

OCTOBER 2017-MARCH 2018

# IMAGINE

A BIENNIAL MAGAZINE ON MENTAL HEALTH

## EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS

Shedding light on schizophrenia, and how the condition can be managed



## THE *Mindful* LIFE

How self-awareness and strategies to beat stress can have a positive impact on mental wellness

>> EXPRESSIONS: DANCING HER WAY TO RECOVERY - A YOUTH'S JOURNEY

# Are you living with someone who has addiction issues?

For every person who has an addiction issue, at least four others close to him or her are impacted. It is challenging to care for someone with addiction problems. Families often feel stressed and helpless. Caregivers have their own needs and may suffer from physical and emotional problems. They require support too, especially when their loved ones with addiction issues are not ready to seek treatment.

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**Live Well**  
Staying on top, mentally



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**“BY SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCE, PSS OFFER NEWLY-DIAGNOSED PATIENTS CONFIDENCE THAT THEY TOO CAN OVERCOME SCHIZOPHRENIA.”**

Dr Charmaine Tang, Consultant and Deputy Chief of IMH's Early Psychosis Intervention Programme on Peer Support Specialists (PPS).

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ANSWERS TO "STRETCH YOUR MIND"  
Turn to page 6 for the puzzle

ANSWER: 60

# STAYING MINDFUL OF *Mental Health*

“Schizophrenia is among the most disabling disorders. Ongoing research will give us better means of identifying individuals who are at risk of developing the condition, enable early intervention and prevention of complications, and pave the way for more effective treatments.”

PROF CHONG SIOW ANN,  
Vice Chairman, Medical Board  
(Research), IMH



**M**ental illness can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or social status — and it can manifest itself in those closest and dearest to us. Unfortunately, some do not seek treatment because of the stigma attached to these conditions, while others simply do not know that they have a mental disorder.

Gaining a better understanding of common mental disorders is vital. With growing awareness and understanding, society will be more accepting of people with mental illness and they will not have to suffer in silence. A better understanding can also help us to recognise developing signs and symptoms in ourselves and others. Early intervention can reduce the severity of an illness.

In this issue of *Imagine*, we put the spotlight on one of the most misunderstood and poorly-recognised mental disorders – schizophrenia. While the condition can be debilitating, it can be successfully managed and persons with schizophrenia can go on to lead normal, fulfilling lives. Family and friends also play an important role in the path to recovery. Sharing the perspective of a caregiver is Mr Ang Beng Hui, who has been a pillar of support for his mother who has schizophrenia, since he was a boy.

We also take a look at the increasingly popular practice of mindfulness, which is a way of keeping the mind in focus to reduce stress. This practice is being used in healthcare institutions, schools and workplaces. It is also something that even you and I can perform to maintain our well-being.

Happy reading.

*the editorial team*

**imagine**

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## STRONGER TOGETHER

Senior Minister of State for Health **Mr Chee Hong Tat** hopes to see an inclusive environment for caregivers and those with mental health issues.

INTERVIEW ASHUTOSH RAVIKRISHNAN  
// PHOTO COURTESY OF IMH



Senior Minister of State for Health and Communications & Information, Mr Chee Hong Tat (middle) at the Institute of Mental Health's 'Be A Nurse For A Day' programme

**I** learnt of IMH's 'Be A Nurse For A Day' initiative when I attended the hospital's Nurses' Day celebrations last year. I participated in this year's edition to better understand what nurses in a mental healthcare

setting do on a day-to-day basis.

As I served breakfast to patients in a long-stay ward, I encountered one who was upset that he had not been served first. The nurses told me that when angered, that particular patient would sometimes kick them.

It was a vivid reminder of the challenging environment that our IMH healthcare workers operate in. After all, the patients they care for do not always have full control over their emotions and actions. Despite these challenges, staff remain dedicated to looking after their patients' safety and well-being, and serve with professionalism and passion.

Just a few minutes into my half-day shift, it became clear how important multi-disciplinary teamwork is across the healthcare sector. Whether it's feeding, bathing or medication rounds, nobody works in silos — there is a culture of collaboration. This has quite a few benefits. For one, it nurtures a support network for staff, which is important when working in high-stress situations. It also allows healthcare professionals to learn from one another across different disciplines.

