

Letter in Response to 'Maid Pleads Guilty to Ill-Treating Bedridden Boy'

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We refer to the article 'Maid Pleads Guilty to Ill-Treating Bedridden Boy' (ST, March 6 2017). Individuals affected by Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) require continual ventilation and oxygen support. This condition can also affect the muscles used for chewing, sucking, and swallowing. Therefore, respiratory care is critical. Children with SMA usually require ongoing care throughout their lives from a range of doctors and professional caregivers.

The daily care includes not only managing the ventilator and other equipment, but also being able to provide emergency medical care if the child experiences distress and most importantly, the ability to recognise signs of distress. The high degree of medical and technological expertise required by parents or caregivers can be a tremendous drain on the family. The nature of such care goes beyond normal expectations of the family unit, and caregivers need extensive support from a rehabilitation team.

The inability to recruit qualified home nursing staff, a limited number of capable family caregivers and delays in obtaining appropriate equipment are some of the challenges families who care for a child with SMA may face. The child's family and designated caregivers have to be involved in all aspects of the child's care. Ongoing coordination and communication between the medical and rehabilitation team is required.

This incident has not only sparked off questions about the ability of domestic workers to perform advanced care work but the multiple roles they are expected to perform, such as cleaning, cooking, washing and laundering. Caregiving can be physically, emotionally and mentally exhausting. Are we expecting too much of our domestic workers? What measures are in place to ensure their physical and psychological wellbeing is not compromised? Is the quality of care for the vulnerable being compromised without more resources from the government to train these women?

HOME recognises the need for competency in care giving skills and offers such programmes for domestic workers. It is also important to recognise the difference between domestic work and care giving. Employers need to take responsibility for

selecting the right person for the job. The government also needs to ensure employers have access to affordable and quality caregivers.

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