

Subject : Elemis  
 Date : 10-8-2010  
 Source : The Standard 英文虎報  
 Page : 19  
 Circulation : 120,000

Tuesday, August 10, 2010

The Standard 英文虎報

19

# Health & Beauty



## A whole new world

Carrie Cheng

**U**SING THE COMPUTER should come easy to 26-year-olds but not for Cheung Man-kin. An attack of encephalitis in 2005 affected his brain, leaving him with blurred vision and an inability to control his upper limbs. Not being able to type, he used to feel at a disadvantage in this age of computers and the internet.

But thanks to technology tailor-made to suit his needs, he can now use the computer just like his peers. He uses his left hand to control a ball-shaped joystick, which helps him move the cursor over an on-screen Chinese-language keyboard and so type in his thoughts.

"I can keep contact with the outside world and express myself in computer-generated Cantonese. The ability to use the computer has increased my confidence to handle life's various daily challenges," Cheung said.

His contact with the technology that changed his life was made possible by Rehabaid - a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with special needs.

This year, it is providing information technology equipment on a long-term basis for free. The group hopes this will help at least 80 beneficiaries overcome disability-induced daily living difficulties.

Cheung is one of the recipients. Rehabaid is using HK\$512,000 donated by the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged and Operation Santa Claus to run the program.

Its main beneficiaries are students but Rehabaid also offers help to those past school-going age. "Education is a lifelong process," said Cecilia Lam Shia-ling, head of the organization's Rehabaid Centre.

Any person with disabilities who needs information technology to function better and is financially unable to afford the equipment can apply. Rehabaid assesses each case before picking the recipients.

Before getting the equipment, applicants undergo a thorough assessment of body function and daily living needs, following which the center programs the devices to address their specific disability.

That means the devices given to each recipient vary depending on their individual capabilities. "We will use whatever [faculty] is functioning, such as facial muscles or nerve coordination, to adapt the equipment for them. It can involve software or hardware," Lam said.

So the blink of an eye can be a signal for those paralyzed from the neck down. And those with severe loss of muscle function can type via an on-screen keyboard by breathing in a particular way.

Chan Chun-pong is another beneficiary. The 23-year-old suffers



from muscular dystrophy, with deteriorating torso control making it difficult for him to sit upright for long. He also has difficulty talking due to limited lung capacity.

But he can now communicate via a computer mounted by his bedside, using his mouth to control the joystick, which acts as a keyboard cursor. "It helps me reach out to friends and maintain an active social life. I can also call for help in case of emergency, so my mother can feel comfortable going out without spending all her time keeping an eye on me," he said.

Operating the computer also allows Chan to get information about his condition from the internet, so that he is able to make informed decisions about his rehabilitation needs.

Rehabaid Centre has chosen to lend the electronic devices rather than giving them away because it wants more people to benefit from the program. "The clients can keep the equipment for as long as they need it. They can later return it to us to lend out to another person," Lam said.

"The weather disabled can buy the equipment themselves. But people who cannot afford the huge expense can apply for the scheme. It is such a great opportunity for them. I hope that this information technology can enhance their quality of life."

Applications for the program are being accepted in three phases. The two remaining phases close on September 30 and December 31. Those looking to apply may call 2364-2345. staff.reporter@singtaonews.com



### Looking a bit yellow!

Mrs Lee presented to her Family Doctor because of looking a bit too yellow. Her family and friends had said to her such change of skin colour, particularly in her face. So she asked her doctor to check her liver.

She complained of increase in menstrual flow, which is fairly common in mid-age ladies like Mrs Lee. On examination, the doctor noted some increase in the "yellow tinge" of her face but there was conjunctival pallor (pale eyes). Her blood pressure and pulse were within normal limits. She was otherwise well apart from getting tired easily and a bit "short of wind". There was no weight loss nor change in appetite. Thus tests for complete blood count, liver functions and kidney functions were performed.

The tests revealed gross anaemia with a haemoglobin level of 7.1, about 60% of the lower normal limit. Her liver and kidney functions were all within normal ranges. The doctor ordered the serum iron and total iron binding capacity tests on the reserve serum kept in the laboratory from her first tests. These confirmed iron deficiency anaemia, resulting from menorrhagia, that causes excessive blood loss from the periods.

Clinically, Mrs Lee has compensated well in a stable body condition, without showing dizziness or fainting. However her situation could be potentially dangerous with such a low haemoglobin level. She was given daily iron tablet supplement, and anti-bleeding medicine for use during period to reduce the flow. Her haemoglobin level was elevated to 10 in a month. She was advised to consult a gynaecologist about her menorrhagia.

Information provided by Dr. Ben Fong (Qualifying General Practitioner)

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