But this learning cannot be limited to within the healthcare sector alone — innovations in other

*"People with mental illness should be treated with compassion and supported. They should not be relegated to society's fringe; instead, we must encourage them to be active in the community."*



**MR CHEE HONG TAT**  
is a Member of Parliament for Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC. Besides his role as the Senior Minister of State for Health, he is also the Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information.

sectors can be adapted to tackle healthcare's pressing problems. For instance, we can explore how we can tap on technology to ease the burden on a group that plays an important role — caregivers. One example is the Jaga-Me App that matches retired nurses who can provide services on a part-time basis to persons requiring care management at home. Many Singaporeans would prefer to age in place and it is crucial to support caregivers in their caregiving journey.

There are community resources in place to support caregivers of people with mental illness, such as the Community Resource, Engagement and Support Teams (CREST). This initiative reaches out to persons with, or at-risk of, mental illness or dementia, as well as their caregivers, through screening and providing information about these conditions. Caregivers can also learn how to better care for their loved ones and if possible, take some time off for themselves as well.



### A DAY IN SCRUBS

► Held in conjunction with Singapore Nurses' Day, IMH's 'Be A Nurse For A Day' is an annual initiative that gives the hospital's non-nursing staff an opportunity to experience a typical day at work for a psychiatric nurse.

This whole-of-society approach to supporting people with mental illness is crucial and timely. Given our ageing population, it is likely that more Singaporeans will experience mental health issues in the coming years. The community must become more aware of mental health issues, so that we can identify early signs of common mental disorders like dementia and depression in vulnerable seniors. Early intervention matters.

Awareness should be coupled with empathy — people with mental illness should be treated with compassion and supported. They should not be relegated to the fringes of society; instead, we must encourage them to be active members of the community. To do this, we should translate our awareness and empathy into action. Whether it's to be part of a befriending service or to just be more patient when interacting with them, there are steps we can all take to create a more caring and inclusive society."

STAYING ON TOP, MENTALLY

# LIVE WELL!



A new study by the University of Exeter in the UK finds that excluding children from school can cause long-term psychiatric problems and psychological distress. 'Exclusion' in this case refers to the suspension or expulsion from school as a form of disciplinary action in response to a child's poor behaviour.

Published in the journal *Psychological Medicine*, the study also warns that exclusion can contribute to a range of mental disorders including depression and anxiety. Instead of exclusion, the report encourages teaching staff to provide support to children whose behaviour is challenging.



## BRAINS AND BRAWN

If you're over 50, doing moderate exercise several times a week is one of the best ways to keep the mind sharp — and 39 studies in the UK can back this claim. The theory is that through exercise, the brain receives a greater supply of blood, oxygen and nutrients that boost a growth hormone that helps the formation of new neurons and connections.

In this analysis of previous studies, researchers from the University of Canberra in Australia found evidence of aerobic

exercise improving cognitive abilities, such as thinking, reading, learning and reasoning. Meanwhile, muscle training — using weights for example — had a significant effect on memory and the brain's ability to plan and organise. Study author and researcher Joe Northey said, "There will still be improvements in cognitive function even if you are doing moderate exercise only once or twice a week, but the improvements were better when more exercise was done."

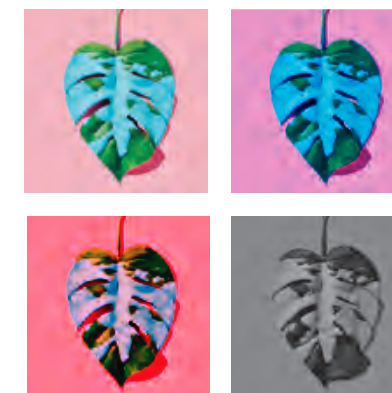
PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

### > INSTAGRAM STATE OF MIND

Photos that are shared online may hold clues to one's mental health, new research suggests. From the colours and facial expressions of the photos to the enhancements applied before posting them, Instagram users with a history of depression present the world differently from their peers, according to the study published in the journal *EPJ Data Science*. "People in our sample who were depressed tended to post photos that, on a pixel-by-pixel basis, were bluer, darker and greyer on average than healthy people," said Harvard University's postdoctoral researcher Andrew Reece, who co-authored the study with Professor Christopher Danforth at the University of Vermont.

