

FEBRUARY - MAY 2022

imagine

A MAGAZINE ON MENTAL HEALTH

**WHEN THE
BABY BLUES
LINGER**

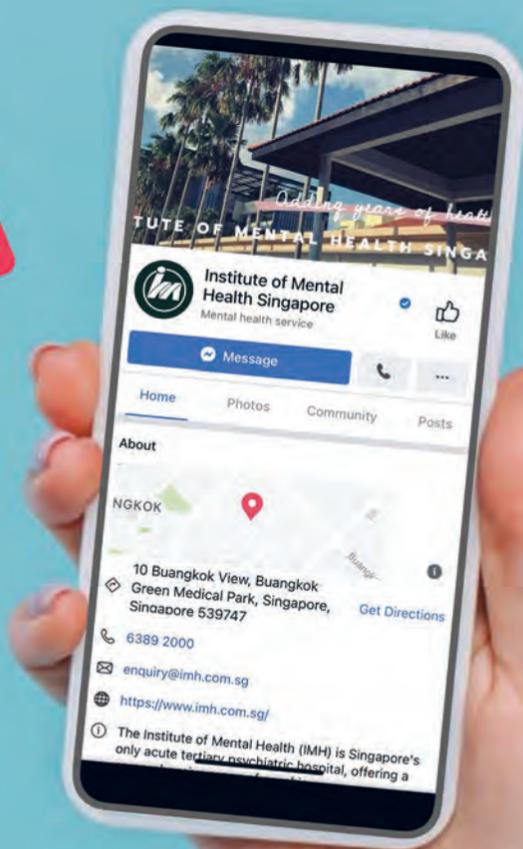
The big picture
on postnatal
depression



KEEPING WELL ON THE JOB
How to prioritise your mental health
and build a healthy, positive and
safe culture at work



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04 Live Well
Having a picnic can be a therapeutic experience.



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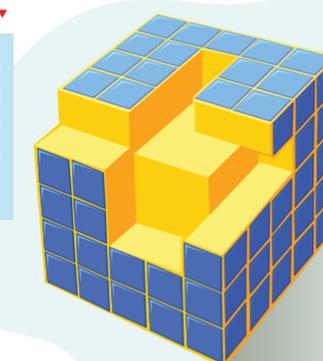
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Match the pieces to their respective cubes

- ANSWER: ▼
- 1 C
 - 2 B
 - 3 E
 - 4 A
 - 5 D



Turn to Live Well, page 7, for the puzzle



"The wake-up call triggered by COVID-19 has shown us that there is more to be done to optimise mental health at the workplace — especially our mindset towards seeking help when things are not okay."

ADJ A/PROF CLARE YEO,
Senior Principal Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

WELLNESS: A WORK IN PROGRESS

“Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” While this adage is certainly inspirational, recent cases in the news have cast the spotlight on toxic work cultures that are rife with bullying and unreasonable demands. Such environments not only reduce productivity, but can also affect the physical and mental well-being of employees.

This issue’s cover story (pages 8-11) delves deeper into this phenomenon and identifies the warning signs of an unhealthy work environment. We also look at what can be done to promote positivity at the office, and steps you can take to achieve and maintain a good work-life harmony.

Our social environment – the places where we spend our time and the people we surround ourselves with – plays a significant role in our state of mind. So, it is important to know how to foster an environment that allows us to thrive. Our profiles Ms Fathima Zohra (page 3) and Ms June Tang (pages 12-13) would know, having experienced the debilitating effects of paralysis and a lifelong struggle with mental illness respectively. But rather than give in to their circumstances and conform to societal notions about people in their position, both women have sought to reclaim the narrative, find nurturing spaces that let them contribute and grow, and define their own triumphs. Learn how they stay resilient and be inspired by their stories.

Elsewhere in this issue, we take a closer look at postnatal depression (pages 14-16), which is sometimes dismissed as “baby blues”. However, this more severe and long-lasting condition, which affects around 10-15 per cent of women who give birth, can drag new mothers down a downward spiral and even put their children at risk, if left untreated.

The conditions and situations explored in this issue may differ in nature but in all cases a way forward is possible. What’s vital to understand is that this journey to wellness should not only occur at the right pace, but also needs the right place to happen. Besides taking steps to ‘detoxify’ our workplaces, we can actively ensure that our homes and other social spaces are safe and supportive environments. Doing so will certainly yield untold benefits for our mental health and of those around us as well.

Happy reading.

*the editorial
team*



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imagine:



Editorial
Lalitha Naidu
Ting Mei See
Illy Iman

Contributors
Ronald Rajan, Dennis Yin, Alvin Teo, Annie Tan, Audrina Gan, Eveline Gan, Keenan Pereira, Koh Yuen Lin

Circulation Coordinator
Chris Ngiam

A publication by



Editorial consultant



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“People often refer to me as wheelchair-bound. But that implies that I am ‘trapped’ in my wheelchair. I choose to see things differently: the wheelchair is my key to freedom.”



Ms Fathima Zohra

Programme manager at Runninghour, model, disability & mental health advocate

Standing tall

A devastating car accident left **Ms Fathima Zohra** paralysed, with limited limb function. But she doesn’t let her disability or the negativity of others get her down.

Text KEENAN PEREIRA // Photos COURTESY OF MS FATHIMA ZOHRA

>> **MS FATHIMA ZOHRA’S CHEERFUL** demeanour belies a painful past. Within minutes into our conversation, she takes us back to one of the darkest periods of her life. “I was in a car accident five years ago and as I recovered in an overseas hospital, I was a wreck in every sense of the word,” she recalls. “My hands were tied to the bed because I was pulling out the tubes that were keeping me alive. I just didn’t want to live anymore.”

The 25-year-old says there were several factors that pushed her to the brink of suicide. “It was a very traumatic experience to have to go through as a 20-year-old. I was just learning to process life when I was dealt this blow. I was not in a good mental headspace even before the accident, so I just broke down afterwards.”

POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES

The years since the accident have been a time of healing, both emotionally and physically. Ms Zohra has accepted her disability but is keen to push herself further, as she believes she determines what she is capable of. This has led to tremendous success. She is slowly regaining sensation below her neck and has gone back to clocking in hours at the gym, determined

to make herself stronger. “I’ve learnt that I’m stronger than I thought,” she says.

She admits that the person she is today is a far cry from the one who lay feeling suicidal in a hospital bed. Reframing her situation and problems has been key to her transformation. “People often refer to me as wheelchair-bound,” she elaborates. “But that implies that I am ‘trapped’ in my wheelchair. I choose to see things differently: the wheelchair is my key to freedom. It allows me to go out to the gym, see friends, and have a job.”

Living with a disability has also made her forgo comparisons to others. “I’ve learnt competition doesn’t mean comparing yourself to others – to me, it is about being a better version of myself every day,” she says. “There are days that I judge myself

harshly, but I accept those days because I’m a work in progress – just like everybody else. When I find myself mindlessly scrolling and comparing on social media, I turn off my phone and give myself time and space to get in touch with my feelings. I also focus on what really matters: my growth, loved ones and the difference I make.”

