

DEAD AFTER 8 HOURS ON LAPTOP

She wanted to earn money to take mum on holiday, but struggled with job. As her health deteriorates, she writes in blog...



◆ Ms May Leong in a photo taken on 6 Apr at Mr Li's birthday celebration. She looked fine then.

VITAMIN M* won't cure my health

*money



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HER story is a painful but apt lesson for us as we take a break this May Day: Work hard, but take care of your health.

That lesson came too late for Ms May Leong, who died on 23 Apr.

Just two days before her death, she had written in her blog: "I don't wanna end up dead for the sake of dough".

Her mum and some friends believe she was stressed out from work.

Going by her blog entry dated 21 Apr - her only entry this year - her job seemed demanding.

And she was clearly struggling to cope with the workload.

Just before she died, Ms Leong, who would have been 29 this month, had been working on her laptop for eight straight hours, said her mother.

Although the cause of death can't be confirmed for now, family

members believe she died from pulmonary embolism caused by deep vein thrombosis.

This is a condition that can strike when someone has been inactive for a long period of time, like sitting in one position. (See report at top of facing page.)

"I really thought I was able to do everything, that I can be supergirl as well, but my health is worsening at a fast rate," she wrote in her blog two days before she died.

"Vitamin M(oney) isn't gonna cure my health."

The Singaporean is an only child. Her father left the family when she was young, said a relative, leaving the mother and daughter to fend for themselves.

That early trauma bonded the pair, who became close.

Ms Leong, who worked in a multi-national company (MNC) and apparently drew a salary of \$2,600 a month, said in her blog that she wanted to "earn lots of \$".

She had a dream: To take her mother abroad for a holiday.

Friends and family said she was bent on earning enough to realise that dream for Madam Lim Mui Mui, 54, who works as a packer for a supermarket chain here.

That is why Ms Leong continued to hold on to her job, despite being stressed by it.

Said her friend, Mr Li Kaiyan, 25, a civil engineering student at the National University of Singapore: "She told us before she blogged her last entry that she was overworked and stressed out."

"We hardly had time to chat on the Internet since she started this job about two months ago."

Ms Leong had been working at different jobs until she joined her last company in September last year, said Mr Li who has been a close friend for three years.

In March, she switched departments in the same company and work became more demanding.

Ms Leong, a support manager, was thrilled to "finally have the chance to

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'Worked up, stressed up, crashed down'

Excerpts from Ms May Leong's blog, 21 Apr 2007, 2 days before she died.

I've got a contract of six months to fulfill... three months to commit. If I quit now, I've got to pay back one month's salary. Not worth it. If I quit after May, it won't be so bad.

But I don't know if my health can tolerate (it) till then.

Just yesterday, I received an e-mail from my job agency saying that a contract staff who's working in (place of work) as well, passed away from heart attack, leaving his wife & kids...

Deja vu? coincidental? a warning sign? I dunno. I don't wanna end up dead for the sake of dough.

Listen to your body or you may regret it

DEEP vein thrombosis refers to the formation of a blood clot within a deep vein, commonly in the thigh or calf.

Some risk factors include being over 60 years old, overweight and being inactive for a long period of time.

If the clot partially or completely blocks the flow of blood through the vein, blood begins to pool and build up below the site.

Chronic swelling and pain may develop. The valves in the blood vessels may be damaged.

Or if the clot breaks free and travels through the veins, it can reach the lungs, where it is called a pulmonary embolism (PE).

This is a potentially fatal condition that can kill within hours.

To prevent DVT, you should frequently exercise your lower leg muscles – every half an hour or so – if you know you'll be inactive for a long period of time.

Other than exercising your leg muscles, you should also exercise work-life balance, said Dr Clarice Hong, a consultant psychiatrist in

private practice.

"I would always advocate that we should always take care of ourselves first. If we don't take care of ourselves, we cannot fulfill our roles at work or at home, especially the multiple roles that women play," said Dr Hong.

If you do not feel well, you should listen to your body and rest.

"Don't push yourself so hard doing one thing. That's like putting all your eggs in one basket. Because if something happens to you, everything comes to an end," she said.

She was gasping for breath

MS May Leong's mother called Ms Pamela Wong in a panic at around 7pm last Monday.

Ms Leong had collapsed and she was having great difficulty breathing.

Said Ms Wong: "I used to live in the nearby block to her flat. But since I got married, I have moved. So I could not rush down. I called my parents and asked them to rush there first."