Using machine-learning tools to find patterns in the photos and to create a model predicting depression by the posts, they found that depressed participants used fewer Instagram filters to digitally alter a photo's brightness and colouring. When these users

did add a filter, they tended to choose 'Inkwell', which drains a photo of its colour, making it black-and-white. The users who aren't depressed tended to prefer 'Valencia', which lightens a photo's tint. Though the findings may not apply to all Instagram users, the pair said that a similar machine-learning model could someday prove useful in conducting or augmenting mental health screenings.



### KINDNESS FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

In July this year, singer Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation released "Kind Communities — A Bridge to Youth Mental Wellness", a survey that explores how young people's mental wellness is affected by relationships, their environment and the presence or absence of kindness in their communities. The study of 3,000 American youths aged 15 to 24 shows that young people who describe their environment as 'kind' are more likely to be mentally healthy. 79 per cent of students who said their high school has a kind environment had the highest mental health scores, whereas only 12 per cent of those with low mental health scores described their high school as kind.

"These findings are a reminder that — while mental health may be a challenging and multifaceted issue — there are tangible actions we can all take to support our own mental wellness and the wellness of our young people, starting with building kinder communities," said Cynthia Germanotta, Co-Founder and President of the Born This Way Foundation.



### LONELINESS AS BAD AS SMOKING

New research presented at the 125<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association finds that loneliness and isolation may be bigger public health issues than previously realised. The study by psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad of Brigham Young University concluded that prolonged isolation carries the same health risks as smoking 15 cigarettes per day.

To quantify the impact of loneliness and isolation, Dr Holt-Lunstad analysed 218 studies and data from more than 3.4 million people in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. "There is robust evidence that social isolation and loneliness significantly increase risk for premature mortality, and the magnitude of the risk exceeds that of many leading health indicators," she said.



### ➤ BETTER JOBLESS THAN TO HAVE A HIGHLY STRESSFUL JOB

A new paper published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* reports that people in stressful or low-paying jobs are not better off — health-wise — than people who are unemployed. The research of 1,116 participants between 35 and 75 years of age who were unemployed was conducted by the University of Manchester. The aim of the study is to examine the association of job transition with health and chronic stress related biomarkers.

Using various measures, the researchers found out that compared to those who stayed unemployed, adults who transitioned into poor-quality jobs had elevated risks for a range of health problems. Lead author Professor Tarani Chandola said, "Just as good work is good for health, we must also remember poor-quality work can be detrimental to health."



**#KNOW THIS**  
Just as good work is good for health, we must remember that poor-quality work can be detrimental to health.



### HAPPY HABITS

What's going to make you happy? More specifically, what's going to make your brain happy?

- **THINK ABOUT YOUR GOALS** When you're feeling stressed or challenged, think about your long-term goals. It gives your brain a sense of control and can release dopamine which will make you feel more motivated.
- **LISTEN TO MUSIC FROM THE HAPPIEST TIME IN YOUR LIFE** Music affects the brain in that it can remind you of places and fond times during which you have listened to it before. Play the music you had loved during a specific moment of your life and it can boost your mood and transport you to that happier place.
- **SMILE** Sometimes the mind receives a range of random information and it isn't sure how to feel. It hence looks around for clues. This is called "biofeedback." You feel happy and that makes you smile. But it works both ways: when you smile, your brain can detect this and take it to mean that you are indeed feeling happy.
- **ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS** Keep your phone and desktop notifications on silent, and stay off social media. Reward yourself with a two-minute break when you have completed a task or reached a goal.
- **GET GOOD SLEEP** We all know depression can disrupt sleep. Interestingly, it is in fact a two-way street: bad sleep also causes depression. Trying to go to bed at the same time every night can improve the quality of your sleep.

WEATHER THE STORM

## How to build resilience in midlife

Much of the research on resilience has focused on children, but science shows that adults too can be more proactive in boosting resilience. After all, stressors such as career setbacks, retirement worries and the death of a parent, tend to occur at midlife. Here are some active steps to take during and after a crisis to speed your emotional recovery:

#### Don't personalise it

We tend to blame ourselves for life's setbacks and to dwell on what could be done differently. To bolster resilience, remind yourself that a number of factors probably contributed to the problem. Shift your focus to the next steps that can be taken to resolve the issue.



#### Go out of your comfort zone

Resilience is not derived solely from a negative experience. You can build it by challenging yourself in unfamiliar, but exciting situations. Take an adventure vacation, run a triathlon or share your poetry skills with strangers at a poetry slam.