BEING AND ACCEPTING HERSELF

That difference stems from her work as a programme manager at Runninghour, an inclusive running club that promotes the integration of people with special needs through running. “I manage and facilitate the sports club’s daily programmes,” she shares. Ms Zohra is also active on social media, with nearly 40,000 followers on Instagram. Her candid posts about her challenges and triumphs are a reminder that diversity is more than just a trendy hashtag – it means seeing and accepting people of all stripes, just as they are. “I am a model. I may not be the model that you are used to seeing, but I love myself and want people to love themselves too.”

Through her work and social media content, she hopes to reframe the discourse about people with disabilities. “There’s a narrative that people assign to us, even before getting to know us. The media is a big reason for this, as they often influence the world to pity us because we lead these ‘sad lives’.” She too fell into the trap of believing this narrative, until her accident. “Then I started meeting wonderful people who just happened to have a disability. They lead full and enriching lives, but instead of celebrating such stories, society still paints us as profiles of pity. The same is done to people with mental health issues. There’s more to us than our conditions.”



LOVE WELL!



Perks of a PICNIC

PICNIC SNACK IDEAS

- > **Cheese and crackers** Fancy, yet requires minimal preparation
- > **Finger sandwiches** Who doesn't love a sandwich? Customise the fillings to your taste
- > **Cookies** For those with a sweet tooth
- > **Sushi** Always easy to pick up a platter if you are pressed for time
- > **Fresh fruits** Just the thing you need to cool down under the hot sun

>> Almost all cultures around the world love a picnic. Be it a simple ham and cheese sandwich or an Insta-worthy charcuterie board, picnics are a great way to enjoy our favourite food and spend time with friends and family. Picnics are so well-loved that 18 June is celebrated as International Picnic Day. Other than serving as a leisure activity, they can also be therapeutic.

HERE ARE FOUR WAYS PICNICKING IS BENEFICIAL FOR YOU:

- > **NATURE THERAPY.** Being exposed to greenery and sunlight can improve our mood and lower stress levels.
- > **TIME TO DISENGAGE AND REFLECT.** The outdoor setting can serve as the perfect opportunity to put down our phones and spend some time reflecting and clearing our mind.
- > **HEALTHY EATING.** One of the best parts of picnics is preparing the snacks. Spending time putting together a picnic basket allows us to be more aware of our food choices.
- > **SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY.** Generally a communal experience, picnics allow us to reconnect, catch up and spend quality time with friends and family.

BE KIND TO yourself

Feel like your life's a mess? Don't be so hard on yourself, because chances are, others don't judge you so harshly. >



Research conducted by Dr Anna Bruk from the University of Mannheim in Germany reveals that we view our own vulnerabilities more negatively than others would. As a result, we might struggle to share our problems with others due to the fear of being judged as harshly as we judge ourselves.

Dr Bruk conducted a series of experiments involving 340 university students. They were asked to read and imagine scenarios where they and others had to make confessions, such

as admitting a mistake, or revealing one's imperfection. Participants were then asked to evaluate the confession, for instance whether they saw it as a sign of strength or weakness. At the end of the study, their level of self-compassion was measured. Those with less self-compassion judged themselves more negatively than they did others.

The results show that self-compassion can help to build a healthier and more balanced perspective of ourselves.

FOR GOOD LEISURE

Taking time off work to enjoy leisure activities can have positive effects on our mental and physical health. But whether we experience these benefits depends on how we view leisure time, says a study published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

Researchers asked 302 participants to take part in two types of activities over three rounds of experiments — instrumental or terminal. Instrumental activities served a particular purpose, such as parenting responsibility of taking their children out. Meanwhile, terminal activities were those done purely for pleasure. In the first round, participants undertook both types of activities and rated how much they enjoyed them and whether they considered the time spent on them to be unproductive.

In the second round, participants engaged in other general leisure activities like watching TV or spending time with friends. For both rounds, those who viewed leisure as unproductive reported lower levels of enjoyment of terminal activities compared to instrumental ones. In the final round, participants were divided into four groups. Each group was asked to read an article that described leisure time as either wasteful or productive, with the control group reading an unrelated article. All were then asked to watch a cat video and rate how much they enjoyed it. Unsurprisingly, the groups primed to think about leisure time as wasteful enjoyed the video far less than the other groups. So, as we plan our leisure activities, be sure to prepare yourself mentally to enjoy them!



FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FUN?

As parents, we may be reluctant to expose our children to scary situations. However, research suggests that children can benefit from experiencing them under safe and fun conditions, where there is no actual threat.

Scary situations trigger a range of reactions in our bodies, like increasing our heart rate, boosting adrenaline levels, and releasing stress hormones. Our bodies go into survival mode when we experience these reactions which we commonly refer

to as the 'fight or flight' reflex. But under safe and fun conditions — like when watching a scary movie or walking through a haunted house during Halloween — research published in the journal *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory* claims that we manage stress and fright better. As a bonus, when the 'fight or flight' reflex subsides, the body releases endorphins, dopamine, oxytocin and other neurochemical changes associated with feeling good.

According to researchers, overcoming frightening yet harmless situations are especially beneficial for children as they teach them how to deal with similar situations in the future. They allow children to learn to cope with stress and fear, and build self-confidence. These can then be applied in other unnerving situations, such as performing or speaking in public, and also make children open to new experiences that they would otherwise hesitate to try.



MAXIMISE HAPPINESS WITH MINIMALISM

Is the key to happiness just simplicity? It could very well be, according to a report published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*. It analysed findings from 23 different studies on the topic and found that more than 80 per cent of them concluded that minimalist living enhanced psychological well-being.

This lifestyle involves living simply with only things essential for our lives. By controlling our desire to consume, minimalist living allows us to focus on other positive attributes that enhance our psychological well-being. These attributes include making choices independently, realising our full abilities, and feeling connected to other people.

Lead researcher of the study, Professor Joshua Hook from the University of North Texas, says: "It's one of the biggest lies we can buy into that we just need more money, more material possessions, and more [fill in the blank] to be happy. These efforts don't usually work. Instead, I think we need to think about other avenues to improve happiness and living more simply might be something to try out."

KEEP IT SIMPLE



CLEAR THE CLUTTER

Here are some tips to lead a minimalist lifestyle:

> TIDY UP REGULARLY
Key to maintaining a minimalist way of living is to make organising and cleaning regular habits. This will keep the clutter at bay.

> RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO SHOP
With the rise of e-commerce, we are often just a click away from shopping for new products. But resist the temptation to do so by asking yourself: "Is the item a need or a want?"

> FIND A PURPOSE
Knowing why you want to adopt a minimalist way of living will keep you motivated to adapt to the lifestyle in the long run. Some do it to save money, others do it to be environmentally-conscious. Find out what your purpose is and let it guide you.



