't want to pass judgement.

I called her an ambulance and the civil defence force team was very kind and gentle with her as they put her onto their gurney and drove to the A&E.

Gee, I thought, it's hard enough being old and poor with infirmities.

It's really depressing if one has nobody, on top of all of that.

I remember reading that in some aboriginal tribes, when a member of their community commits murder, his or her punishment is to be banished from their village, to wander alone. Often time, alone in the wilderness, he or she does not survive long.

We really all need somebody to have our back and to worry about whether we come home at the end of a long day or not, be that our family, neighbours, friends or colleagues.

We aren't good alone. ♦

Faith Healer

Text by Dr Tan Su-Ming

There is a family of five that I see: a Malay woman in her 40s married to a Chinese Muslim convert, and their three boys.

They have been my patients for the last ten years. Some time ago, they came to see me for the common flu and before she left, she said something that left me gobsmacked.

"Doctor, my family comes to you and you touch us and we are healed."

Too surprised to formulate any appropriate reply, I muttered, "Izzit?" (Singlish for "really?") and smiled stupidly.

Later on, as I was driving home, I thought I should have said: "Wow, woman, you are of incredible faith, but maybe I am just the channel and you must have a world-class immune system."

Maybe it wasn't just her immune system that was robust (enabling her to recover quickly). It was possibly the placebo effect with the doctor being the medicine and her incredible faith (in her doctor), that convinced her that I was her faith healer. ♦