#### Remember your comebacks

In order to feel better, we tend to tell ourselves that others — like war refugees or a friend with a chronic disease — have it worse. Alternatively, you will get a bigger resilience boost by reminding yourself of the obstacles you have overcome.

#### Practise optimism

An optimist does not ignore the reality of a difficult situation, but acknowledges the challenge in a more hopeful way, taking the opportunity to rethink his life goals. Thinking positive thoughts and being with positive people can help.

#### Rewrite your story

A Harvard University study found that people who saw stress as a way to boost performance did better in tests than those who were taught to ignore stress.

#### Take stress breaks

Just as you would rest your muscles after a workout, allow for your body to recover from stress. Take a walk, meditate or chat over a meal with a friend to give your mind and body a break.

#### Support others

Studies show that strong support networks of friends and family to help cope with a crisis can fortify a person's resilience. But you can get an even bigger resilience boost by giving and offering this support to others.

HINT: LETTERS NEED NOT BE IN A STRAIGHT LINE AND CAN ALSO RUN IN A BACKWARD ORDER. REFER TO THE CONTENTS PAGE FOR THE ANSWER

N  
N I N  
N I A I N  
N I A R A I N  
N I A R B R A I N  
N I A R A I N  
N I A I N  
N I N  
N

## STRETCH YOUR Mind

Figure this out: Making sure the letters touch each other, how many ways can you read **BRAIN** off the diamond on the left?



BE

The practice of mindfulness is growing in popularity as evidence gathers about its benefits.

PRESENT

TEXT BY WANDA TAN

**S**tress happens to the best of us. Whether negotiating the ups and downs of being a teenager, coping with corporate pressures or adjusting to a newborn at home, it is nearly impossible to avoid stressful situations.

If not handled well, the burden of chronic stress may lead to depression or anxiety. Finding a way to deal with the stress that we are bound to encounter is not just recommended, but necessary.

Mindfulness meditation is a stress-management solution that is taking hold globally, and in Singapore more and more people are turning to this practice in our hectic times to pause, reflect and gain perspective.

**A PROVEN PRACTICE**

A basic understanding of mindfulness can be obtained by going straight to the source: Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, USA, who founded the practice in the 1970s. He defines mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally ... in the service of self-understanding and wisdom”.

Dr Yang Suyi, Senior Occupational

Therapist, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), elaborates: “We tend to react impulsively to what is happening around us, so we immediately pin our likes or dislikes on something, or get angry or anxious easily. Mindfulness encourages people to calm down, pause and observe what is happening. They can then regulate their thoughts or emotions and respond to the situation in a more skillful and compassionate manner, both to themselves and to others.”

It all began in 1979, when Prof Kabat-Zinn developed an eight-week programme called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to relieve chronic stress and pain in patients, some of whom had cancer. Consisting of formal meditation as well as informal (everyday) exercises, MBSR teaches people to sustain their attention on a specific task and develop meta-awareness so that in the long run, when faced with stressors, they are able to take a step back and choose how to respond.

Emerging research on mindfulness backs up the claims of its benefits. “Brain imaging studies show empirical evidence of neuroplasticity of the brain — changes in brain structure — in people who practise mindfulness for long periods,” explains Ms Germaine Tan, Senior Clinical Psychologist at IMH’s Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. “Positive changes have been



“POSITIVE CHANGES HAVE BEEN SEEN IN THOSE PARTS OF THE BRAIN ASSOCIATED WITH ATTENTION, EMOTION REGULATION, COMPASSION, MEMORY, LEARNING, CONCENTRATION AND INTROSPECTION.”

Ms Germaine Tan, Senior Clinical Psychologist at IMH’s Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

seen in those parts of the brain associated with attention, emotion regulation, compassion, memory, learning, concentration and introspection.”

MBSR has now been adopted worldwide to treat not just the chronically-ill but anyone susceptible to stress — from prison inmates and staff, students, office workers, and elite athletes. Researchers from the UK and Canada also developed Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), another eight-week programme that incorporates Prof Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness strategies to prevent relapse in patients with depression.