WATCHING YOUR WELLNESS

Spotting the signs of depression can be difficult. But researchers from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have found that wearable technology such as smartwatches can help with this. In a study involving 290 working adults, participants were asked to wear a Fitbit device for two weeks, taking them off only during shower or to recharge the device. The device measured the number of steps taken, heart rate, energy used and sleep patterns. Researchers then analysed the data and found that certain indicators were linked to higher chances of depression. Those with irregular sleeping and

waking up timings were more inclined to experience depressive symptoms. Conversely, those who woke up and went to bed at regular timings, had better mental health. Researchers also found that those who had varied heart rates between 2am and 4am, and between 4am and 6am were more prone to depressive symptoms.

"This is a study that, we hope, can set up the basis for using wearable technology to help individuals, researchers, mental health practitioners and policymakers to improve mental well-being," said Associate Professor Georgios Christopoulos from the NTU Nanyang Business School.



SPOT THE SIGNS
Researchers analysed the data from smartwatches and found that certain indicators were linked to higher chances of depression.

Keep Fit, Feel Fine

Improving our fitness adds an extra layer of protection against illnesses.

A study in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* found that people who were getting over 10 minutes of exercise per week had some protection against severe illness or death from COVID-19. Those who were getting over 150 minutes of exercise per week had even more protection.

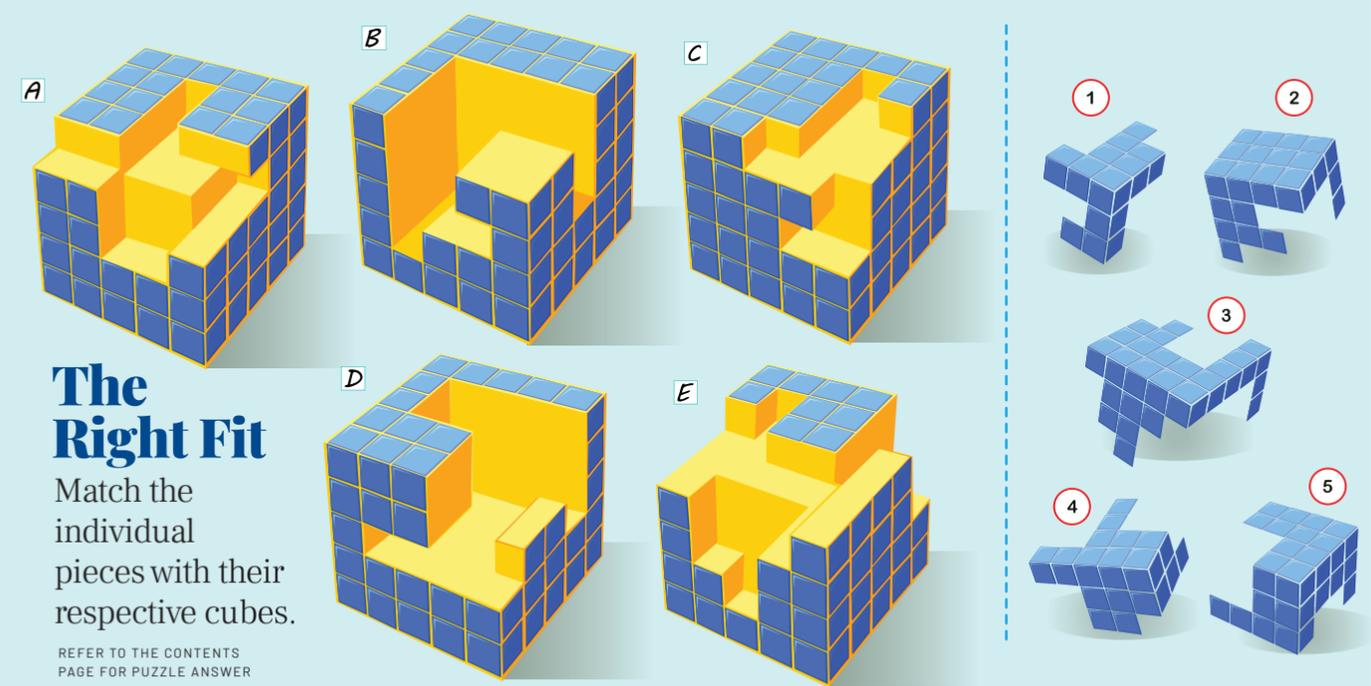
HERE ARE FIVE KEY FITNESS TRENDS FOR BETTER HEALTH:

- > FUN WORKOUTS.** Instead of the usual gym routines, expect to see more interesting exercises that combine training with fun activities. Some of these include trampoline jumping, weighted hula hoop exercises and roller blading.
- > INTERACTIVE TRAINING.** Gadgets that monitor training and suggest new training plans will expand in popularity. Soon, fitness enthusiasts will have their own Personal Trainer at the click of a button.



- > OUTDOOR EXERCISES.** By now, many of us have learnt how therapeutic the outdoors can be. So, explore more exercises that let you sweat it out while being close to nature.
- > INCLUSIVE FITNESS.** With greater acceptance that individuals have different lifestyles, body types and diets, there will be more inclusive training

- plans that can fit into the lives of many more people.
- > MIND AND BODY.** Fitness trends will increasingly target both physical and mental health as both are crucial for holistic wellness. Examples include yoga and *tai chi*, which combine body movement, mental focus and controlled breathing to improve overall health.



The Right Fit

Match the individual pieces with their respective cubes.

REFER TO THE CONTENTS PAGE FOR PUZZLE ANSWER

Staying well on the job

Text ANNIE TAN
in consultation with
Adj A/Prof CLARE YEO,
Senior Principal
Clinical Psychologist,
Department of
Psychology, Institute
of Mental Health
(IMH).



As the spotlight shines brighter on workplace wellness, greater awareness and the destigmatisation of mental health issues faced by employees are vital. *Imagine* reveals the red flags to watch for and how to create a positive environment at the office.

We spend one-third or more of our waking hours at work. In fact, in a survey last year by technology company Kisi, Singapore ranked the second most-overworked city out of 50 cities, with over 25 per cent of full-time employees working more than 48 hours per week.

With long hours at work, burnout is a growing problem. A 2022 report by human capital software company Ceridian revealed that nine in 10 employees in Singapore suffer from burnout at some point in their careers. "The most telling symptom of burnout is when – ironically – we are no longer physically and mentally



“We cannot deny the impact of COVID-19 on the nature of our work, the workplace and the workforce – the full extent is yet to be seen.”

Adj A/Prof **CLARE YEO**, Senior Principal Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

stressed out by our work, but rather, simply not have the energy or desire to carry on,” says Adjunct Associate Professor Clare Yeo, Senior Principal Clinical Psychologist at the Department of Psychology in IMH. “At this point, one can start to feel helpless and hopeless – even to the point of thinking about suicide if we do not seek help.”

