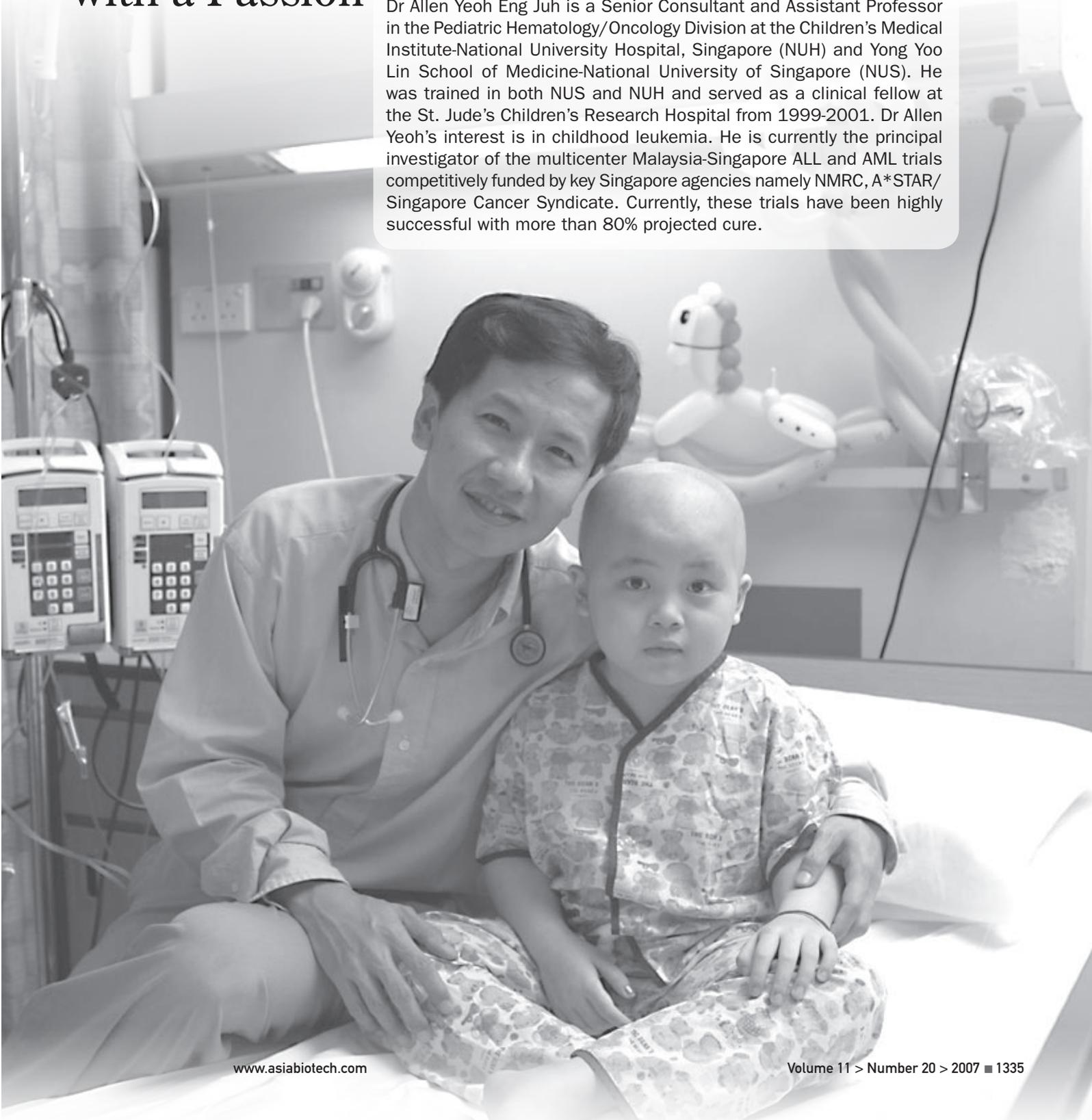


Dr Allen Yeoh

Combatting Childhood Cancers with a Passion

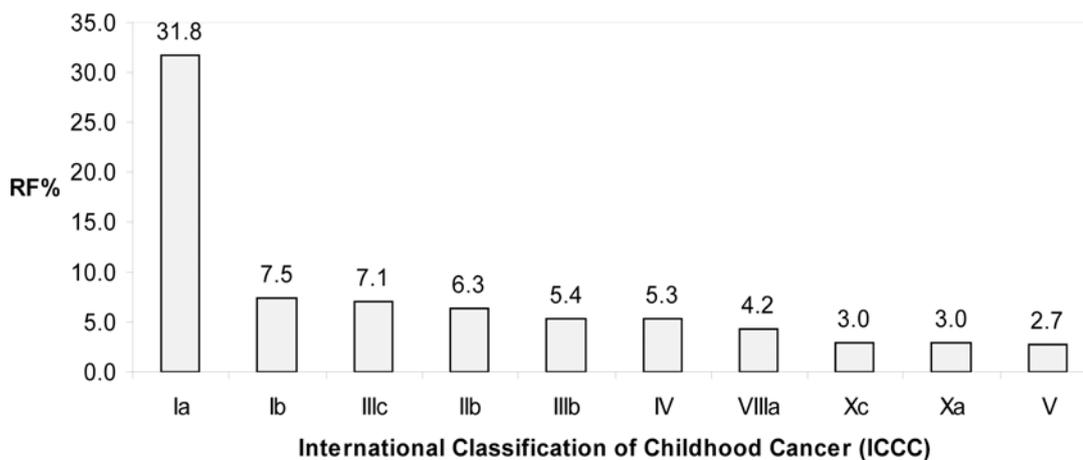
Dr Allen Yeoh Eng Juh is a Senior Consultant and Assistant Professor in the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Division at the Children's Medical Institute-National University Hospital, Singapore (NUH) and Yong Yoo Lin School of Medicine-National University of Singapore (NUS). He was trained in both NUS and NUH and served as a clinical fellow at the St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital from 1999-2001. Dr Allen Yeoh's interest is in childhood leukemia. He is currently the principal investigator of the multicenter Malaysia-Singapore ALL and AML trials competitively funded by key Singapore agencies namely NMRC, A*STAR/Singapore Cancer Syndicate. Currently, these trials have been highly successful with more than 80% projected cure.



[Special Feature]

For the sake of our readers, some of whom are laymen, what are the common subtypes of childhood leukemias in Singapore?

