

JUNE-SEPTEMBER 2019

IMAGINE

A MAGAZINE ON MENTAL HEALTH

DEMENTIA DECODED

Understanding the condition that's often regarded as 'the thief of the mind'

YOUR FIRST VISIT TO THE PSYCHIATRIST

What you need to know, and how to prep yourself



SOCIAL MEDIA:

The good, the bad & the ugly

How to safeguard your mental well-being when using online networking platforms

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She doesn't tell me her problems. How can I help?

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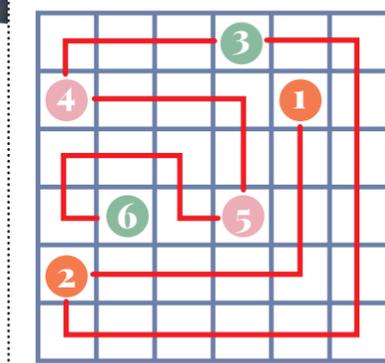
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ADJ A/PROF LEE CHENG,
Vice Chairman, Medical Board (Clinical), Institute of Mental Health



ANSWER TO GET IN LINE PUZZLE
Turn to page 9 for the puzzle

THE CHOICE IS OURS

As with all 'game-changing' inventions and advances throughout the course of human history, social media has proven itself to be a double-edged prospect. On the one hand, it has collapsed the boundaries of time and distance that once governed our interactions with others, given some individuals a newfound confidence to expand their social circle, and has even become a platform where those with mental health issues can form communities that support them. On the other, it can perpetuate unrealistic comparisons and affect self-esteem or heighten FOMO ('fear of missing out'), putting a strain on both our mental well-being as well as on our everyday relationships. This issue's cover story (pages 10 - 13) examines the good, bad and the ugly when it comes to social media and our mental health, with experts sharing their views on how we can choose to use it positively.

Similarly, an element of choice factors in how our profiles have managed to overcome the difficult challenges they faced. By making a conscious decision to persevere, Ms Anthea Ong (page 3) and Mr Rayner Gooi (pages 14 - 15) did not let their struggles with emotional and mental health issues stop them from achieving their dreams, and instead have become an inspiration for others.

In all things then, we should be committed to 'fighting a good fight'. While it may not be possible to fully triumph over all mental health conditions, our attitudes and choices can make a difference. The first step, of course, is to seek help, and our feature (pages 20 - 21) provides an insight into what to expect when meeting with a psychiatrist for the first time. Here too, you will find that a willingness to co-operate and participate in the process of our own recovery is crucial for its success. So reach out for help and never give up – the light at the end of the tunnel is there.

Happy reading.

the editorial team

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Cause and effect

interview • MY SAY

NMP **Ms Anthea Ong** is sure of her life's purpose — to champion the cause of those with mental health issues as well as the differently-abled — but the road to discovering it was not without trials and tribulations.

Interview FAIROZA MANSOR //
Photo courtesy of ANTHEA ONG

>> MS ANTHEA ONG'S IMPASSIONED ADVOCACY of mental health issues in Parliament in February left little doubt among those who caught the session that this is her *raison d'être*. Speaking in her capacity as a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP), Ms Ong emphasised that mental health must be valued as a basic need, and be a part of an ongoing national and whole-of-government priority.

"I have found my purpose," Ms Ong tells *Imagine*. The conviction to stand up for those with mental health issues as well as the differently-abled isn't new for the 51-year-old. In 2014, she set up Hush TeaBar, a social enterprise bringing silent tea rituals to workplaces to help busy urbanites slow down and reflect. It is led and run by the Deaf and persons-in-recovery from mental health conditions. "The idea is to not just include, but empower them," says Ms Ong. "There's no reason for them to be marginalised over something they didn't ask for or choose to live with."

This empathy perhaps stems from her own childhood experiences. She was born with a condition called divergent strabismus, which prevents her eyes from focusing. "In school or at the playground, I got called 'ugly', 'monster' and 'alien' by other kids," she says. "I remember wanting so much to belong to the mainstream but could not, so I understand being ostracised for something I had not chosen for myself. It just didn't make any sense."

MS ONG IS NO STRANGER TO DEPRESSION having experienced some symptoms herself. At her "lowest and

darkest", she had \$16 in her bank and was going through a difficult divorce. It was a fast and furious fall from grace for Ms Ong, who once thrived in the corporate world and held top positions. "I did think about the distance between my 18th floor flat and the ground," she lets in. "Luckily, all I did was lie down for a long time on my living room floor until those negative thoughts shifted to gratitude over the things I still have."

The process of healing was difficult, but Ms Ong pressed on. She continued practising yoga and meditation — which was restorative for her — and trained to be a yoga teacher. She also volunteered at various non-profit organisations. "Volunteerism was what really saved me. It made me feel useful and was a reminder that there's some value in me," says Ms Ong.

The hurdles she overcame taught her a key lesson: Financial resources do not necessarily lead to a path of meaning. "I define 'meaning in life' as finding joy, especially from being of value to people," says Ms Ong. "And you don't need money to give your time and stand in solidarity with those in the margins of society."

MS ANTHEA ONG

Social entrepreneur,
and advocate for
mental health

Ms Ong hopes her advocacy will lead to actual policy shifts in education and employment, and if not, changes in the workplace that support mental health. Her latest initiative, the WorkWell Leaders Workgroup, brought together 25 C-Suite leaders in May last year. "My secret vision is to put mental health on the board agenda, but for now, I'd be happy if it is a leadership priority," says Ms Ong, who is also a life and leadership coach and has plans to take her social enterprises and community projects abroad. "I'm excited about what the future brings," she says. "I've always believed in the multiple dimensions of the human experience. People ask me what is my full-time occupation and I say 'human being', I'm part-time everything else. Go out there, tap into your potential, and give what you have been given."

A LOVE-PACKED READ



To commemorate her 50th birthday last year, Ms Anthea Ong wrote *50 Shades of Love* — a unique wood-cover book. The collection of 50 short stories that chronicle her life experiences followed by carefully-crafted questions for reflection is retailing at all major bookstores across Singapore. For more details, visit 50shadesoflove.org

LOVE WELL!

Pet Pursuits Pay Off

» Thinking of welcoming an animal into your home? Consider a dog if it's happiness you're after. That's because dog owners are about twice as likely as cat owners to say they're very happy, according to the 2018 General Social Survey, an annual poll that monitors social change in the United States led by the University of Chicago. But don't fret if you're a cat person — people who own pets are generally happier. The poll found that having a pet helps older adults mentally, physically and socially. Owners reported less stress, increased social connections, and a greater sense of purpose.



Before you rush out to get a pet, remember that a pet is a commitment for life. Only get one if you can afford to take care of it, both financially and with your time. If you've thought these issues through, consider adopting one from the following places:

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA): This non-profit has been a mainstay of Singapore's animal welfare scene for decades. Options here aren't limited to cats and dogs — smaller animals like rabbits and birds in

need of a new home can also be found. spca.org.sg

Exclusively Mongrels: Singapore's street dogs are rehomed by this organisation that is committed to giving these loveable mutts a home to call their own. exclusivelymongrels.org

Cat Welfare Society: This volunteer-run non-profit organisation aims to protect the well-being of cats in Singapore. It also has a page where you can find cats up for adoption. catwelfare.org



A POWER PAIRING

for change
The Internet was set ablaze in April when British royal Prince Harry >



and US television host Oprah Winfrey announced a collaboration on a documentary series about mental health. In a statement, Prince Harry shared that "Our hope is that this series will be positive, enlightening and inclusive — sharing the opportunity for us to understand ourselves and those around us better."

Stay tuned: The docuseries is set to premiere in 2020 on Apple's upcoming streaming service, Apple TV+.

Mental wellness is a subject close to the duo's hearts. Prince Harry has spoken of his difficulties in coping with the death of his mother, Princess Diana, revealing that he had sought professional help. Oprah, meanwhile, has devoted many episodes of her popular talkshow to mental health issues.

The friend factor

You might think that buddy movies like *The Hangover* and the *Rush Hour* films are good for nothing more than comic relief, but they often drive home a serious message: don't underestimate the power of good friendships. Many studies have shown that a supportive circle of friends can extend life expectancy, lower chances of heart disease and even increase pain tolerance. A recent finding by Harvard University even suggests that people without strong friendships are at higher risk for depression, experience greater cognitive decline as they grow older and are more likely to die younger.

This finding is part of a larger 80-year-long research project — The Harvard Study



of Human Development. Its current director Professor Robert Waldinger attests that "good relationships don't just protect our bodies; they protect our brains."

The study began with 724 male participants in 1938, and counted former US President John F. Kennedy as one of the original subjects.

