20-year-old gets breathless, stops gasping and dies

Ex-avid gamer had two attacks before, diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis

BY TEH JOO LIN

THE final, ragged gasps for air by a dying 20-year-old were so loud on Wednesday morning that they woke his brother, who was sleeping in his room with the door shut.

When Mr Oh Han Boon emerged from his bedroom, he saw his younger brother Rui Hong sprawled on the floor outside the bathroom, struggling to breathe.

This was his third—and final—attack of breathlessness in about as many years.

Shocked at the sight, Han Boon, a 22-year-old medical student, called for an ambulance immediately.

Rui Hong died on the way to the hospital.

The exact cause of death will not be clear until a coroner's inquiry, but he had had two near-death experiences since December 2003, both after attacks of breathlessness.

Following his first attack, he was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis (DVT), a condition in which the flow of blood is restricted in a vein.

A clot forms, and can become fatal if it breaks free, travels through the body and blocks a blood vessel in the lungs.

The first attack came soon after his O levels in the Gifted Education Programme at Raffles Institution. He was crossing a road when he became breathless and collapsed.

He was taken to the hospital and put on blood-thinning medication.

DVT can arise from poor blood circulation. In the weeks before that incident, Rui Hong had spent long hours glued to his computer, playing games online.

A year later, he landed in hospital again, also for breathing difficulties. He underwent surgery to remove blood clots and was put on another course of blood thinners.

His family hoped there would not be a third time—and they had reason to be hopeful. Doctors gave him a clean bill of health a few weeks ago and took him off the blood thinners.

Rui Hong died on the way to the hospital.

The exact cause of death will not be clear until a coroner’s inquiry, but he had had two near-death experiences since December 2003, both after attacks of breathlessness.

Following his first attack, he was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis (DVT), a condition in which the flow of blood is restricted in a vein.

A clot forms, and can become fatal if it breaks free, travels through the body and blocks a blood vessel in the lungs.

The first attack came soon after his O levels in the Gifted Education Programme at Raffles Institution. He was crossing a road when he became breathless and collapsed.

He was taken to the hospital and put on blood-thinning medication.

DVT can arise from poor blood circulation. In the weeks before that incident, Rui Hong had spent long hours glued to his computer, playing games online.

A year later, he landed in hospital again, also for breathing difficulties. He underwent surgery to remove blood clots and was put on another course of blood thinners.

His family hoped there would not be a third time—and they had reason to be hopeful.

Doctors gave him a clean bill of health a few weeks ago and took him off the blood thinners.

The family was so happy they celebrated with a home-cooked meal, said Han Boon.

Fighting back tears, Han Boon said his brother's death came just when he was coming into his own: Just a few years ago, computer gaming was his life, and he was "very shy" by nature.

But since starting his studies at Singapore Management University where he was doing a double degree in business and economics, he had opened up, taken up soccer, jogging and lifting weights.

Computer gaming became just a hobby for him.

"He was trying to take care of his body and overcome his condition," Han Boon said, adding that for the first time, his kid brother was nursing dreams and aspirations of starting a business of his own.

"He was strong, independent and never wanted anyone to worry about him," his brother added.

Rui Hong is survived by his father, operations assistant Oh Poh Reng, 51, and his mother, Madam Rosalind See, a 50-year-old senior management services assistant.

The wake is at the multi-purpose pavilion next to the family's home in Block 356B, Admiralty Drive.

The cortege departs for Mandai Crematorium on Sunday at 10am.