**AN ADJUNCT TO THERAPY**

At IMH, psychologists may use mindfulness as an adjunct to therapy methods including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The areas where mindfulness has shown to help includes

**SOME MINDFULNESS PRACTICES**

**FORMAL** Set aside about 40 minutes a day for exercises like breathing meditation. This involves focusing on your natural breathing pattern and how it affects different parts of your body, while sitting upright on a chair or cross-legged on the floor. If you get distracted by other thoughts, simply notice where your mind has wandered to and then gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

**INFORMAL** Weave mindfulness into your daily life. When taking a walk in the park, hone in on the movement of your feet or the sensation of the wind blowing against your face. Instead of wolfing down lunch, eat slowly and enjoy the experience of chewing, tasting and savouring your food.



## FOCUS

patients with depression, anxiety and stress-related symptoms. "Mindfulness may be used in therapy to help clients be more attentive and observant of their thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations," says Mr Wong Chin Meng, Senior Clinical Psychologist at IMH's Department of Psychology. "Being an observer of these internal events may help the clients cope better with distresses that may arise."

Similarly, Dr Yang runs an eight-week Mindfulness-based intervention at IMH's Occupational Therapy Department. Under her group-based intervention programme, patients are taught various mindfulness practices that equip them with the skills to manage their emotional states to help them overcome stress, anxiety and depression.

"One patient I worked with, a woman in her early 20s, had social phobia and used to avoid large crowds," recalls Dr Yang. "Mindfulness training helped her to be less reactive. Although she still feels anxious when walking through crowds, she has learned how to calm herself down and is less overwhelmed by her emotions."

### BEYOND THE HOSPITAL

IMH has also been running group-based sessions on the practices of mindfulness in schools for children and adolescents since 2015 through REACH (Response, Early intervention and Assessment in Community mental Health). REACH is a community-based mental health service set up to work closely with schools, community agencies and family doctors to help students with emotional,



**"MINDFUL EMPLOYEES AND LEADERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO FEEL BURNT OUT OR STRESSED, ARE MORE SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS, AND WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY AND PERFORM AT HIGHER LEVELS"**

Associate Professor Jochen Reb, Singapore Management University (SMU)'s Lee Kong Chian School of Business and founding Director of Mindfulness Initiative @ SMU



behavioural and/or developmental disorders. To teach mindfulness to students, REACH uses age-appropriate curricula developed in the UK: ".b" (pronounced 'dot -be', and stands for 'stop and be'), a 10-week programme for 11 to 18 year-olds; and a shorter six-week version called "Paws b" (pronounced 'pause-be', and stands for 'pause and be') for primary school children. The lessons aim to introduce the practices of mindfulness in fun and classroom-friendly ways to promote well-being and resilience, and to help students cope with everyday stresses and navigate through difficult mental states such as low mood or anxiety.

"During their first session, students are usually very fidgety and have trouble settling down. By the end of the programme, they can sit still and do a breathing exercise for 15 minutes," says Ms Tan, a member of IMH's REACH team. Ms Tan's own journey to mindfulness began years ago, after she became a mother, to help her better manage the demands of work and family. "Many students report feeling happier, calmer and more contented afterwards, and research studies show that both courses are promising tools in promoting well-being of students."

Another space where mindfulness has caught on is in the workplace. Associate Professor Jochen Reb from Singapore Management University (SMU)'s Lee Kong Chian School of Business is an expert on mindfulness at work and is the founding Director of Mindfulness Initiative @ SMU, that engages in research, education and outreach activities in this area. Based on his research, mindfulness has been found to improve an individual's well-being, performance and productivity, as well as interpersonal relations. "Mindful employees and leaders are less likely to feel burnt out or stressed, are more satisfied with their jobs, and work more effectively and perform at higher levels," says Assoc Prof Reb. "Employees of mindful leaders also feel less exhausted, show greater helping behaviours, and are more satisfied with their jobs and their leaders."

## CALMING THE MIND AND BODY

Mr Hiroshi Limmell, 38, Assistant Head of Infuse at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR), is a sceptic-turned-proponent of mindfulness.

Until last year, I didn't know what mindfulness was. The first time I heard of it was when one of my colleagues suggested introducing mindfulness at work to help staff de-stress.