+ Maintaining friendships can be hard when you are overwhelmed by work and family. Here's how to do it, according to *Psychology Today*:

- 1. Be honest with one another.** Open communication ensures that everybody has a chance to share their thoughts without fear of judgment.
- 2. Apologise for past mistakes.** Holding on to anger doesn't just spoil your mood, it also hinders friendships.
- 3. Make time for each other.** Whether it's a backpacking trip through Europe or a birthday picnic at the neighbourhood park, there's always something you can do with a friend.
- 4. Change your expectations.** A close friend forgetting your birthday might not mean that he doesn't care for you. Learn to accept that your friends are human and that sometimes they make mistakes.

REIN IN ROAD RAGE

Find yourself fuming at the wheel? You're not alone: according to a survey by insurer AXA, one in two Singaporean drivers feel that the roads are less safe now compared to three years ago. Why? Most respondents cited aggressive drivers as the top reason. In fact, the number of road rage incidents reported as "voluntarily causing hurt" cases hit 66 in 2017, according to *Channel NewsAsia*.

Research findings from a number of studies point to various reasons for road rage. These include environmental factors like weariness from driving and poor traffic conditions to stimuli such as loud, aggressive music or stressors at work. Even displaced aggression and a tendency to attribute blame to others play a part. So the next time you encounter a frustrating situation while on the road:

- 1. Take a deep breath** and do not give in to your feelings of anger or rage.
- 2. Think twice** before you honk or make a rude gesture at another driver.
- 3. Remember** that driving dangerously not only endangers others, but also endangers you.
- 4. Focus** on getting to your destination safe and sound.





> MINDFULNESS AS A LESSON MATERIAL
When we think of lesson materials, things like worksheets and textbooks immediately come to mind. But researchers from the University of Bristol are advocating a new material — one they say would improve the mental health and well-being of tertiary students: mindfulness.

Their study involved 57 medical undergraduates who took part in an eight-week mindfulness programme. The programme taught the students how the mind works, how stress impacts one's life, an awareness of stress triggers and signs of stress symptoms, coping techniques, meditation practice and the importance of self-care. Each student was required to attend an instructional session on mindfulness for two hours a week as well as commit to 30 minutes of daily home practice. By the study's end, students who were exposed to mindfulness training reported lower stress levels, as well as reduced anxiety and worry.

IN A STUDY INVOLVING 57 MEDICAL UNDERGRADUATES, RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT MINDFULNESS TRAINING CAN IMPROVE THE MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS.



OF COLLEAGUES AND CONTAGIOUS EMOTIONS

Maybe you type furiously, banging on certain keys extra loudly. Or maybe you sigh frequently.

Whatever your involuntary response to stress is, chances are your colleague knows you are under duress. According to the 2019 Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey, one in two respondents in Singapore noticed their colleague's stress. The survey by insurer Cigna examined issues related to health and wellness affecting global working populations.

But while many of us may know how to de-stress, helping a colleague to do so may come less naturally. We may even question the need to do so, since it's not *our* stress. But it has been shown that we sometimes mirror the emotional states of people around us. So if you do nothing, your deskmate's stress may become yours!

Being in sync with your colleague's feelings can be helpful. For one, it helps you understand them better. It also allows you to connect on a basic emotional level by fostering empathy. The easiest way to help a colleague? Provide a listening ear. Ask that person out for a short tea break and let him vent his frustrations. You need not offer advice; sometimes letting it all out to a sympathetic listener is all it takes to help someone feel better.



JUNK FOOD strains the brain

EAT WISELY TODAY

An unhealthy diet may be a reason for poor mental health, according to the Loma Linda University in the US. The researchers behind the study (published in the *International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition*) found that adults who consumed more junk food were more likely to report symptoms of psychological distress. While more research is needed, evidence suggests that healthy diet choices can contribute to mental well-being, said the study's lead author Associate Professor Jim E. Banta. The findings are consistent with other studies as well. For instance, researchers at Bucharest's Hospital of Psychiatry in Romania have highlighted a link between depression and a diet rich in sugar, oil and processed grains.

Simple tips for healthy eating:

- 1. SKIP THE FIZZ**
Sodas contain a large amount of sugar — as much as 40g per can. Don't reach for the diet or zero-calorie soda though; these may come with ill-effects of their own. Instead, make it a habit to drink just water. Add cucumber or lemon slices to improve the taste and turn it into a refreshing beverage.
- 2. OPT FOR GOODNESS**
Swap out one unhealthy dish each meal.
 - Choose a garden salad (minus the oil-laden dressing) over french fries.
 - Choose grilled over deep-fried.
 - Pick wholemeal options whenever possible. Their higher fibre content helps you stay full for longer.



Seeking solitude is often cast as a red flag for depression and isolation, especially for adolescents who get labelled as outcasts or misfits because they choose to keep to themselves. A study by researchers at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Wilmington College, has shown that this is not necessarily so, and

hinges on a key factor: choice. Solitude can pose problems if those who engage in it do so because they lack friends, feel awkward, or experience social anxiety, or when solitude is used as a punishment by parents, said Virginia Thomas, assistant professor of psychology at Wilmington College, who led the study.

They are at greater risk of social anxiety, loneliness and depression, and tend to have lower levels of identity development, autonomy and positive relationships. However, when teenagers deliberately choose solitude, it could be that they know what's best for them. Adolescents want to spend time alone for

many reasons including self-reflection, creative expression or simply to recharge, with introverts needing more time alone than extroverts. "Sometimes, solitude is good. Developmentally, learning to be alone is a skill, and it can be refreshing and restorative," said co-author Professor Margarita Azmitia.



“If you want to be miserable, think of yourself. If you want to be happy, think of others.”

A quote by Buddhist monk Sakyong Mipham on the benefits of kindness, shared by the researchers

➤ BEING KIND HELPS THE MIND

The old saying “the more you give the more you receive” isn’t just a nugget of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* wisdom. Researchers at Iowa State University in the US have found that displaying kindness to others reduces one’s own anxiety, and increases feelings of happiness and social connectedness.

IN AN EXPERIMENT, the researchers divided the student participants into four groups, and told each group to take a walk around the campus. Those in the first group were asked to look at each person they saw and internally wish for that person’s happiness. The second was asked to think about how they might be connected to the people they encountered, with shared hopes, stressors, or even class schedules. Group three was told to think about how they might be better off or more fortunate than the people they saw. The last group served as controls, and they were asked to focus on external appearances of the people they passed.

AFTER THE WALK participants were queried about their moods. The first group showed notable changes, including feeling happier, more connected, empathic and less anxious. The second group felt more social connection, but not happier or less anxious, while the other two groups felt no change at all.

“Walking around and offering kindness to others in the world reduces anxiety and increases happiness and feelings of social connection,” said study author Professor Douglas Gentile of the University’s psychology department in a statement. “It’s a simple strategy that doesn’t take a lot of time that you can include into your daily activities.”

THE GOODWILL GUIDE

Here’s how you can get started:

1. When looking at loved ones, think kind thoughts about them to yourself. Some of these thoughts can be as simple as wishing for them to be happy or healthy.
2. Think about how interconnected you are with those around you. These people could be colleagues, classmates, friends or even strangers. Think about what you have in common – for instance similar hopes, goals, hobbies and interests.
3. Make a list of things or people you are thankful for. Gratitude acknowledges the kindness of others.
4. Be mindful of how your actions can affect others. For example, holding the door open for someone can turn the day around for them. Try to always say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ not just out of politeness, but to brighten someone’s day.
5. “To love oneself,” wrote Oscar Wilde, “is the beginning of a lifelong romance.” Before you can express kindness to others, you must first be kind to yourself.



#KNOW MORE:

A *Journal of Psychology* study suggests that how often you should smile during an interview depends on the job in question. Researchers say that it pays to be more amiable when trying for teaching and sales jobs, but not for male-dominated fields (banking) or those that require serious-minded people (journalism).

Keeping cool in the hot seat

There you are, waiting to be called in to a job interview. The Human Resources officer invites you inside, everything’s going well, then the nerves hit and you struggle to answer questions. While small doses of anxiety can be good so that we don’t get complacent, too much of it can ruin the chances of landing that perfect job.

Here are some tips for managing stress both before and during an interview:

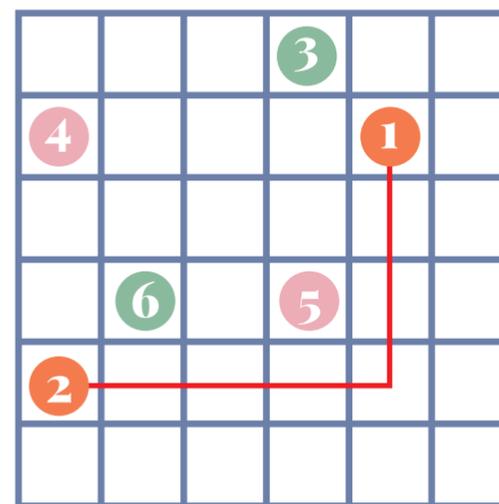
- **Prepare** Thorough preparation can go a long way toward easing interview stress. Identify your most relevant skills, and share examples of how you

applied those strengths, and generated positive results.