The reasons for this high level of burnout and stress at work are many, with the phenomenon of ‘toxic workplaces’ (see next page) accounting for several cases. COVID-19 has further exacerbated work-related stress, affecting the job security and livelihoods of many and accelerating a shift to remote working, which came with its own challenges.

“We cannot deny the impact of COVID-19 on the nature of our work, the workplace and the workforce – the full extent is yet to be seen,” says Adj A/Prof Yeo. She adds however, that one positive outcome is the greater recognition of, and emphasis on mental health. “I hope that we can introduce and update work and healthcare policies that better support our overall health, with physical and mental well-being going hand in hand.”

Imagine looks at the key issues and explores what employers and employees can do to foster a healthier work environment.

1. Examining a toxic work environment >>

TOXIC WORKPLACES OFTEN OPERATE ON A CULTURE OF FEAR, BULLYING AND HARASSMENT.

For instance, specific individuals are targeted and verbally abused for minor mistakes. Other issues include the blurring of work-life boundaries with unsustainably long hours, work messages late into the night and discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, gender, appearance or age.

A toxic work culture cultivates “roadblocks” within the workplace, says Dr Susan P. Chen, Head of People, Asia, at video game developer Riot Games. “It could be intentional, such as a discriminatory promotion process, or unintentional, such as unregulated work hours due to remote work in the pandemic,” she says. These then prevent employees from succeeding or even performing their tasks, and can hurt their morale and well-being.

While unequivocally horrific work cultures are rare, toxic situations may be more common than we think, notes Dr Chen. “We often fail to notice the early signs of toxic practices, which tend to start

on a small scale, such as by one leader or small team, and multiply in impact organically,” she adds. This may lead to anxiety, negative automatic thoughts and physical symptoms such as headaches and muscular tension, as well as poor concentration, attention and sleep.

Such environments also tend to breed distrust. “Relationships between colleagues take a hit, as the person responsible for the toxic environment intentionally creates conflicts and misunderstandings such that trust is compromised. Individuals start to become suspicious of the intentions and actions of their colleagues, which can then affect their own and the team’s work performance as anxiety and mood symptoms set in,” explains Adj A/Prof Yeo. “If they are unaware of this happening, the toxic effect may be brought back to their homes where their families may bear the brunt of these feelings, creating more problems at home.”

If your mental well-being is taking a hit at work, here’s what you can do:

Seek help > “The wake-up call triggered by COVID-19 has shown us that there is

more to be done to optimise mental health at the workplace – especially our mindset towards seeking help when things are not okay,” says Adj A/Prof Yeo. Ask for support from friends, loved ones and mental health professionals, if you need it.

Raise the issues internally > Share your concerns with your supervisor or boss, or make a formal complaint to your HR department. Document what you need to back this up, including emails and comments.

Set boundaries > Discuss unrealistic goals and unsustainable hours – as well as messages, calls and emails that infringe on your rest time – with your boss.

Manage stress > Get enough sleep, exercise regularly, eat well, take a few days off to rest and recharge, and surround yourself with positive people who lift you up.

Plan an exit strategy > Sometimes, the best thing you can do is to move on. Begin searching for a new job or acquiring new skills that can help you make a better transition.

When Enough is Enough

FOR SOME, PROBLEMS AT WORK MAY BE SO UNMANAGEABLE THAT THE SOLUTION IS TO SIMPLY WALK AWAY. A MANAGER SHARES HER STORY AND WHY SHE RESIGNED WITHOUT ANOTHER JOB DURING THE PANDEMIC.

Marketing communications manager Audrey* describes herself and her colleagues as having been “human targets” for her ex-boss. Yelling, rebukes and “being thrown under the bus” were par for the course. “My boss would keep bullying the ‘target’ until the person quit. Then, she’d move on to the next target. This person would be shot down regardless of what was said. It got to the point where the mere mention of this person would cause the boss to start shrieking,” she recalls.

With the high turnover at the mid-sized organisation, Audrey eventually became the victim of the attacks.

“I would be yelled at during meetings even if I was simply sharing data. I found myself watching the clock and trying to get ahead of things because I never knew when the next bomb would explode,” she says. Work-life boundaries were also disregarded. Audrey and her team often worked till 10pm or 11pm. They would receive calls and text messages about non-urgent matters late into the night.

Audrey raised these issues to her immediate supervisor, who dismissed these as ‘common suffering’ that she was experiencing as well. This high-stress environment left Audrey feeling emotionally drained, unhappy and fatigued.



With the support of loved ones, she resigned in early 2021. Within three months, she found a job at another organisation, where she enjoys more job satisfaction, thanks to the culture of mutual respect.

*Interviewee’s name has been changed for anonymity.

2. The challenges of remote working >>

THE SHARP PIVOT TO WORK-FROM-HOME (WFH) AND HYBRID WORK ARRANGEMENTS COMBINING REMOTE AND IN-OFFICE TIME DURING THE PANDEMIC HAS CREATED NEW PROBLEMS.

Blurring of boundaries > When work encroaches on personal time, it may create stress, especially for those with competing priorities, such as caring for young children or elderly family members. This is also problematic when collaborating across different time zones. “The main challenge with working for a 100 per cent remote-first organisation is figuring out how to work asynchronously,” explains Ms Joanna Yeoh, who’s in charge of human resource at a blockchain analytics start-up. “If your boss in Europe pings you on Slack at 11:30pm Singapore time, are you obligated to get out of bed to reply? It is important for bosses to set expectations for when employees need to be available – for example, daily or weekly check-ins, and for employees to reciprocate by delivering quality output in a timely manner to establish trust.”

Sense of isolation > “Organisations are built on the foundation of a sense of community and belonging, which can

never be fully captured while 100 per cent working from home,” says Dr Chen. If you feel lonelier due to the lack of physical interaction and social support from colleagues, “it helps to step out of your comfort zone and embrace new ways of staying connected, which may need to happen outside of work hours,” suggests Adj A/Prof Yeo.

Loss of personal space > It may be hard to find a conducive work area if you share a small space with many family members. However, being aware of various potential distractions – such as the television, your bed or your children wanting attention – can help you better manage them.

Unclear expectations > It may be harder to fully grasp expectations or seek help when working remotely, so prioritise two-way communication. Rather than waiting for top-down instructions, reflect on your feelings, thoughts and expectations, and proactively discuss these with your boss or colleagues, recommends Adj A/Prof Yeo.



AN ESTIMATED
1 IN 2
Singapore employees have been grappling with longer working hours since the start of the pandemic, according to a recent survey by *The Straits Times*.

3. Preparing for your return to the office >>

AFTER ADAPTING TO WFH AND HYBRID MODELS, WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ARE BEGINNING TO SHIFT AGAIN THIS YEAR, WITH MORE EMPLOYEES HEADING BACK TO THE OFFICE.