While her parents were on the way to Ms Leong's flat, they called her mother to ask if they should call a doctor or an ambulance.

"She asked for an ambulance," said Ms Wong.

When her parents arrived at the flat, her father saw Ms Leong on the sofa "gasping for breath".

"He also saw a huge bruise on her leg," said Ms Wong.

Ms Leong's mother was frantic, but there was little anyone could expect wait for the ambulance.

"The ambulance took about 20 minutes to half an hour to arrive," said Ms Wong.

"During that time, my father saw her calling her mother and crying, quite loudly at first, but as she grew weaker, her cries became softer."

By the time Ms Leong arrived at the National University Hospital at about 8pm, her condition was critical. Not long after that, she died.

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'fly high' in a Fortune 500 MNC", she wrote in her blog.

So much so that it was "ok for me to wake at 3.30am to start work @ 4.30am everyday in the morning" as she was dealing with New Zealand partners.

"But never did I realise what kind of stuff (would be) coming towards me..." she wrote.

"What I face everyday as a partner support manager is having more than 100 e-mails per day.

"Partners from New Zealand practically 'screaming' to be served first, getting their orders delivered ASAP, wanting everything, complaining of everything.

"Month end was the most 'exciting' part, you get to go on concalls (conference calls) almost every day, prepare backlog reports for each concall session which consists of 500 over orders remaining undelivered, investigating item by item..."

"I've got to work at home during non-working hours including weekends, just doing my best to clear my work."

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS

A National University Hospital spokesman confirmed that Ms Leong was taken to its A&E department on 23 Apr at around 8pm.

She could not confirm the cause of death as it is now a coroner's case.

Ms Pamela Wong, 29, who was Ms Leong's best friend for 21 years, believes that it was deep vein thrombosis which killed her.

She said doctors had told family members that Ms Leong had a blood clot in her legs.

"Her family members told me that when she tried to stand up, the blood clot actually shot to her heart causing her to collapse," she said.

Ms Wong added that since Ms Leong fell down two weeks ago, she hadn't been feeling well.

On 18 Apr, Ms Leong fainted at the lobby of her workplace. But she did not want to take medical leave. Nor did she want to quit her job.

"She was worried because she was on contract. Every time she took medical leave, it would be on no-pay basis," said Ms Wong.

Ms Leong wrote in her blog: "I've got myself sick these few days. Had diarrhoea last Thursday (19 Apr), hurt my knee and was limping badly since last Sunday (15 Apr), had

Chinese New Year (CNY) Reunion Dinner (8 Feb '05) next photo >



Mum & I (6-10x480)

It's only natural after seeing how hard your mother worked to bring you up that you would want to do something for her and want to take care of her. I believe that was my cousin's dream.

– Ms Jamie Tan, Ms May Leong's cousin (Ms Leong is pictured above with her mum in a photo which she posted on her blog)

breathlessness since Wednesday (18 Apr) and fainted after work on that day at my office lift lobby, knocked my head against the wall when I fainted, collapsed again last night at home."

Madam Lim said her daughter had been very sick since Friday.

Ms Leong wrote in her blog: "Now my chest feels really tight & breathing is really tough.

"Getting up & walk, I just feel like I'm carrying a heavy baggage of few hundred kilos & I'll start to feel really weak & dizzy."

Earlier, she had been to see the doctor at a private clinic near her home in Clementi. But the doctor had told her it was probably work stress she was feeling, said Ms Wong, who had spoken on the phone to Ms Leong the day before she died.

Ms Leong wrote: "Doc just said I'm really stressed out. Sigh.... what should I do? Quit? Or continue this ultra-super stressful job?"

"I've got a contract of six months to fulfill... three months to commit. If I quit now, I've got to pay back one month's salary. Not worth it. If I quit after May, it won't be so bad.

"But I don't know if my health can tolerate (it) till then."

Mr Li said: "According to her mother, before she collapsed, she had been working non-stop for eight hours with the laptop on her lap, replying to e-mail and work-related stuff."

At her wake at Singapore Casket last week, friends, family and ex-colleagues gathered.

According to Ms Jamie Tan – Ms Leong's cousin – her boss was the first to arrive.

"We spoke to him. We wanted to know if she was overworked. He said no," said Ms Tan, 31, whose mother is the elder sister of Ms Leong's mother.

Madam Lim said: "Now that my daughter is gone, what is there left for me?"

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