- **Research** Research your target company thoroughly, and be prepared to share why the employer and job in focus match your interests.
- **Try to Avoid Negative Thinking** Stress around interviews is often influenced by our assumptions or the statements we make to ourselves about the process. Identifying and countering anxiety-provoking thoughts can help to lower levels of anxiety.
- **Visualise** Many sports and job coaches believe that visualising images of success

can improve performance and reduce anxiety. Try imagining positive interactions with your interviewer, in the hours immediately before your interview.

- **Relax** You may also try relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises as a way to manage anxiety.
- **Reflect** Always remember that if you don’t get this job, there will be another one. Take it as a learning experience and move on to the next opportunity.



REFER TO THE CONTENTS PAGE FOR PUZZLE ANSWER

Get in Line!

DIRECTIONS: Can you draw a continuous line without lifting your pen off the paper? Draw a line starting from 1 and ending at 6. You can only move horizontally and vertically, the line must not cross itself and every square must be used.



To Post or Not to Post?

Why does social media have a positive mental health impact on some individuals, and a negative impact on others? The key, experts say, is in how it is used.

Interview Wanda Tan

Like other millennials, Ms Jessica Yu, 28, went through her bumpy teen years in the mid-noughties, during the height of first-wave social media sites such as Friendster and Myspace. “Social media was very interesting and fresh to me, as it was a new and convenient way of keeping in touch with family and friends,” Ms Yu, a graphic designer, recalls.

About three years ago, however, she started feeling less rosy about social media. “I was spending so much time taking photos to post on Facebook and Instagram, hoping to get ‘likes’ and positive comments. I would be embarrassed if I received few ‘likes’ for my posts. I would ask myself, ‘Why did more people like someone else’s posts but not mine? Are my posts not good enough? Am I not good enough?’”

Ms Yu was eventually able to overcome her self-doubt by cutting back on time spent on social media, and using it only in cases where it would potentially boost rather than dent her confidence. Nevertheless, her experience illustrates the double-edged sword that is social media. On the one hand, it is a powerful tool to connect people and expand an individual’s social network. On the

other, it could invite negative social comparisons with other online users and lower a person’s self-worth. This issue may be especially prevalent among Singaporeans, who are among the most active social media users globally.

THE GOOD ...

Social media was developed, first and foremost, to enhance human connections – either with existing friends and family, or with new people – by overcoming constraints such as geographical distance and physical immobility. On that score, it holds great mental health

benefits. “It relieves social isolation and loneliness by offering the chance to communicate with others,” says Ms Michelle Tan, a Clinical Psychologist at the Institute of Mental Health. “The option of being able to do so anonymously may even give some users the courage to share their problems or engage in creative self-expression.”

Online communities can be a wonderful source of information and emotional support. Countless social media users have translated their online connections with like-minded individuals – for instance, having the same hobby or interests – into real-life, offline friendships.

It can also be a motivational tool. People often use social media for tips or inspiration to achieve healthy lifestyle goals such as quitting smoking or getting in shape. One globally popular social networking site, Black Dog Tribe, encourages people with depression and other mental health struggles to share their experiences, so as to help one another in their recovery journeys.

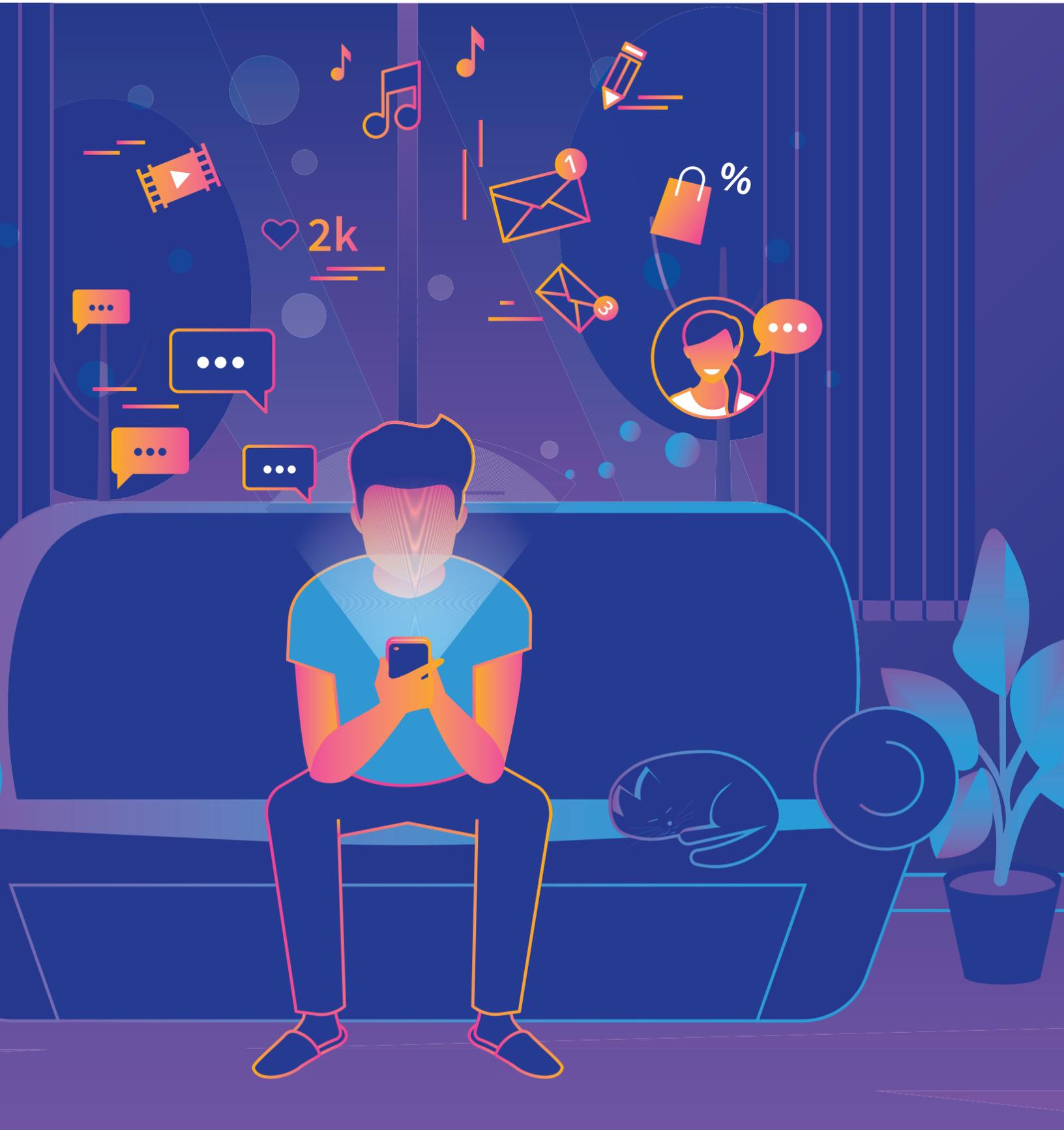
In his research on cancer survivors, the National University of Singapore’s Dr Jiang Shaohai, Assistant Professor in the Department of Communications

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

Besides Black Dog Tribe, there are other Instagram accounts that aim to promote better mental health and well-being:

- **@introvertdoodles, @crazyheadcomics** and **@letstalkaboutmentalhealth** post illustrations and thought-provoking messages to raise awareness about mental health issues, spark online conversations and fight the stigma surrounding them.
- **@positivelypresent** features original artworks that spread positive values such as gratitude, resilience and self-love.

Another Instagram phenomenon that has taken off is the body-positivity movement, which arose in response to the unrealistic beauty standards portrayed in mainstream media. Celebrities and non-celebrities alike share unfiltered ‘selfies’ and thoughts with hashtags like **#bodypositive** or **#bopo**, to combat body-image issues. Wide-reaching campaigns such as this, says Dr Jiang, help to “increase public awareness of the negative consequences of problematic social media use and improve psychological well-being”.





and New Media, found a positive correlation between their social media use and emotional well-being. "My study supports the mediating factor of patient activation. That is, as patients use social media more frequently, they would become more empowered and activated in the course of care, which could lead to better emotional well-being," explains Dr Jiang.

...THE BAD AND THE UGLY?

The same attributes that make social media a force for good can also have a negative impact on mental health. Enabling its users to connect with a much wider network raises the likelihood of upward social comparisons being made. This is when individuals compare themselves, be it in terms of looks, possessions or talents, to people who are perceived as better off than them. Negative comparisons can lead to lower self-esteem, depression and social anxiety. "For people with self-esteem issues, hearing about others' happiness and successes can deepen inferiority. It is easy to forget that social media

posts often present an idealised, heavily-edited version of life," says Ms Tan. A vicious circle thus develops, whereby social media perpetuates unrealistic comparisons and heightens the 'fear of missing out' (known as FOMO in millennial slang) on certain experiences and activities.