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL Ia) is by far the most common, followed by acute myeloblastic leukemia (AML Ib). Data from the Singapore Childhood Cancer Registry from 1997 through 2006 are shown below (Tan AM, Ha C, *et al.*; SCCR).



Can you share with us about the collaboration among St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Viva Foundation for Children with Cancer, and the National University Hospital (NUH) in Singapore?

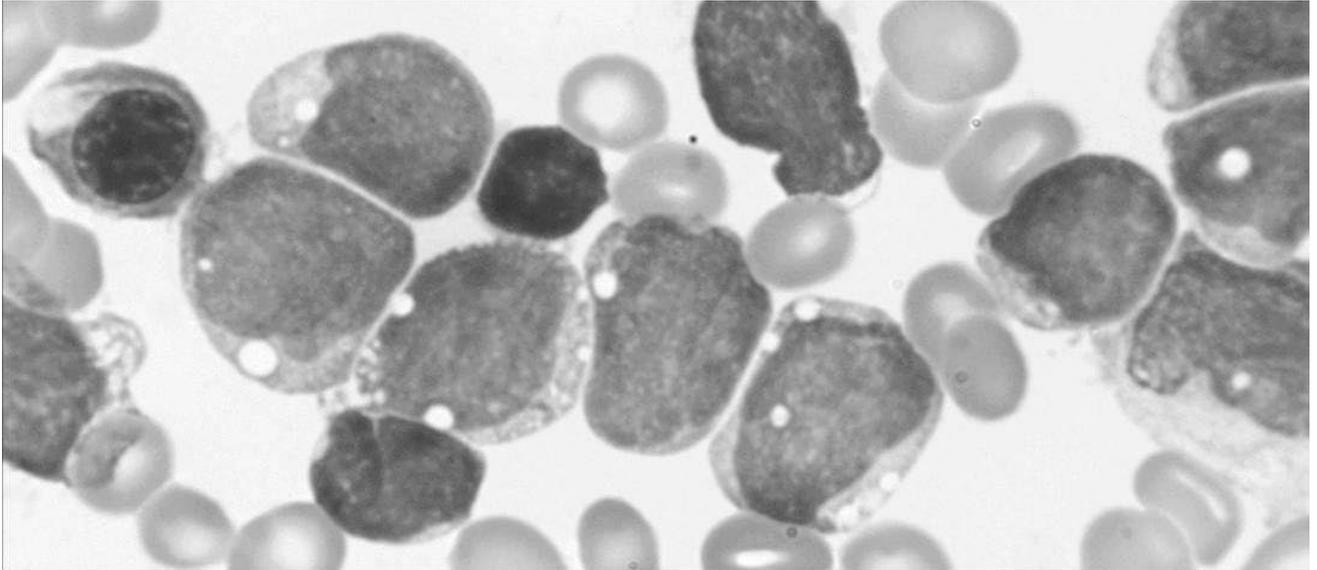
The Viva Foundation for Children with Cancer was established by a group of philanthropists who are keen to help children with major devastating illnesses. They hope that, through their funding, they will be able to improve the outcome for these children. Childhood cancers, especially childhood leukemia, has become their area of focus. Specifically, children with leukemia are curable, but long term side effects and the risk of relapse must be carefully monitored.