There are benefits to working in the office, such as better work-life boundaries, clearer communication between team members, and a greater sense of community. However, disadvantages include the loss of autonomy and flexibility in managing our time to juggle work responsibilities and personal commitments, says Adj A/Prof Yeo. “The commute to and from work also takes extra time and effort as compared to a WFH arrangement. The time lost eats into time that can be spent to maintain our mental wellness,” she adds. She recommends that companies provide staff with support during this transition period. “Open communication to overcome the barriers of returning to the office after having adjusted to WFH is the key,” she says. Here are some tips to ease your back-to-office transition:

Plan your new routine > With less flexibility and control over your time as compared to WFH, it is helpful to create new sleep, exercise and caregiving routines well ahead of your return to the office for a smoother transition. Set realistic expectations for yourself – you

may not have time to do everything, so be intentional about where you want to invest your time and energy.

Make new arrangements > If you are a caregiver, you may need to make new childcare or caregiving arrangements. At the same time, prepare yourself and your family for separation anxiety, and consider installing CCTVs or other monitors that help you stay connected with children or elderly family members.

Recognise that the rules have changed > It is likely that your workplace has transformed during the pandemic. Asking questions and understanding the new safety protocols can help to ease fears about the virus’ spread.

Reclaim work-life boundaries > If WFH has blurred work-life boundaries, this is the perfect time to set new ones on when and where you work and rest.

Prep yourself mentally > It may also help to visualise your commute, your workspace, who you are going to talk to, and how you are going to spend your lunch hour. Run through some common work scenarios and workplace dynamics so you will be more comfortable with them.

Talk about it > Monitor your anxiety levels at work and be aware of trigger points. Reach out to friends and family for support or talk to your bosses or the HR department if you need time or help to adjust. Remember to extend the same compassion to your colleagues.

4. Fostering a healthy work culture >>

A POSITIVE WORKPLACE IS ONE THAT VALUES EMPLOYEES AND HELPS THEM PERFORM AT THEIR PEAK AND BOOSTS MORALE, TRUST AND COOPERATION.

The mental health of employees is also a key consideration, and many companies are now prioritising their staff’s well-being, development and aspirations. Here are some important strides being made today:

Increasing mental health awareness >

Organisations are equipping leaders with knowledge and skills to understand signs of distress and promote mental wellness at the workplace. HP Singapore, for instance, partnered with the Singapore Emergency Responder Academy to train its people managers on mental

health first aid. Companies can also destigmatise mental health issues by ensuring that employees have easy access to resources and support. For example, they can offer employees access to counsellors and coaches, in addition to various online resources such as Mindline.sg, a digital stress management platform by the Ministry of Health’s Office for Healthcare Transformation, which addresses topics such as revealing your mental illness to bosses, creating a positive work culture, and practising gratitude.

Ensuring work-life harmony > This can include setting clear boundaries for off-work hours. Some companies like Google, SAP and Thomson Reuters go further to block out mental health or “reset” days. Cisco held its inaugural well-being month in June last year – offering mindfulness

sessions, one-to-one consultations and connection sessions for employees.

Prioritising flexibility > This could include offering employees the option to combine WFH with working from the office to better juggle competing responsibilities such as parenthood. Technology firm SAP, for example, launched its first hybrid office with spaces designed for team collaboration and social interaction. “Providing a hybrid model allows for agency and ownership for employees to make those important working location decisions,” says Dr Chen.

Fostering a culture of empathy > Leaders should schedule regular check-ins with their team, practise active listening and respond with compassion. Non-profit organisation Bizlink, which hires employees with mental health conditions, also believes that it is essential to “establish a

buddy or peer support at the workplace, and actively promote inclusion and open communication for colleagues who need support,” says its CEO, Ms Ang Li May.



Mercer Marsh Benefits’ Health on Demand Survey which polled 14,000 employees found that **56%** of employees in Singapore reported that they **did not** receive strong support from their employers during the pandemic.

Finding meaning amid adversity

Mental health issues may have robbed **Ms June Tang** of her childhood dream, but they have not diminished her drive to heal others, a goal made possible through peer support.

Interview KOH YUEN LIN // Photo ALVIN TEO



MS JUNE TANG

Peer Supporter (Management), Caring For Life

Those who knew Ms June Tang in her twenties would remember her to be a highly-intelligent individual who had a near-photographic memory. She sailed through school with excellent results to graduate from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), and was on the path towards becoming a doctor. Ms Tang also saw herself one step closer to her dream of working as a medical professional in Third World countries.

This façade of perfection started to crack under the stresses of transitioning from student life to housemanship in 2003. The long and taxing work hours at the hospitals wore

her out. At the same time, she had moved out of the university hostel to share an apartment with some friends. It was a starkly different environment from the hostel, in which she enjoyed the constant companionship and friendship of fellow students. "I was very firmly embedded in the hostel environment and moving out, in a way, cut off my entire social support system," she recalls.

Personal relationship issues had also come to the fore, and the many external

factors came together to push her over the edge. "Two months into my new career as a house officer, I distinctly remember the night something snapped," she writes in a record of her journey of recovery. "I felt I had crossed an invisible line into madness." A week later, Ms Tang was hospitalised for overdose, and a few years later she was formally diagnosed with major depressive disorder and bipolar tendencies.

A GRADUAL DESCENT

While those around Ms Tang might have been surprised by this turn of events, the signs were there even in her childhood. "Looking back, I experienced mental health issues as far back as from kindergarten. I was a very melancholic child and had marked mood swings: once, I refused to go to school for a long time because I was upset about moving to a new home," she reflects. "Later on, I made it through school with a record of tardiness." But her excellent academic performance made it seem like she was doing fine. "I am an only child, and my parents probably thought all kids behaved in such a manner," she shares. At age 13, she left her family in Malaysia to pursue her studies in Singapore. In hindsight, Ms Tang also feels that the move might have allowed her to bury her mental health issues, and put up a front to her family that made her seem fine. Deep down, however, she always knew something was amiss. "I had diagnosed myself way before medical school. It just never crossed my mind to seek help," she shares.

The first overdose incident finally forced her to seek medical attention but she continued to grapple with her condition over the next five years. It took a toll on her career (resulting in her leaving the medical profession) and her friendships as well. "Depression is a terrible thing. It takes away your desire to live. The achievements and abilities I once had were gone, dead and buried with the real me," she writes in her personal account. At rock bottom, Ms Tang tried to take her life.

THE ONLY WAY IS UP

Her failed suicide attempt got her to see things in a different light – the fact that she didn't die must mean that there is a bigger purpose in her life, she thought. Ms Tang also started seeing a new psychiatrist, who identified her bipolar tendencies, and her medication was changed. In addition, the psychiatrist prescribed rehabilitation at Singapore Anglican Community Services Hougang Care Centre (HCC). It was there that Ms Tang had a powerful breakthrough moment: the realisation that recovery



“Recovery from a mental illness is really a journey. Some people get better within weeks and some in years. There may be hiccups or really good seasons along the way as well. Everyone’s journey is different.”

is possible. "As a medical student, you would think that I would know all about recovery. Yet you will only find diagnosis and treatment in the books – the term 'recovery' didn't exist," she recalls. "Recovery from a mental illness is really a journey. Some people get better within weeks and some in years. There may be hiccups or really good seasons along the way as well. Everyone's journey is different."