Mrs Anita Low-Lim, Senior Director, Children and Youth Group, TOUCH Community Services, notes that youths in the 13-20 age bracket are especially prone to the comparison trap. "Youths are at a developmental stage of wanting to find their own identity and desiring peer acceptance. Because their online identity is very much a part of overall identity, they tend to seek validation online via social media likes, follows or comments. There is a mental stress of constantly needing to measure



“Social media can affect one's mood, but at the same time, depression can colour one's perceptions of online posts”

MS MICHELLE TAN,
Clinical Psychologist at
the Institute of
Mental Health

up to what others post, and those who don't may feel inferior or even suicidal about not being as 'perfect' as others," she says.

In addition, those who spend too much time in the virtual world may feel alienated in real life, as they lack the social skills to communicate face-to-face and forge relationships. The cloak of anonymity afforded by social media may also embolden some users to engage in cyberbullying, cyberstalking or online scams, causing psychological and emotional distress to their victims.

A 2018 study by American researchers, published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, found that limiting the use of Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat to 30 minutes per day may reduce loneliness and depression. That said, however, Ms Tan remains wary about deducing a direct causal link between social media usage and mental health problems.

For one thing, the relationship could go both ways. "Social media can affect one's mood, but at the same time, depression can colour one's perceptions of online posts," Ms Tan adds, "As with any mental

health disorder, it is a combination of factors – such as life stressors, poor coping strategies, biological vulnerabilities, and lack of a supportive environment – that results in the development of certain difficulties over time; we cannot attribute it to social media alone."

GUIDE TO CYBER WELLNESS

At its core, social media is neither inherently good nor inherently bad for our mental health; rather, our thoughts, feelings and behaviours influence how we use it. "If you have a strong sense of self, then you won't need to focus on how

popular, attractive or successful you come across on social media. Conversely, if you are inclined to comparing yourself to others offline, then chances are you will also do so online," says Ms Tan.

The key, therefore, is to develop healthy online habits (or cyber wellness). "To be cyber well on social media is to strike a healthy balance between online and offline activities, and to practise good online etiquette," says Mrs Low-Lim, who is also a member of the Media Literacy Council. "A person's daily living and social functioning – including real-life interactions, sleep, and school or work performance – should not be affected by social media."

Here are some tips on using social media in a positive and responsible manner:

- > **Engage in self-reflection.** "If you feel worse after using a specific social media site, change who you interact with or stop using the site altogether," advises Ms Tan.
- > **Log off.** Set a daily limit on social media use, or take 'social media vacations' from time to time. Put the phone down to interact directly with those around you. Take part in offline activities that are meaningful and fulfilling.
- > **Be more selective.** "I created a new Instagram account and follow only those who have content that I really want to see, such as artists, designers, museums and photographers. I also follow a few accounts that post about mental health and self-love," says Ms Yu.
- > **Avoid comparing yourself to others.** Positive self-talk or cognitive reframing strategies may help, suggests Dr Jiang. "View others' successes and beautiful moments shared on

social media as opportunities to get inspired, or to think about your own strengths and achievements [instead of feeling distressed or inferior]."

- > **Remind yourself** that not everything you see on social media is real.
- > **Do not** browse through social media feeds when you are feeling vulnerable and lonely. Stop stalking your ex-partners or their new partners online.
- > **Think twice** before posting anything to make sure that it is not offensive. Refrain from cyberbullying or getting into arguments.

Did you know?

- Singapore is ranked **No. 4** globally in social media use (after the United Arab Emirates, Taiwan and South Korea), with **79%** of the population being active on social media.
- Singaporeans spend an average of **2 hours and 8 minutes** daily on social media.

Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite's Digital 2019 report.



ADOPT GOOD HABITS FROM YOUNG

SETTING ONLINE GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH.

"Before the Internet boom, parents, teachers and friends helped us form our identity and self-image. These days, the online arena contributes a great deal to youths' identity because of the time and emotional investment they place online," says Mrs Low-Lim. To cultivate healthy online habits in the young, she recommends that parents draw up a "family contract" that clearly states the rules and parameters for their kids' online activities, and place it visibly at home for all to reference. The document should contain:

- **Limits on screen time.** Avoid the use of digital media (except video-calls when necessary) for children under 18 months. Set a limit of one hour per day of high-quality programming for children under five, and watch it with your child to help them make sense of what they are seeing.
- **Designated media-free times and locations.** Ban digital devices from bedrooms and during mealtimes. Set an example to your child by following this yourself.
- **Proper online etiquette tips.** Teach your child the importance of being kind to others and respecting people's privacy, offline as well as online.
- **Protection against cyberbullying.** Assure your child that they can confide in you if they are being harassed online. Use the social media platform's blocking feature to cut off communication with the harasser.

Above all, Mrs Low-Lim urges parents to promote their child's identity outside of cyberspace through participation in real-life activities. "Affirm your child's achievements as a daughter or son, student, CCA leader, etc. This will improve your child's emotional stability and ability to cope with stress."

“ I was about 26 or 27 when I was watching David Letterman on TV one day – and thought he was talking specifically to me. I was writing an admission paper to a law school in the United Kingdom (UK) at that point, and I am not sure if the stress of that triggered my schizophrenia. It spiralled from there: I thought people on TV were talking to me, that directions were being given to me through the radio, that the newspapers were full of hidden messages. I found signs in the most innocuous things. For example, if I heard somebody say “stand up”, or “sit down” on TV or the radio, I would think that it was a test and I would be rewarded for compliance and punished for defiance.

At first I felt special, like I had a bigger purpose. But within a few weeks, the voices became malevolent. This was my second psychiatric episode: the first was while I was in National Service, for which I was treated. There were no major psychiatric episodes in between.

I told my dad to be careful about what we are doing and saying because the house was bugged. He got me to see a doctor and I was diagnosed with schizophrenia. I was initially resistant to the idea of treatment. I wasn't thinking very clearly then, and voices that were not mine were in my head.

It reached a point where the voices were telling me to kill myself, otherwise “they” would kill my family, and then kill me. I felt there was a huge conspiracy and that my doctor was part of it. So I thought if I threw myself at his feet, then perhaps “they” would be content with me being in a psychiatric ward, and leave my family alone.

My doctor put me on medication, which helped. But I went off it after six months, when I thought I was better. Eight months later, the psychosis started again.

THE FINE Art of coping

The struggle with schizophrenia threatened to take over his life, but Mr Rayner Gooi successfully battled it to establish himself as a lawyer and budding painter.

Interview
KOH YUEN LIN
Main photo
HONG CHEE YAN

MR RAYNER GOOI

45, Lawyer, battled schizophrenia

I thought people around me were agents of a powerful malevolent force. I couldn't sleep because I was afraid that something would happen to me if I did. I was convinced that mind-altering drugs were being pumped into my room. The voices in my head were egging me on to kill myself again. My dad brought me to see the doctor and I had to be hospitalised.

Subsequently, I went to the UK to study law. It helped as I was convinced that the conspiracy was Singapore-based in nature. A doctor I saw there put me on a different medication and it worked better for me. I felt safer and calmer.

I kept to myself, but I knew this wasn't good for me. I found it easier to interact with

others online, so I would chat with like-minded people – such as fans of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV series. This gave me confidence to reach out, and I even met some of them in person. Subsequently, when I had finished my course work, I would head out to Camden in London, which is home to a big Goth community. It was a very accepting community in which I felt comfortable.

I graduated with a Second Upper, came back home and have been practising law for over a decade. Now, I have my own law firm, which I started in 2014. The work has to come from somewhere, so I go out and meet clients. I still don't particularly enjoy social interactions, but I do it anyway.

Outside of work, I keep busy. I just started a T-shirt business as a fun side project, and have also been going for weekly skateboarding lessons for a few months now. I was a skater when I was young, and used to weigh just 55kg! I want to get myself fit again. I also paint, and often tell people that I am married to my art. I have always been drawing – comic book heroes in my younger days – and I progressed to painting at about the same time I started my firm.

For those who share the same condition, my advice is: Get help and follow through with the treatment. You cannot afford to have a casual attitude towards taking medication. Also, however well you think you are, you need to always watch out for negative



Some of Mr Rayner Gooi's art pieces that were exhibited at his first show, *Picking up the Pieces*, in 2018. Above: *Response to Onement VI* (2016); below: *An Answer Unsought* (2016).



“ Doing art and using it as a platform to talk about mental illness somehow makes me feel that something of value came out of what I went through.

symptoms, such as apathy, avolition and asociality. These

things are a lifelong struggle because the medication doesn't fully address them. I still have difficulties at large gatherings and it took a long while for me to be able to take the bus or the MRT. And I have only recently been able to watch news programmes (due to the fear of 'hearing' hidden messages).