We proposed to the Viva Foundation to focus on childhood cancers, and developed three strategic areas which Viva can help push and rapidly translate into clinical care in Singapore so as to improve the cure rate for children with cancers. These areas are as follows:

1. Cellular therapy — to use stem cells for destroying leukemia and cancer cells and transplanting the bone marrow in very high-risk patients.
2. Childhood leukemia — to develop cost-effective protocols for maximizing the chance of cure and minimizing the side effects.
3. Bone and soft tissue cancers — to avoid amputation of the limb and attempt good limb salvage surgery.

After Viva identified childhood cancer as its focus, the foundation then searched for centers which manage children with cancer in Singapore that have the best potential to achieve its strategic aim using novel related technologies. The National University Hospital/National University of Singapore (NUH/NUS), with its strong academic and translational-

[Special Feature]



clinical research in leukemia, was chosen as the Viva Foundation Center of Excellence. Viva helped to raise funds to build the Center, which will be ready in January 2008 and will be housed in NUH ward 88.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital has been the top children's cancer hospital consistently for the last 40–50 years. It is the “mecca” of pediatric oncology, and many top pediatric oncologists are trained and develop protocols there. Hence, it was the optimal choice in our case.

Why has Singapore been chosen for the collaboration with St. Jude?

St. Jude is a charity hospital whose mission is to help poor countries. Singapore, with its close proximity to many developing and third-world countries in the Asia Pacific, is thus a prime location for this purpose. Since 2003, NUH has had a strong outreach program, where we conduct annual workshops for doctors throughout the Asia Pacific region. St. Jude is piloting a new model of working with a regional center of excellence (in this case, NUH/NUS and Viva) to help another center in a developing country (in this case, Davao Medical Center, Philippines).

How is the alliance structured? Are there any research programs, training programs etc.?

Translational-clinical research and training as well as continuing medical education form the backbone of the St. Jude–Viva Program.

Can you briefly explain what the St. Jude–Singapore International Outreach Program is?

The St. Jude–Viva International Outreach Program is the humanitarian aspect of the St. Jude–Viva Program. Its purpose is to train doctors and nurses from the region in caring for children with cancer so as to improve the standard of treatment of childhood cancer in the region.

[Special Feature]

What is the role of Viva Foundation other than raising funds?

Viva is the facilitator cum fundraiser. It acts as a catalyst, bringing together NUH, NUS, and St. Jude to achieve its mission of improving the care of children with cancer. By providing seed funding and facilitating collaborative research between the partners, Viva achieves more than raising funds alone.

Who are the main sponsors?

Lee Foundation, Goh Foundation, Kuok Foundation, and many others.

How will the children with cancer gain from such a collaboration?

The collaboration may lead to new treatment modalities that are not available anywhere in the world at an affordable cost. For example, one important mission is to develop cellular therapy using parents as a donor for stem cells which will then develop into immune cells to fight cancer cells.

How can the public donate?

They should contact the Viva Foundation at www.viva.sg. ■