Initially, I had my doubts about the idea but was nevertheless curious. I signed up for the Mindfulness Foundation Course at Brahm Centre in July 2016. As a medical biologist by training, I was amazed at the amount of scientific research that has been conducted on mindfulness and its effects on the human anatomy — for instance our stress responses and anxiety levels. It was my colleagues who first noticed a change in me being calmer and then, more people said I seemed happier — and I am. I continued my Mindfulness journey, attended Brahm Centre's Intermediate and MBSR courses, and went on a mindfulness retreat in Thailand last June. Now, I dedicate 45 minutes daily to formal mindfulness practice. I have learnt to be kinder to myself and in doing so, to care more for others. I have since organised two mindfulness courses in my workplace and staff who attended them reported being happier, more focused and productive at work and home."

**"I DEDICATE 45 MINUTES DAILY TO FORMAL MINDFULNESS PRACTICE. I LEARNT TO BE KINDER TO MYSELF AND IN DOING SO, TO CARE MORE FOR OTHERS."**



### WHAT MINDFULNESS ISN'T

**MINDFULNESS ≠ RELIGIOUS PRACTICE:**  
▶ Although meditation has its roots in Buddhism, mindfulness is a secular practice developed in the West. There is no reference to religion in MBSR or MBCT.

**MINDFULNESS ≠ YOGA:**  
▶ Like mindfulness, yoga contains elements of meditation. Unlike mindfulness, yoga is also a kind of physical exercise and improves flexibility.

**MINDFULNESS ≠ A FORM OF RELAXATION:**  
▶ Mindfulness practice is hard work. It involves training the brain to pay attention to something that is difficult and to look past negative thoughts or emotions. Nor is it a quick fix; the benefits will only be felt after doing it consistently for a long time.



### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

**STEP 1** Read up on mindfulness. Recommended books include *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World* (by Mark Williams and Danny Penman) and *10% Happier* (by Dan Harris).

**STEP 2** Download mindfulness apps on your smartphone. Apps such as "Headspace" and "Insight Timer" let you follow free guided meditations from the comfort of your own home.

**STEP 3** Join a structured mindfulness programme. Places such as Brahm Centre, Mindfulness Initiative @ SMU and Shan You Counselling Centre offer a range of introductory and advanced courses, where you can learn from a trained teacher and share your experiences with other participants.

# Staying on the

# beat

Hip-hop dancer Jodee Kua on how her passion for dance helps her in times of darkness.

INTERVIEW PHYLIS HONG // PHOTOS KELVIN CHIA



**O**n her way to lunch one Sunday, Jodee Kua picked up a flyer from a dance studio out of curiosity. Jodee had no interest in dance up till then, but she felt compelled to give it a shot for inexplicable reasons. So keen was she that when her friend kept procrastinating about signing up, the then-15 year-old decided to do it alone.

That was in 2011, and Jodee signed up for K-pop, hip-hop and urban choreography classes. With no dance background, her initial moves were awkward and she rued donning "a super tight T-shirt" for her first lesson. Six years on, Jodee is still at the same school — Recognize Studios — but is now an experienced hip-hop dancer who performs and competes both locally and overseas.

Since 2013, Jodee has taken part in about 20 or so contests but her first public competition — for an all-female freestyle dance 'battle' — still counts as her most memorable. She was nervous and intimidated by her strong opponents, but managed to "kill the beat" — hitting some moves precisely to the beat of the music — when a familiar song came on. "Killing the beat got me cheers from those dancers whom I really respected. It was such a proud moment for me, and still is even now when I watch the video again," she recalls.

played — and still plays — a pivotal role in her recovery from depression and panic attacks. She started self-harming in primary school. The cutting gradually turned into a form of self-punishment for doing badly in examinations, and then into a form of emotional release whenever she felt unhappy. In secondary school, her depression worsened and she started hurting herself more.

A breaking point came in 2014 when she cut her wrist so deeply that she required stitches. She was 18 and studying psychology at a local polytechnic. "After that cut, I knew I needed help," she says of that time. "I never really understood what was going on with me. People said that I was an angsty and rebellious teenager. I only learnt about depression and anxiety after studying psychology."

She approached the Community Health Assessment Team (see box) — which she had chanced upon while researching for a school project on adolescent psychology — for an assessment. Jodee was later referred to a psychiatrist who diagnosed her with depression.