Painting helps to keep me level. Given the amount of time I spend alone, I need something to keep me occupied. Rather than spending four to five hours playing a video game and have nothing to show for that, I would have created something that is, hopefully, an object of beauty. While painting, I mentally work through things that I have experienced.

My first art show (*Picking up the Pieces* at the Substation in November 2018) was something that I had worked towards for two years. I had a close friend who lost a loved one to suicide, and that was the impetus to start the show – to increase awareness for mental health issues so that others wouldn't lose their loved ones.

Doing art and using it as a platform to talk about mental illness makes me feel that something of value came out of what I went through. I am now conceptualising my second show and will move on to do more portraits. My involvement with the Rotary Club in the past year has also helped me to look beyond myself and think about others, who might have been through worse.

I gave a talk for the Rotary Club about stigma against people with schizophrenia. Those who are diagnosed and treated are the least likely to act out – yet they are the ones who are the target of social stigma. I am currently looking at studies about how exclusion works. I think that if we can figure that out, then we can figure out how to be included.

The blows will still come, and you never know when they will come, but I think I am now better at getting back up. Having a community helps, and my friends from secondary school are very supportive and watch out for me. I try to disclose my condition to people I come into contact with, because I think it is nothing to hide. So what if I have a mental illness? I think I have achieved as much as others without.

>> **LAST YEAR**, a Facebook user, Mr Lim Chuin Ping, posted a series of videos of his elderly mother, who has dementia. In a particularly poignant one, she is having a conversation with him during which she asks him how his mother is — she had no idea she was talking to her own son. The video, along with others such as her singing along to classic Chinese songs while riding in his car, went viral, probably because it struck a chord with many going through a similar situation.

Dementia is a growing concern. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the condition affects about 50 million people worldwide. In Singapore, one in 10 elderly aged 60 and above has dementia, according to the Well-being of the Singapore Elderly (WiSE) study conducted by the Institute of Mental Health in 2015.

Although the most common and obvious symptom of dementia is memory loss, it would be a mistake to reduce this illness to just this. In fact, dementia is actually a syndrome that includes a range of brain diseases that result in the progressive deterioration of memory, cognitive functions and behaviour. Dr Marcus Tan, a consultant at the Department of Geriatric Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), explains, “The hallmark of dementia is cognitive dysfunction, which impacts daily functioning.” Aspects of cognition that may be affected include memory as well as attention or the ability to concentrate, says Dr Tan. The individual’s ability to

Thief of the mind

In dementia, brain cells die faster than usual, causing memory loss, changes in personality and the ability to reason. Identifying the condition early can go a long way in improving the quality of life for those with this condition.

1 in 10
elderly Singaporeans aged 60 and above has dementia

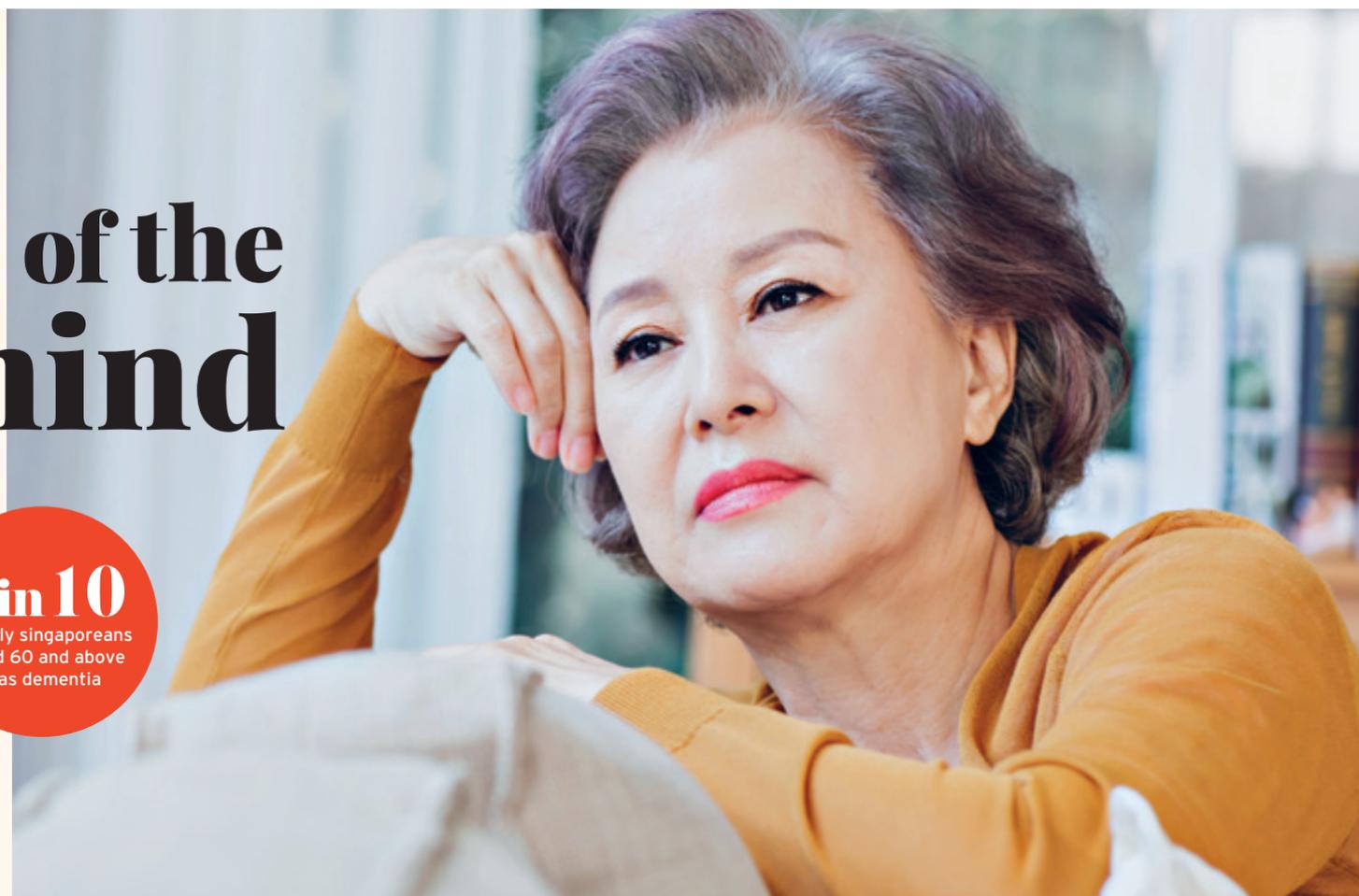
Interview **THERESA TAN**

judge and plan, and his language skills are also affected. There might also be personality changes. Dementia, however, is not part of normal ageing.

SIGNS, RISKS & EARLY DETECTION

The key risk factor for developing the condition is increasing age. According to the WiSE study, the likelihood of dementia for those aged 75 to 84 years is 4.3 times higher compared to those aged 60 to 74 years. For those 85 years and above, it is 18.4 times higher. The study also found that those who have had a stroke were at higher risk, as were people of a lower educational level, and/or were unemployed.

So how do you tell if your loved one has dementia? You may notice short-term memory changes. For example, he or she



TRAINING THE BRAIN

What’s good for the body is also good for the brain, says Dr Marcus Tan. Here are some ways to reduce the risks of developing dementia:

- 1 **WATCH** your alcohol intake.
- 2 **AVOID** any injuries to your head.
- 3 **BUILD UP** your brain reserves. “If you do the same thing over and over again, it doesn’t help much. Do new things, learn new languages. Travel, it makes a difference.”
- 4 **MAINTAIN** a healthy sleep-wake cycle as poor sleep is a contributor to dementia. During sleep, proteins that are responsible for Alzheimer’s disease and other neurological disorders are also removed more efficiently from the brain than during waking hours.
- 5 **MAINTAIN** a healthy diet. “Some studies show that a Mediterranean diet is good — unsaturated olive oil, fibre-rich, no excessive protein. It helps to control blood pressure, diabetes and stress.”
- 6 **EXERCISE.** Physical activity is good, but besides cardio-vascular exercise, Dr Tan advises taking up an activity such as dancing and yoga. These engage the brain at the same time, i.e. there is variation and one has to think while at them.

may remember a trip you took together 20 years ago, but not what was for lunch a short time ago. Someone with dementia may also have difficulty finding the right words to express themselves. They may also misplace things more often than usual. In some cases, the person with dementia may have a change in personality, going from being sweet-natured to someone suspicious and paranoid.

Though there is no known cure for dementia, early detection and treatment — medication as well as therapy — can help slow down the progression of the condition and aid functioning. This is because the severity of the condition is directly linked to the degree of damage to the brain cells. Identifying the condition early can go a long way in helping both the individual and caregiver to better manage daily living.