At the care centre, she saw peers who lived through similar experiences go on to lead meaningful, purposeful lives. "I met for the first time people with mental health issues like me. There was an unspoken sense of camaraderie. I also found it very inspiring to see real-life examples of peers employed, bearing in mind that this was in 2007, when Singapore did not yet have any formal peer support," shares Ms Tang. "There was a peer in a management role, and I found that really exciting. I sort of took him as a role model, and I think he'd be proud to see me now."

After rehabilitation, Ms Tang studied social work, fuelled by a desire to get into the mental health industry and help others. Formerly a manager at Resilience Collective, a registered mental health charity powered by peers for peers providing a platform for the collective voices of peers to be heard, she now works with Caring For Life (CFL), whose mission is to educate the public to play a part in suicide prevention. "Suicide strikes a chord with me," she explains.

"I just read an article that said an average of one in five counsellors will see a suicide sometime in their career. I have seen too many. These people need help. Besides coaching the public on how to respond when they encounter a suicidal person, I'm also pretty excited about our next project to reach out and offer support to suicide attempt survivors, and suicide loss survivors (those who have lost loved ones)," says Ms Tang of her new role.

RIDING THE HIGHS AND LOWS

A crucial element in the recovery journey is developing a sense of self-awareness and facing the reality of one's situation. She is also acutely aware that recovery is not a linear journey, but one with plenty of ups and downs. To her, it's the small victories – such as keeping her mood stable, not having to depend on medication to sleep at night, or being able to reach out when she needs to – that ultimately win the war. "I don't really have any milestones to mark my recovery journey," she reveals. "It is commonly measured in terms of how long one has worked, and what one works as. I don't quite like that view because it ties recovery to one's function as a contributing member of the economy," says Ms Tang. In her view, it is more important for one to function within a space that one is comfortable in. "And I have been fortunate to have been able to go down this path, which kind of found me."

When baby blues linger

More than just a temporary slump in mood, **postnatal depression** can affect a mother's well-being and her ability to bond with and care for her baby in the long term. Early intervention and support are key to overcoming this condition.

Interview **EVELINE GAN** in consultation with **DR GILLIAN LIM SHAN HUI**, Head, Perinatal Mental Health Service and Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, IMH

>> CARING FOR A NEWBORN

can be stressful. It is not uncommon for new mothers to experience postpartum 'baby blues', which may include feelings of sadness, irritability, poor sleep and tearfulness. These strong emotions may wax and wane, but most mothers will still experience moments of joy and happiness in between, says Dr Gillian Lim Shan Hui, Head, Perinatal Mental Health Service and Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, Institute of Mental Health (IMH).

According to Dr Lim, postnatal blues occur in up to three-quarters of new mothers and symptoms tend to resolve on their own within a month. For some women, however, the symptoms do not let up, and affect their well-being as well as their ability to bond with and care for their infant. Dr Lim shares that this more severe, longer-lasting depression known as postnatal depression – occurs in around 10 to 15 per cent of new mothers. The difference between the two lies in the severity of their symptoms and how much they impair how the mother functions. "In women with postnatal depression, their depressive symptoms exist almost all the time, last for more than two weeks and do not resolve naturally," Dr Lim says, adding



INITIAL INDICATORS

Studies have found that around **2 in 5** women with postnatal depression have symptoms beginning in pregnancy

that mothers should consider seeking professional advice if their symptoms start to affect their ability to look after their newborn.

IN THE DANGER ZONE

Why do some women get postnatal depression as they transition into motherhood? One risk factor would be previous episodes of major depression or a family history of the condition. Women who struggle with depression during their pregnancy also face an increased risk. Studies have found that around two in five women with postnatal depression have symptoms beginning in pregnancy, explains Dr Lim. "This is largely related to the affected woman having lower reserves to deal with the stress of becoming a new mother, as well as the

massive hormonal changes that can occur after delivery." Other stressors include pregnancy or delivery complications, as well as the mother's age. Those younger than 21 years old or mature mothers are at a higher risk of postnatal depression, especially if the pregnancy was unplanned.

Women with less social support are also more likely to have postnatal depression. A 2021 study by Japanese researchers from Teikyo University's Graduate School of Public Health looked at the relationship between postnatal depression and social support during the COVID-19 pandemic. It found that mothers in the low-support group were more likely to have postnatal depression compared to those with higher levels of support.

THE RED FLAGS

Dr Lim shares that symptoms suggesting postnatal depression include the new mother crying a lot, having trouble bonding with her baby and talking about life being hopeless or meaningless. The new mother may also experience difficulties in responding to her baby's needs, or show irritability and anger towards the baby and family members.

“If symptoms are moderate to severe, doctors may prescribe anti-depressant medications in addition to counselling. Many medications are relatively safe for pregnancy and breastfeeding.”



DR GILLIAN LIM SHAN HUI, Head, Perinatal Mental Health Service and Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, IMH

With more severe depression, there may be recurring thoughts of hopelessness and thoughts of death, Dr Lim adds. Left untreated, mothers with severe postnatal depression may also experience a distortion of reality. "For example, the mother may become suspicious of others and feel that family members want to harm her and the baby. Termed 'puerperal psychosis', this is seen as a psychiatric emergency and the individual should get help immediately," Dr Lim says.

SEEKING HELP EARLY

For struggling mothers, getting help early is important. Dr Lim says the first line of treatment usually involves talk therapy or counselling. "If symptoms are moderate to severe, doctors may prescribe anti-depressant medications in addition to counselling. Many medications are relatively safe for pregnancy and breastfeeding," she adds.

Early intervention is crucial as research suggests that postnatal depression has wide-ranging negative effects on both the mother and child. These adverse effects can impact a mother's psychological health, quality of life and interactions with their infant, partner and relatives, according to a systemic review of 122 studies, published in peer-reviewed international journal *Women's Health* in 2019. The review also suggested that postpartum depression creates an environment that is not conducive to the development of the child. In a separate



DADS GET SAD, TOO

According to Dr Gillian Lim, approximately



3-4% of new fathers may experience paternal postpartum depression, which has symptoms similar to those in new mothers. "This often stems from difficulties in adjusting to his new role as a father and husband, and may be aggravated if his wife is also struggling with the adjustment," she explains.

POSTNATAL DEPRESSION • focus

study published in the journal *JAMA Psychiatry* in 2018, researchers found that children of mothers with persistent and severe postnatal depression were more likely to have delayed cognitive and language development, as well as higher rates of behavioural problems and lower grades later in school.

Yet, the stigma of mental health disorders may prevent mothers from opening up about their emotional struggles and seeking help early. Unrealistic expectations — fuelled by social media and the pressure to be a “super-mum” — may also make it harder for them to come forward.

