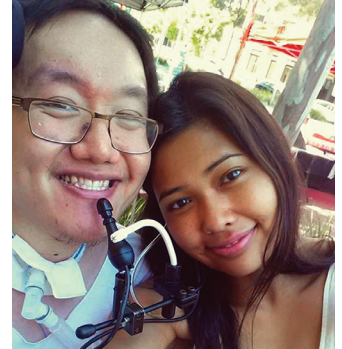


Case study: Tony Tong

Condition: High level spinal cord damage/trauma



“I could sum it up in one word: Freedom” — Tony Tong

At 22 years old, University of New South Wales Law student Tony Tong had the world at his feet.

All that changed in 2012 when he received the devastating news that the cause of his underlying lethargy and weakness was a malignant brain tumour, an astrocytoma in the brainstem.

In the months after his initial diagnosis, Tony was admitted into the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney and began radiotherapy, but that provided little improvement, so surgery was the last remaining option.

“My spinal cord was like a piece of string—all the rest was occupied by tumour,” Tony remembers.

Caught between either having high-risk surgery or facing certain death, there was little choice.

So in May 2013, Tony underwent surgery to remove the astrocytoma from one of the most inaccessible parts of his brain.

The risks were great; to survive was a major achievement. Preserving Tony’s life, however, came with the uncompromising cost of high-level quadriplegia.

Close to complete paralysis, his recovery began with three months in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) on mechanical life support. There, he still found a way to communicate, although his friends and carers had to learn to lip-read.

“Not being able to vocalise was so incredibly frustrating,” Tony says.

The severity of his quadriplegia required full-time ventilation. Over the course of his stay he was switched from the ICU’s heavy ventilators to ResMed’s more compact Elisée™ 150.

Once stabilised, Tony was transferred to the Spinal Rehabilitation Unit where he underwent intensive physiotherapy,

and occupational and speech therapy sessions to regain the basic skills of life, as well as his independence.

“I kept visualising getting out of hospital, finishing university and getting my career back on track,” he says.

“I wanted to pick up where the happiness had stopped.”

Set up with a computer, which operated through voice recognition and a Quadjoy handsfree mouth mouse, Tony was optimistic. He wanted to attend lectures, catch public transport and remain social like everyone else.

In March 2014, Tony was introduced to Astral™. Fitted to his wheelchair, the smaller, portable ventilator with long battery life and a range of therapy settings, gave doctors and nurses more options to better meet Tony’s needs, and provided him with mobility.

“Just being able to go out without the constant pressure that if I don’t go back in a few hours I’ll die, has made a huge difference,” Tony says.

“Simple pleasures such as visiting the shops or going out for dinner are now so much more possible.”

After 16 months of hospitalisation, Tony was discharged in September 2014. He now lives at home with his fiancée, Ashanti, and his cat, Leo.

In his most important decision and every related one afterwards, Tony chose life. He is now contemplating when he will graduate with his law degree, what jobs to apply for and where to have his wedding.

Though he remains on 24-hour ventilation and needs a carer at all times, the use of modern ventilation devices makes it less difficult being a quadriplegic and retaining a quality of life—just as Astral did for Tony.

“I could sum it up in one word,” he says, “Freedom.”