But even bringing a loved one to the doctor for an assessment can be a challenge. “It can be a frightening experience for the person,” explains Dr Tan. “Many are in denial and try to brush it aside as ‘just old age’ or they are unaware they have a problem. So,

we have to tread sensitively.” During the first visit, the person will undergo cognitive screening, blood tests and brain imaging. Health problems such as thyroid issues that may affect brain function have to be ruled out before a diagnosis of dementia is given.

DEMENTIA’S DIFFERENT GUISES

There are four main types of dementia, and many other less common subtypes — sometimes, a person can have a combination of causes for dementia. The two most common are Alzheimer’s disease and vascular dementia, followed by Lewy body dementia and frontotemporal dementia.

Alzheimer’s disease, which accounts for 60 to 80 per cent of dementia cases, is mainly characterised by memory impairment. Other cognitive abilities are relatively preserved in the earlier stages of the condition. **Vascular dementia** is caused by blood supply problems to the brain (sometimes as a result of a stroke). The cognitive problems that result may differ depending on which parts of the brain are

affected. **Frontotemporal dementia** affects the frontal and/or temporal cortices of a person’s brain, causing behavioural and personality changes — a person may exhibit uncharacteristic behaviour and have difficulties with language and communication. A common feature of **Lewy body dementia** is that sufferers may exhibit symptoms of Parkinson’s disease such as limb tremors and rigidity. They may also report visual hallucinations.

PROGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

A person with dementia can be helped to live life with dignity and enjoyment. Medication is available for treating Alzheimer’s and vascular dementia, says Dr Tan. “In dementia, there is a deficit in certain neurochemicals and medication can increase the concentration of that aspect.” However, he points out that medicine “slows down but doesn’t reverse dementia. The person still won’t remember a lot, but it helps in terms of his functioning.”

In addition, there are several therapies to improve the mood and quality of life of people with dementia. Reminiscence therapy — a psychosocial intervention used to maintain the person’s past and to reinforce his or her identity — is an example. “Friends and family members discuss past events and experiences with the person with dementia, usually using tangible prompts like photographs, household or other familiar items from the past,” explains Ms Ong Xin Ling, Senior Occupational Therapist, Department of Geriatric Psychiatry, IMH.

Ms Ong also recommends that caregivers find ways to engage the person and help them continue to do the things they enjoy.

From her clinical experience, she has found that familiar, meaningful activities are



“It can be a frightening experience for the person. Many are in denial and try to brush it aside as ‘just old age’ or they are unaware they have a problem. So, we have to tread sensitively.”



DR MARCUS TAN, Consultant,
Department of Geriatric Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health



“Friends and family members discuss past events and experiences with the person with dementia, usually using tangible prompts like photographs, household or other familiar items from the past.”

MS ONG XIN LING,
Senior Occupational Therapist,
Department of Geriatric Psychiatry,
IMH, on reminiscence therapy.

a powerful form of engagement. “For example, for a mother with dementia who used to cook for her family, it would be meaningful for her to be still able to do simple things like making a cup of Milo or cooking green bean soup,” says Ms Ong. Besides enhancing their self-esteem, such activities encourage them to use their remaining abilities. Being occupied with activities in the day also helps reduce behaviour like wandering and agitation and to promote quality sleep at night.

It is vital to note that persons with

dementia have feelings, just like the rest of us, says Dr Tan. “It’s just that they can’t express themselves, or they’re confused. Often, there are triggers in the environment that may cause confusion and behavioural issues, so if we can identify such triggers, we can avoid them.” For example, a person with dementia “may be lucid in the mornings, but by afternoon he may be confused because his sense of physical environment is poor,” explains Dr Tan. “So help him to remember when it’s day or night. Do things to calm him down, and re-orientate him if he wakes up at 3am and wants to go out.”

Ultimately, caring for a person with dementia requires patience and understanding – and a healthy amount of self-care as well. “Caregivers need to see what the person can do. Perhaps he can talk and walk and do simple tasks. Being aware of what he can still do, and his likes and dislikes are some ways to connect,” says Dr Tan. “It can be challenging but some caregivers have told me that there is no greater joy than to care for someone who has cared for you.”

A CAREGIVER’S PERSPECTIVE:

Realise you are not alone, and seek the support and help you may need

My in-laws, who both have dementia, live with my husband and I and our three children. About two-and-a-half years ago, my mother-in-law was diagnosed with very early stage Alzheimer’s, and has been on medication since. My father-in-law was diagnosed in 2018 with two types: vascular dementia, likely caused by previous strokes, and Alzheimer’s. They are in their 80s. As I work half-days, I became the caregiver. The initial two years were hard for me, because my mother-in-law has always been a go-getter – she’s a church volunteer, loves to travel, and is always reading. So, her diagnosis was painful for me to accept, and I found myself trying to force her to remember things, to

exercise more, to simply defy the signs of decline.

When my father-in-law started getting lost frequently about 18 months ago, we brought him to the doctor, after some persuasion. His symptoms are more extreme – he has four or five lunches a day because 10 minutes after his meal, he forgets and asks for lunch again.

Things got better for me when I researched dementia and talked to other caregivers and friends in the same situation. I realised I was not alone, and there were others facing more challenging circumstances. We share tips and resources, or simply provide a listening ear. It also helps that my husband and his siblings are

supportive of decisions I make.

Last October, we hired a helper to look after my in-laws. We also sought out tools to help them, such as a SIM card tracker that my father-in-law now wears

Things got better for me when I researched dementia, and talked to other caregivers and friends in the same situation.

when he goes out – this helps us to trace his whereabouts.

I know that their decline is inevitable, but at least now, I am better prepared to listen to my mother-in-law when she relates the same story for the eighth time. And I’ve trained the helper to prepare six small portions of lunch daily for my father-in-law so he doesn’t overeat. I’m grateful for every day that we have together. Even if one day they won’t remember the time we’ve had, I will.



PAWS FOR A Cause

Through regular visits, volunteers and their dogs bring joy and companionship to IMH patients.

Interview DENNIS YIN // Photo AIK CHEN

In 2017, Ms Tan Hsiang Yue thought that her newly-adopted 10-year-old Golden Retriever, Zuzu, might make an ideal therapy dog after coming across articles on pet-assisted therapy. Zuzu certainly had the right temperament – she is docile, friendly and good with people.

But when Ms Tan brought her for an assessment, Zuzu “flunked the test spectacularly” because she seemed unable to follow commands. “Zuzu was too busy making friends with other dogs and their owners during the test,” says Ms Tan with a laugh. She later approached Therapy Dogs Singapore (TDS) for help. “Zuzu had actually known basic commands all along. I just didn’t know how to go about ‘activating’ them,” she says. Zuzu was tested again and she passed.

Since then, Ms Tan and Zuzu have been visiting IMH twice a month with TDS to conduct animal-assisted activities and provide companionship to patients.

How do the patients respond when they see Zuzu and you?

They are delighted, especially the young adults. These hourly sessions are very informal and take place in a hall where patients can just mingle with the volunteers and their dogs.



KEEN TO VOLUNTEER?

TDS is a non-profit voluntary welfare group committed to reaching out to society’s disadvantaged through pet-assisted therapy. For more information about volunteering with TDS, visit www.tdspore.org



ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES AT IMH >>



Animal-assisted activities are used to provide patients with therapeutic and recreational benefits to enhance their quality of life. Although not used as a formal form of therapy, these casual “meet-and-greet” sessions benefit over 60 patients each month.



MS TAN HSIANG YUE

42, Therapy Dogs Singapore Volunteer

Having regularly visited IMH, what have you learnt about mental health?

I used to think that people with mental health challenges will exhibit visible signs, but I have learnt that that is not always the case. Many of the patients are just like you and I; they can be articulate and we have excellent conversations. Some do open up and share with us about their background, why they have been admitted to IMH, as well as their aspirations when they are discharged. As they tell their stories, I can feel that they have gone through emotionally tough times. Thankfully, Zuzu’s presence and companionship help to distract them temporarily from their worries.

How do you think such visits benefit the patients?

Volunteers are not trained psychologists or counsellors. We and our furry friends are there to provide companionship and comfort. Long-stay patients don’t often meet people outside the hospital much or get to see their families, so seeing the same faces every month also gives them a sense of consistency and stability.

What keeps you going with your volunteer work?

The smiles and glee on the patients’ faces make it all worth it. Another thing that encourages me is the joyful reactions from the nurses. They, too, enjoy our dogs’ company very much. It’s hard work having to look after patients and such sessions are a time for them to de-stress too.

How have these sessions helped you?

Interacting with people who are different makes us reflect on how we wish to respond to them and also be more open to differences. It is because of Zuzu that I am able to have these interactions with people with mental health challenges, which have helped me better understand this relatively unknown and misunderstood segment of society. It has been a very humbling experience, so I often share my experiences with my family and friends to help create awareness.



