



Mr Ng Chao Mo underwent surgery after being diagnosed with liver cancer in 2005. More than a year later, he found that the cancer had returned and there were two tumours in his right lung. He then took part in a clinical trial and has remained well for the last two years. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Trial saved his life, cancer now stable

IF NOT for a clinical trial, Mr Ng Chao Mo, 68, might not have survived his liver cancer, which had also spread to his lungs.

Given just months to live, he had little hesitation when his oncologist offered him the chance to take part in a trial for a drug to treat his cancer.

The six-month treatment would have cost \$30,000, far beyond the means of the retired lorry driver. Taking part in a clinical trial meant he would get it free.

Since he was given the drug Avastin in the trial at the National Cancer Centre, his cancer has stopped growing and he has remained well for the past two years.

After Mr Ng was diagnosed with liver

cancer in 2005, he underwent surgery, followed by radiotherapy and chemotherapy to kill the remaining malignant cells.

More than a year later, during a regular screening, he found that the cancer had returned.

This time, there were two tumours in his right lung. His oncologist, Dr Toh Han Chong, told him it was caused by his liver cancer spreading.

Because of the location of the tumours, they could not be operated on.

His best option was a new drug that has proven extremely good for only about 3 per cent to 4 per cent of patients. But at \$5,000 a month, it was beyond him, and his Medisave account was already depleted.

"I don't have the money. I'm a pauper," he said in Mandarin.

So when Dr Toh asked if he was willing to take part in a clinical trial, he grabbed the chance.

Throughout the treatment, he suffered few side effects, apart from a bit of gum pain and constipation.

Now, life goes on as normal. He has lived alone, since his divorce three years ago. His son lives with his former wife, and his two daughters are married.

He moved into a studio apartment for the elderly in Tampines a year ago.

He shops at the nearby supermarket, cooks his own meals, and spends his time reading, or doing calligraphy and Chinese painting – a hobby he picked up 11 years ago.

The results of his efforts adorn his neat sixth-floor unit.

Mr Ng is fatalistic about life. "I'm very happy the cancer is stable," he said.

"If it does come back, then it can't be helped."

SALMA KHALIK