## SAFEGUARDING HER PASSION

Jodee continues to receive psychotherapy and her condition is well-managed. Although she still gets bouts of depression and panic attacks which leave her exhausted each time, Jodee is adamant about not letting them get in the way of her passion for dance. Coping methods she has learnt, such as breathing exercises, help her to handle anxiety and stabilise her mood before dance performances. Some panic attacks are severe enough as to be "paralysing" — to deal with these, Jodee gives herself time to feel better before heading to dance.

On days when depression hits but she is physically well, Jodee forces

herself to go for dance practice. "I don't think I've ever regretted any of the times I dragged myself to class. I feel better after I sweat it out, at least for the moment, and I think that's all you need — to get out of the darkness for a while," she says.

Through dance, Jodee has found a "family of friends" which includes about 13 other dancers from her studio. They make up the crew for TXM, the group that Jodee represents in competitions and performances. Hanging out with the right company is important, she says, as friends who are

**“**WHEN I WAS STRUGGLING WITH POOR GRADES AND GETTING BULLIED IN SCHOOL, DANCE GAVE ME AN OUTLET TO DE-STRESS. IT WAS THE FRIEND I NEVER HAD.**”**

Jodee Kua, 21, Hip-hop dance enthusiast



## + [LINKS]

### SEE JODEE IN ACTION:

▶ **Team Singapore Japan Xchange (SJX), Radikal Forze Jam 2017**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgKL5WrvKWc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgKL5WrvKWc)

▶ **Mental health discussion with Prince Harry during his visit to Singapore in June 2017**

[www.chat.mentalhealth.sg/reach-out/Prince\\_Harry\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Discussion/](http://www.chat.mentalhealth.sg/reach-out/Prince_Harry_Mental_Health_Discussion/)



LEFT Prince Harry is an advocate for positive mental health

understanding and positive help in her recovery.

Jodee's parents and elder brother are another strong pillar of support, accepting her as she is. Her part-time job as a barista while she takes a course in counselling psychology also gives her a sense of purpose and keeps her occupied so that she doesn't brood over unhappy thoughts.

Jodee is also one of 23 pioneer Peer Support Specialists who graduated from the training programme (see box). She now helps people with mental illness in their recovery journey by sharing her story. Joining the programme has equipped Jodee with new knowledge and skills, and even the opportunity to meet Prince Harry of the UK for a chat on youth mental health issues during his visit to Singapore in June this year. "As newly-minted Peer Support Specialists, we are excited to practise what we have learnt. The challenge now is for the society to see the benefits of this profession so that we can find employment opportunities," she says.

## A DIFFERENT TYPE OF BATTLE

But dancing has never been about the applause or attention for Jodee, now 21. Dancing is her way of expressing herself and coping with her inner turmoil. "I started taking dance at a significant time in my life, during a dark, messy and stressful period," she says. "When I was struggling with poor grades and getting bullied in school, dance gave me an outlet to de-stress. It was the friend I never had."

Dance classes got her through school. "I would count down, by the hour, to dance practices on Friday and the weekend. I remember posting things like '100 more hours after Math lesson' on my social media accounts." Dance also

## CHAT CHECK

Youths aged between 16 and 30 can get a confidential mental health check, offered by the **Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT)**. CHAT is a national outreach programme for mental health. Its team includes healthcare professionals and volunteers.



FOR MORE INFO, VISIT [WWW.CHAT.MENTALHEALTH.SG](http://WWW.CHAT.MENTALHEALTH.SG)

## Sharing empathy and experience

**Under a new peer support programme**, those who have recovered from mental health issues can support recovering patients as employed Peer Support Specialists (PSS). Besides offering a listening ear and sharing personal experiences, PSS also suggest coping strategies.

A 180-hour structured training curriculum equips PSS with the necessary knowledge

and skills, and those who complete the course receive a Certificate in Peer Support.

The programme was introduced by the National Council of Social Service in collaboration with the Institute of Mental Health in 2016.



# OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Imagine shines the spotlight on schizophrenia, a serious but poorly-recognised condition.

TEXT ASHUTOSH RAVIKRISHNAN  
IN CONSULTATION WITH // DR CHARMAINE TANG, CONSULTANT AND DEPUTY CHIEF, EARLY PSYCHOSIS INTERVENTION PROGRAMME // PHOTOS GETTYIMAGES



## BE AWARE

SCHIZOPHRENIA CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED WITH MEDICATION AND TREATMENT, BUT RELAPSES ARE NOT UNCOMMON. POSSIBLE TRIGGERS FOR A RELAPSE OF THE CONDITION INCLUDE:

- Stress
- Major life events
- Substances such as illegal drugs and slimming pills, or excessive alcohol use

"Avoid these by adhering to medication and leading a healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally," advises Dr Tang.