IF YOU FEEL THAT the first session might be too intimidating for you, having a loved one there to back you up might help

A Positive First

An initial visit to a psychiatrist can be stressful for some; keeping these points in mind can turn it into a **helpful experience**. Interview Ashok Soman

>> SO YOU'VE GOTTEN A REFERRAL from your GP or family doctor to see a psychiatrist, and have arranged your first appointment. A little anxiety before your session is perfectly normal – you've been to the doctor many times before, but chances are this is the first time you are seeing a psychiatrist.

"Sometimes our patients delay seeking help for their mental health issues due to fear or misconceptions," says Adjunct Associate Professor Lee Cheng, Vice Chairman, Medical Board (Clinical), Institute of Mental Health (IMH). "But seeing a psychiatrist is not that different from going to a

neighbourhood GP or a specialist for physical ailments."

Knowing what to expect can help to set your mind at ease. With input from Adj A/Prof Lee, here is what you need to know in order to make the most of your first appointment.

1. Prepare for your first session. You've come this far in wanting to seek help. This is a key first step, and you should feel good about this decision. Before your visit, make a list of what has been troubling you – not just a mental list but write down your concerns. Go into as much detail as possible, including your feelings

and questions about your behaviour.

Doing so will help you to remember all you want to tell the psychiatrist, and you will be able to refer to the list during your session. Any information you can provide will be helpful to your psychiatrist. "Contrary to popular belief, we cannot read your mind," says Adj A/Prof Lee light-heartedly, "that's why we need you to share with us as much information about yourself as you can."

While physical ailments often present themselves clearly, mental ones may be more challenging, says Adj A/Prof Lee. For instance, if you have been under great

stress, you may feel that you are not experiencing psychological problems as such. Instead, you may have become irritable with loved ones or your work performance may have suffered. "You may even be having somatic problems too, such as insomnia or aches and pains," he adds.

2. Be as open as you can. Don't be overly concerned about running out of time because the first session with a psychiatrist is usually the longest. At IMH, this can be anywhere from 40 to 50 minutes. Subsequent sessions are shorter.

In addition to getting to know you, there is a need for a routine physical examination in the first session. Adj A/Prof Lee explains that this is to ascertain if there is a physical problem. "Let's say there's a person with panic attacks who has never experienced them before – we would want to be sure that there isn't

an underlying medical issue, such as cardiac or respiratory problems, there," he says.

To help give your psychiatrist a better picture, share your medical history and remember to bring in any documents you already have, such as your referral letter, recent blood test results or scans.

3. Bring a loved one along. Whether you come to the session alone or with someone depends on your preference. However, if you worry that the first session might be too intimidating for you, having a loved one there to back you up might help. This person can also help in making the list of issues to share with the psychiatrist and fill in the gaps and support you should you forget anything during the appointment. In some cases, family members and caregivers need to be involved, especially if the patient has diminished capacity in some way, or if the patient is a child.

4. Don't worry about sharing personal information. While the psychiatrist will do his best to get you to open up, remember that you are there to get help for yourself. To that end, be honest about the struggles you are facing. It may be difficult to open up about some subjects but rest assured that your sessions with the psychiatrist are meant to help you cope with them.

Taking the first steps in getting help >>

If you are experiencing symptoms that trouble you, help is available in your community.



Talk to a counsellor at a Social Service Organisation or to your GP. They can help you manage mild to moderate mental health issues or point you in the right direction should you need more specialised care. You may also call the 24-hour IMH Helpline at 6389 2222 for advice on mental health issues.

Your psychiatrist is not there to make a judgment about you, and the information shared is confidential. He may sometimes suggest involving family members in your session. But this will be discussed with you first.

5. Don't rush your diagnosis. It may sometimes take a few sessions with your psychiatrist before a diagnosis can be given. "It can also be provisional," says Adj A/Prof Lee, "For conditions such as schizophrenia, the psychiatrist would not be inclined to immediately arrive at a diagnosis, especially in the early stage. This type of labelling is not helpful, especially if the situation is not clear-cut." Once a diagnosis has been provided, you and your psychiatrist will work together on a treatment plan based on your health needs and preferences.

6. Take charge of your mental health. Ask questions – not only about medications you may be prescribed, but also about the doctor's recommendations and thoughts about your condition. Learn as much as you can about your condition, and stay committed to the treatment plan as you work towards recovery.



ADJ A/PROF LEE CHENG, Vice Chairman, Medical Board (Clinical), Institute of Mental Health

“For conditions such as schizophrenia, the psychiatrist would not be inclined to immediately arrive at a diagnosis, especially in the early stage.”

PSYCHIATRISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? >>

While they are both mental health specialists and often work together to provide care, psychiatrists and psychologists have some important differences in focus and treatment approach. A psychiatrist is a medical doctor, who is able to provide a diagnosis and prescribe medication. Psychologists, on the other hand, conduct assessments such as IQ, personality and other neuropsychological tests. They also provide non-medication-focused treatment such as psychotherapy to help patients change their behaviour and thinking patterns, and improve their coping skills.



Q&A

ASK THE

Experts

IMH clinicians answer your questions.

01: MY 70-YEAR-OLD FATHER, AN AMPUTEE, HAS NO INTEREST IN REHABILITATION AND IS TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON OTHERS FOR EVERYDAY TASKS.

The family tries to accommodate his needs, but doing so is stressful and has overturned our daily routines. We aren't able to engage in activities that we enjoy, and are constantly tired and frustrated, since we also have to put up with his tantrums. And yet, there's this sense of us not having done enough. Is it normal to feel this way? What coping strategies can we employ?

A: Caregiving is never easy, with caregivers often experiencing feelings of frustration and guilt. Even if you are doing everything well, you may think that you are not doing enough. To maintain your own emotional health and prevent caregiver burnout, it is important to first care for yourself by ensuring that your own physical, emotional and other needs are met. You can do this by:

- Making time for yourself on a weekly basis
- Setting realistic expectations of yourself while setting limits on

- your father's expectations
- Balancing your father's needs with those of your family
- Acknowledging and sharing your feelings with a friend or loved one — or a counsellor if you prefer professional advice
- Attending psychoeducational and support group sessions for caregivers to enhance your knowledge and skills on caregiving

Likewise, your father might be struggling with his own emotions, such as frustration with his loss of independence, fear of death, insecurity and trauma, due to the

amputation. He might also be feeling guilty about burdening the family financially and physically. Encourage him to join a support group to help him cope with his condition and, eventually, to join a day-care centre so he is engaged with activities and social interactions. Meanwhile, you can consider getting home-care services to help with his rehabilitation.

MS TAN SIEW KHIM, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department

THE STRESS OF CAREGIVING

Caregiving is never easy, with caregivers often experiencing feelings of frustration and guilt.

VISIT THE Singapore Silver Pages website www.silverpages.sg for more information on eldercare and caregiving resources.



02: I HAVE BEEN A SMOKER FOR 25 YEARS. BUT GIVEN SO MUCH RECENT LEGISLATION – THAT HAS MADE SMOKING BOTH EXPENSIVE AND INCONVENIENT – I HAVE RESOLVED TO QUIT,

and have been trying to do so for months. Some people have told me the best way is to go 'cold turkey' while others recommend cutting down incrementally. However my efforts have been in vain. My problem is that I know smoking is bad for me but ultimately, I still enjoy it. I also worry about the effects of withdrawal. What should I do?

A: It is difficult to quit smoking because the nicotine in cigarettes causes a pleasurable sensation that makes smoking addictive. Choosing the method of quitting depends on the individual, e.g. if you are a heavy smoker, reducing gradually may work better than attempting to stop immediately. From my experience in helping people to quit smoking, having proper support is key, regardless of the strategy.

There are several effective medications that can help you quit. If you are worried about or have experienced nicotine withdrawal symptoms, then nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) could be an option. There are other medications which are

useful as well, and if the problem is severe, a combination of the above may be used. Over time, with proper treatment, the pleasure you get from smoking should go down. Do speak to a pharmacist or doctor to learn more.

Of course, medications alone aren't usually enough — lifestyle changes and counselling also go hand in hand to sustain the motivation to quit smoking. If there are certain triggers, e.g. stress, then these need to be addressed too. It is definitely possible for you to quit smoking with the right support, so don't give up!

DR LAMBERT LOW, Consultant, National Addictions Management Service



News

A round-up of news and events centred on mental healthcare.

happenings • IMH SCENE



Cohort 8 graduates with VIPs and GDMH faculty

READY TO SERVE

WITH THE LATEST BATCH OF GDMH GRADUATES, SINGAPORE NOW HAS MORE PRIMARY CARE DOCTORS WHO CAN MANAGE MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN THE COMMUNITY.

The 8th Graduate Diploma in Mental Health (GDMH) cohort graduated in April 2019. With the addition of the 15 graduates, there are

a total of 142 GDMH-trained doctors who have obtained the diploma since it was launched in 2010.