BEING THERE FOR MUM

New mothers ought to accept that the transition into parenthood can be stressful. “New mums will also need to intentionally find time to rest to recover from delivery, and cope with the hormonal changes. Don’t be afraid to ask for help from others when it comes to taking time to rest or relax,” Dr Lim says. Other ways to cope with negative emotions include engaging in



Spouses and family members can do their part to support and encourage new mothers.

simple activities like listening to music, exercising, taking a walk, meditating or talking to friends and loved ones.

Spouses and family members can also do their part to support and encourage new mothers. Dr Lim suggests helping out with tasks so the new mother gets time to rest. For example, offer to change the baby’s diapers, or burp and hold the baby. “Take care of the baby to allow the new

mother to rest or sleep in the day and/or at night,” Dr Lim advises. “Let the mother have some space to relax if she appears to be feeling down or stressed.” Family members should also be mindful of what they say to the new mother. “Do not criticise and compare the new mother with others for being inexperienced, or tell her she is a ‘useless’ or ‘bad’ mother,” Dr Lim adds.

NOT GIVING IN AND NOT GIVING UP THROUGH HER OWN RESILIENCE AND THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS, A YOUNG MOTHER SEEKS TO OVERCOME HER CONDITION.

Faced with an unwanted pregnancy after her ex-boyfriend sexually assaulted her, Shirnesse, in her early 20s, had struggled to come to terms with her sudden new role as a mother. Throughout her pregnancy, thoughts of death lurked at the back of her mind but the dark impulses went away after her son was born. “This was because of the joy my baby brought me,” the single mother shares.

However, the symptoms of depression returned about 10 months after her baby was born. “I started to cry randomly. The thought of my child having my ex-boyfriend’s surname would make me break down in tears,” she says. She shares that there are days when she feels physically and mentally exhausted, and even suicidal, but carries on for the sake of her

child, who is now around a year old. “When the (suicidal) urges happen, I remind myself that such thoughts and feelings are temporary, and they will come and go. I tell myself that no matter what, I have to take care of my son,” she says. Shirnesse adds that the pandemic has also made it more challenging for struggling single mothers like herself. Due to the COVID-19 situation, she is worried about having her child exposed to the virus in infant care. “If I could put my child in infant care, I could have some free time to recuperate and maybe do some part-time work.”

Currently undergoing follow-up treatment at a hospital to manage her depression symptoms, Shirnesse has received assistance

from various community partners and is grateful to have a supportive friend to turn to whenever she feels down. The resilient young mother dreams of a brighter future for herself and her child. “I want to find a job and raise my son right,” she says.

She hopes to encourage other mothers with postnatal depression to open up about their struggles and seek support. “You need someone to hear you out and be there for you at that moment. Find that someone whom you can text and cry to, someone who doesn’t judge you.”



Going the extra mile

case manager • I SERVE

An avid runner, Principal Case Manager Ms Serlina Eng adopts a ‘whole nine yards’ philosophy at work too — to help her patients and the underprivileged. Interview AUDRINA GAN // Photo COURTESY OF IMH

Case managers at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) function as the primary point of contact for patients. These healthcare professionals educate patients on their conditions and the importance of complying with medication and medical appointments. They also help patients adapt to the real-world environment after their discharge, serving as a link between them and IMH’s multidisciplinary care team as well as external service organisations, if further assistance is required.

For Principal Case Manager Ms Serlina Eng, her passion for helping her patients has led her to think of different ways to support them in their recovery journey.

You’ve worked at various departments in your 13 years at IMH. How do you inspire patients to take charge of their mental health? I was involved in an initiative in 2010 to reduce defaults in outpatient visits. Patients are given follow-up appointments upon discharge from the wards and a number of them were not turning up. Sometimes, it is because they forget their appointment or are apprehensive about seeing the doctor and talking about their issues. So I thought besides reminding them about their appointments, case managers, whom they are familiar with, can accompany them during the session. This has helped to reduce default rates and over 90 per cent of our patients now turn up for their appointments.

I also believe affirmation helps in the recovery process. I ask my patients to write letters to themselves about their goals and hopes. After they are discharged, I mail the letters to them, and include my own note to encourage them as they get their lives back on track.

You were involved in setting up IMH’s daytime drop-in facility, The Hut. What’s the idea behind it? We wanted to set up a space where patients and visitors could socialise, have coffee and participate in activities like reading, colouring and gardening, when they come for their medical appointments. Located at the entrance of the IMH campus, The Hut* provides a view of the green fields outside, so it is a relaxing and welcoming space. Before COVID-19, I had a patient who came to The Hut

daily, and he drew pretty sketches which we displayed there. Another patient, an ex-chef, said he felt empowered when he could cook desserts for people who gathered there.

“Affirmation helps in the recovery process. I ask my patients to write letters to themselves about their goals and hopes. After they are discharged, I mail the letters to them, and include my own note to encourage them as they get their lives back on track.”

You raise funds for athletes with disabilities and at-risk youths by running races. What motivates you to do it? I got into running to keep fit after giving birth to my daughter, and progressed to running marathons. It is one of my coping mechanisms for stress. I also run when I need to think. Most sports produce endorphins, happy hormones which are important when dealing with stress or even depression and anxiety.

I later combined my love for running with causes I believe in. I ran my first two 50 km ultra-marathons in Singapore and at Mount Kinabalu in 2015 to raise funds for the Woodbridge Hospital Charity Fund. Since then, I’ve participated in a few more — for instance a three-day race in the mountains of Chiang Mai to raise funds for Beautiful People, a volunteer group that reaches out to at-risk youths; and a 250 km Racing the Planet event in the Gobi Desert to drum up financial support for athletes with disabilities, who often face logistical issues when training and may not get many sponsorships.

Apart from spotlighting issues faced by the underprivileged, I want to see how far I can push myself. Because when you are, say, going over a mountain, your legs are in pain and you get blisters — it’s really about mind over body.



MS SERLINA ENG

Principal Case Manager, IMH



Ms Eng during her race through the Gobi Desert.

*The Hut is temporarily closed due to COVID-19.

Q&A

ASK THE
Experts

IMH clinicians answer your questions.

Q: MY 12 YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER IS A PERFECTIONIST – FROM THE NEATNESS OF HER HANDWRITING TO THE WAY SHE ORGANISES HER THINGS.

This extends to her schoolwork, to the point that she gets frustrated and throws a tantrum when things do not go well. Thus, she often repeats tasks so as to attain perfection. While her dedication is impressive, how do I distinguish between diligence and OCD?

A: Diligence, which is careful and consistent effort in one's tasks, is a positive quality. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), on the other hand, is a mental health condition characterised by the presence of obsessions and/or compulsions. Obsessions are recurring and disturbing thoughts, urges or images that cause significant anxiety and distress. The individual may then engage in compulsions, which are repetitive behaviours or mental acts to relieve the anxiety and distress caused by the obsessions. These obsessions and compulsions interfere with daily activities.