The GDMH, jointly offered by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and the Division of Graduate Medical Studies, National University of Singapore, provides comprehensive and structured training in community psychiatry and counselling. It equips General Practitioners (GPs) and

doctors with the knowledge and skills required to access, identify and manage various psychiatric conditions and provide more holistic care for their patients.

The next intake begins in September 2019. Participants can look forward to a broader curriculum with a new module on personality disorders and psychological therapies. For more information on the course, email nirhana_japar@imh.com.sg



Network of Hope

If you are a person with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or a caregiver, you are not alone in your struggle. The OCD Network provides support to caregivers and persons with OCD across age groups through monthly meetings and outings. At these sessions, clients and caregivers can share experiences and learn from one another. Public education talks are also organised by the network members, which includes IMH and charity group Clarity Singapore, to raise awareness on the condition.

If you are interested to join the OCD Network, or know of someone who may benefit from it, email ocdnetwork@clarity-singapore.org or visit www.ocdnetworksg.com

HEROES IN HEALTHCARE

An IMH staff and volunteer were honoured for going beyond the call of duty to help others.

Ms Serlina Eng, Senior Case Manager, IMH, set up 'The Hut' in 2017 after learning that many patients were seeking a safe and comforting space for respite when they feel troubled. Today, over 20 patients visit the drop-in centre daily to interact with fellow patients and staff and engage in therapeutic activities. For her efforts to improve patients' quality of life, Ms Eng joined 82 other individuals in receiving the 2019 Healthcare Humanity Awards (HHA) on 25 April 2019.

Another award recipient was Mr Jonathan Kuek. Driven by a desire to build an inclusive society, Mr Kuek started volunteering with IMH in January 2014 and pioneered the "Matchsticks" volunteer group to encourage youths to regularly visit IMH patients. With the group, he brings joy and companionship to long-stay patients who have few or no relatives, by organising social activities, such as excursions, outings and festive celebrations.



Above: Ms Serlina Eng and Mr Jonathan Kuek receiving their 2019 Healthcare Humanity Awards (HHA) from Minister for Health Mr Gan Kim Yong.

That familiar feeling

Déjà vu is an age-old mystery that has been the subject of various studies. Recent findings have shed more light on this strange sensation.

IT'S A SENSATION MANY OF US HAVE PROBABLY EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONCE.

For instance, on your maiden visit to the Eiffel Tower, you are suddenly gripped by the feeling that you have been here before. What is happening here? Is it an echo of a 'past life' or a trick of the mind? The answer: it's a phenomenon called déjà vu. A French term that means "already seen", it is an overwhelming sense of having experienced an identical situation in some undetermined past – while clearly knowing this cannot be true.

Manufactured Memories and More

Although it was first described in scientific literature in the late 1800s, it took another century before a universal definition was given to déjà vu. Researchers have since dismissed the wilder theories (such as extra-sensory perception and alien abductions), and put forward some possible explanations on what causes the phenomenon.

● Familiarity-Based Recognition:

Some researchers believe that déjà vu occurs when you enter an environment, meet a person or experience an event similar to one you've encountered before.

● Neurological Glitch:

People with temporal lobe epilepsy and frontotemporal dementia may experience déjà vu right before they have a seizure. Doctors from Mayo Clinic think it is triggered by a disruption in the firing of neurons in the brain.

● Memory Mix-Up:

Another theory suggests that déjà vu may be triggered by a mix-up between sensory input and memory recalling output while your brain tries to make sense of the world around you.

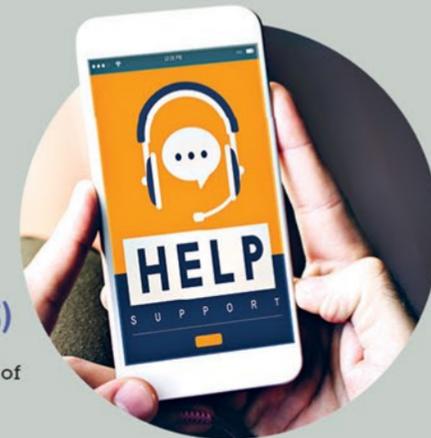
ABOUT **70%** of people – mainly in the **15-25** age group – report having experienced déjà vu.

People who travel often are more likely to experience déjà vu



RESOURCES AND USEFUL INFO

HELP IS A PHONE CALL AWAY



Mental Health Helpline

Manned by trained counsellors from IMH for those requiring advice on mental health issues.

Tel: 6389 2222 (24 hours)

Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) Helpline

Provides information and assistance on mental health matters and psychosocial issues.

Tel: 1800-283 7019 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 6pm)

Dementia Helpline by Alzheimer's Disease Association

Provides information and assistance on caring for a person with dementia.

Tel: 6377 0700 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 6pm)

Dementia InfoLine by Health Promotion Board

For advice and information on dementia-related queries (available in all 4 languages – English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil).

Tel: 1800-223 1123 (Monday to Friday; 8.30am to 5pm and Saturday; 8.30am to 1pm)

Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)

Provides confidential emotional support for those in crisis, thinking of suicide or affected by suicide.

Tel: 1800-221 4444 (24 hours)

National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) All Addictions Helpline

Provides a range of services to assist people who are dealing with addiction problems.

Tel: 6732 6837 (Monday to Friday; 8.30am to 6pm)

National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) Helpline

Provides information and help for problem gamblers and their families.

Tel: 1800-666 8668 (8am to 11pm daily)

Touchline by Touch Youth Services

Renders emotional support and practical advice to youth.

Tel: 1800-377 2252 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 6pm)

Tinkle Friend Helpline by Singapore Children's Society

Provides support, advice and

information to primary school children in distress, especially in situations when their parents or main caregivers are unavailable.

Tel: 1800-274 4788 (Monday to Friday; 2.30pm to 5pm)

Club HEAL

Helps persons with mental health issues to reintegrate back into the community.

Tel: 6899 3463 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 5pm)

Silver Ribbon

Supports persons with mental health issues and their families.

Tel: 6386 1928 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 5pm)

Caregivers Alliance Limited

Supports caregivers of persons with mental health issues.

Tel: 6460 4400 (main line); 6388 2686 (Caregivers Support Centre)

IMH SERVICE DIRECTORY

INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Buangkok Green Medical Park
10 Buangkok View
Singapore 539747
General Enquiries 6389 2000 (24-hour hotline)
Appointment Line 6389 2200 (Monday to Friday; 8am – 6pm)
Email: imh_appt@imh.com.sg

CHILD GUIDANCE CLINIC SUNRISE WING

IMH, Block 3, Basement
Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

CHILD GUIDANCE CLINIC HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD BUILDING

3 Second Hospital Avenue #03-01
Singapore 168937

Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

CLINIC B

IMH, Level 1
Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

SAYANG WELLNESS CENTRE CLINIC (for non-subsidised patients)

IMH, Level 2
Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

COMMUNITY WELLNESS CLINIC, QUEENSTOWN

580 Stirling Road, Level 4,
Singapore 148958
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
8am to 5.30pm

Wednesday 8am to 12.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

COMMUNITY WELLNESS CLINIC, GEYLANG

21 Geylang East Central, Level 4
Singapore 389707
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday,
Friday 8am to 5pm
Wednesday 8am to 12.30pm

NATIONAL ADDICTIONS MANAGEMENT SERVICE (NAMS) CLINIC

IMH, Block 9 Basement
Monday to Thursday
8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

9th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
- TOGETHER AGAINST STIGMA

Beyond The Label
**Towards
An Inclusive
Society**

3 - 5 Oct 2019
Marina Bay Sands Singapore



REGISTRATION IS
NOW OPEN!

ENJOY EARLY BIRD
RATES BEFORE
1 AUG 2019

The Together Against Stigma conference is an international platform to discuss stigma issues that continue to plague people with mental health conditions, preventing them from seeking help, gaining acceptance in society and leading a productive life that they deserve. Uniting against mental health stigma, the global community looks forward to keeping abreast of the latest developments, research outcomes and best practices in this field.

THEME

Beyond the Label – Towards an Inclusive Society

TRACKS

- Social Inclusion in the Workplace and Community
- The Power of the Media and Social Movements
- Professionals, Policy and Practice
- Recovery and People with Lived Experiences

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FEES

CATEGORY	EARLY BIRD RATE (BEFORE 1 AUG 2019)	REGULAR RATE
Advanced Economies	SGD950	SGD1,100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging and Developing Economies • Singapore Residents • Caregivers • Peers • Full-time Students 	SGD675	SGD825

CONTACT US

TAS 2019 Secretariat **Email:** againststigma@imh.com.sg **www.againststigma2019.com**



IN SUPPORT OF THE **Beyond The Label** MOVEMENT

Organised by



Singapore Psychiatric Association

Supported by