Striving for perfection does not necessarily mean that your child has OCD. To determine if her behaviour may be suggestive of OCD, find out what her thoughts about not meeting perfect standards are. Ask her if she has any associated anxiety with those thoughts, as well as whether she repeats tasks to relieve that anxiety. In addition, monitor if the repetition is time-consuming and impairs her daily functioning.

MS ONG LI MIN,
Principal Clinical Psychologist,
Department of Psychology



News

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



MENTAL HEALTH COURSE FOR GPs

With increasing awareness on mental health issues, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, more people are seeking help – and doctors in primary care are often the first resource they turn to.

To enable general practitioners (GPs) to manage patients with mental health issues more effectively, IMH and the Division of Graduate Medical Studies, National University of Singapore, jointly offer a Graduate Diploma in Mental Health.

The 12th run starts in September 2022 and interested doctors can register for the one-year course between 28 March and 4 July. It covers the principles of treatment approaches for various psychiatric conditions, their assessment methodologies, management skills and medication prescription.

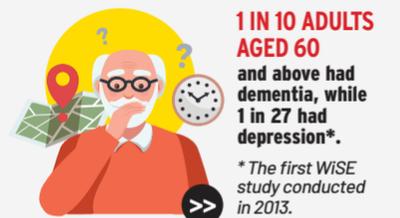
Since its introduction in 2010, more than 180 doctors have graduated from the course.

A government subsidy is available for the course (subject to terms and conditions). Visit imh.com.sg/GDMH or email GDMH@imh.com.sg for details.

LAUNCH OF 2ND WISE STUDY

IMH is embarking on the second Well-Being of the Singapore Elderly (WiSE) study to track the changing trends in the prevalence of dementia and depression in Singapore. Collection of data begins in March 2022 and will continue till July 2023.

The information will guide future policies and resource planning to tackle dementia and depression, so that the country can better prepare to meet the needs of the ageing population.



*The first WiSE study conducted in 2013.



Q: I AM SCHEDULED TO MEET MY PSYCHOLOGIST FOR THE FIRST TIME FOR MY ANXIETY ISSUES.

However, due to my condition, I am becoming even more uneasy as the date draws nearer. How can someone like me better prepare myself for this initial session, and what can I expect to happen during the encounter?

A: You are brave for taking this step to make a change in your life. Lots of people are anxious about meeting a psychologist for the first time! In general, the first few sessions will focus on getting to know you better, to understand how the difficulties you face came about, before you and the psychologist jointly make a plan to tackle the anxiety. For example, the psychologist may ask you about how you experience anxiety and its impact on your life. He or she may also take a history of your childhood, family, interests, school and work experiences.

You can prepare for the session by thinking about what you would like to be different in your life from attending therapy, a summary of your challenges as well as questions you might

have about therapy or anxiety. After your first session, it may be helpful to reflect on how the session was for you and if the psychologist was the 'right fit' for you, and complete any tasks the psychologist may have given you. Remember to take it one step at a time and communicate openly throughout therapy, so that you can have the best possible experience.

DR HANITA ASSUDANI,
Senior Clinical Psychologist,
Department of Psychology



PREPARING FOR THERAPY
Think about what you would like to be different in your life from attending therapy.

The Big Picture Gain insight into psychosis.

Whether you know someone with psychosis, have a personal experience, or simply want to find out more about the condition, *Broken Crayons* is for you. Co-produced by persons in recovery, caregivers and mental healthcare professionals, the workshop series provides a panoramic perspective on recovery from psychotic disorders.

SESSIONS ARE HELD ONLINE VIA ZOOM ON THE FOLLOWING DATES:

● **Workshop 1 > Understanding Psychosis (26 March or 30 March)**
Learn the causes, signs and symptoms, and hear from people who have been through psychosis, their caregivers and mental health professionals.

● **Workshop 2 > Journeying with Psychosis 1 (2 April or 6 April)**
Learn what goes on in the mind during psychosis, the psychological impact of medications, and the crucial attitude one needs in order to recover and grow from the experience.

● **Workshop 3 > Journeying with Psychosis 2 (9 April or 13 April)**
Through an interactive play, take part in key decision-making and explore the vital role family members and mental health professionals perform in seeking help.

● **Workshop 4 > What Keeps You Going? (16 April or 20 April)**
Explore reasons that motivate people to keep moving forward in life, as well as practical tips to help you move towards your goals and dreams.

● **Workshop 5 > Disclosure of Medical History (23 April or 27 April)**
Through a panel discussion, hear



the various perspectives of employers, persons in recovery, caregivers and mental health professionals on self-disclosure of medical history.

● **Workshop 6 > Family & Friends (30 April or 4 May)**
Co-create a collaborative artwork and hear first-hand stories of how the workshop has made a difference to its participants.

Register at >>





Pointing the way

When we're walking to a destination, our brain might take us down a **longer route** than actually necessary. Here's why.

Deep in your brain lies a seahorse-shaped structure, known as the hippocampus. This is your brain's internal GPS and memory bank, helping you figure out where you are, whether you've been here before and where you should go next.

But the hippocampus may not be the most effective GPS around, when compared to the one on your smartphone. That's because your brain often leads you to take the 'pointiest path' when walking through cities, rather than the most direct one. Researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology came to this conclusion after studying the daily patterns of more than 14,000 people navigating the city on foot.

They found that many took paths that *seemed* to point most directly towards their destination – even if this

route ended up being longer. Known as vector-based navigation, this phenomenon has also been observed in insects and even primates.

Researchers from the study believe that our brains have evolved to pay less attention to calculating the shortest route, and instead devote power to other tasks, like avoiding obstacles or predators. Another explanation is that our brains can't calculate distances as accurately as a smartphone can, simply because it doesn't have the computing power to do so. With vector-based navigation, it relies on points of reference and landmarks to gauge distances. So the next time you're walking about in the city, check your planned route against the one recommended by your phone's GPS. You might just shave a few minutes off your journey.



WHY WALK?

> IMPROVES SLEEP QUALITY

Being active in the day will help you to sleep better at night.



> GETS YOU IN SHAPE

Walking for 30 minutes daily can reduce excess body fat and increase muscle power and endurance.



> REDUCES STRESS

Take a break from work and go on a walk during lunch. Brisk walking boosts endorphins, which stimulate relaxation and improve mood.

Source: Health Promotion Board

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 (main line); 6385 3714 (Crisis Resolution Team) (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

I don't feel
like myself
lately.
What can I do?

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

Something's
not quite right.
Should I ask
him to seek help?

The Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT) can help.

We offer confidential mental health checks for individuals aged between 16 and 30. Through the health checks, our friendly team of mental healthcare professionals can help youths in distress understand what they are experiencing, and how they can make things better.

Make an appointment at www.chat.mentalhealth.sg, or contact us to find out more.

Email: CHAT@mentalhealth.sg | Phone: 6493 6500 / 01 (Tue – Sat, 12nn – 9pm)



Community Health
Assessment Team