**F**lashing lights. Voices that range from soft whispers to angry outbursts. Odorous smells. These are phenomena that we encounter every day. But what if you thought they exist — but in reality, they do not? Such hallucinations are a common symptom of schizophrenia, a potentially debilitating condition that affects nearly one per cent of Singaporeans. "Schizophrenia is a major mental disorder that results in a person having abnormal perceptions, thoughts and behaviours," explains Dr Charmaine Tang, Consultant and Deputy Chief of the Early Psychosis Intervention Programme at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). Besides hallucinations, the condition is also characterised by delusions. "Patients might feel that people are monitoring them or out to harm them," says Dr Tang. Other symptoms include disorganised thoughts and behaviours, social and emotional withdrawal, and a lack of motivation in performing usual daily activities.

The exact causes of schizophrenia are unknown, but research suggests that a combination of genetic and environmental factors can make a person more likely to develop the

condition. "Having a family history of schizophrenia puts an individual at a higher risk of developing schizophrenia, and stressful life events can trigger the condition," says Dr Tang. But individuals with schizophrenia can still plan for a family. "They just have to be more mindful of the triggers of their condition, look out for early signs and symptoms of relapse, and seek help immediately should they notice these early warning signs," she says. "They should also, at an appropriate time, educate their children about the condition so that they too are aware of the signs and symptoms of psychosis, and can seek help early, if necessary."

## SUFFERING IN SILENCE

Many individuals are reluctant to seek help because of the stigma associated with schizophrenia. "They worry that it would affect their careers or studies and choose to suffer in silence instead," says Dr Tang.

Families too do not help their loved ones to seek treatment, largely because they fail to recognise the symptoms of the condition. A national mental health literacy study conducted by IMH in 2014 showed that just one in 10 respondents could correctly recognise symptoms of schizophrenia, making it one of the most poorly-recognised mental disorders in Singapore.

However, Dr Tang stresses that loved ones play a big role in ensuring that individuals with schizophrenia receive the necessary help and treatment. When diagnosing mental disorders, doctors often rely on information provided by patients.

"But some individuals with schizophrenia feel that their hallucinations and delusions are real and lack the knowledge that they are experiencing a psychotic episode. These individuals may not be forthcoming with their experiences or may even deliberately hide information from the doctor.



## BUSTING MYTHS

Dr Tang dispels some common misconceptions about schizophrenia:

- > **PEOPLE WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA ARE VIOLENT AND DANGEROUS:** "This is a myth propagated by depictions of mental illness in popular culture. Some may exhibit aggression when they are ill, often due to perceived danger against themselves, but not all do. When their illness is well managed, individuals with schizophrenia are no more violent and dangerous than the general population."
- > **SCHIZOPHRENIA REFERS TO HAVING MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES:** "A person with schizophrenia does not have multiple personalities. He or she has abnormal perceptions, thoughts and behaviours, and has lost touch with reality. The person may appear to have a change of personality when having these experiences, but he or she is still very much his or her own person."
- > **THEY REQUIRE FREQUENT LONG-TERM HOSPITAL STAYS:** "Schizophrenia can be managed much like any other chronic condition such as diabetes and hypertension. Hospitalisations do occur in severe relapses, but they are not always necessary."



## DID YOU KNOW?

Schizophrenia is the ninth-leading cause of disability in Singapore. "This is largely because of two reasons: firstly, the cognitive impairment associated with schizophrenia and secondly, the stigma attached to schizophrenia that prevents patients from being active members of society," says Dr Tang.

Source: Ministry of Health



Dr Charmaine Tang, Consultant and Deputy Chief of the Early Psychosis Intervention Programme



So it is important that we also get corroborative information from families and loved ones," says Dr Tang, adding that a physical examination and investigations are also conducted to rule out medical causes of psychosis.

**ROAD TO RECOVERY**

Following a positive diagnosis, patients are put on a treatment regime comprising antipsychotic drugs and/or psychotherapy. "While this cannot cure the condition completely, it can help people with schizophrenia manage the condition and lead normal, fulfilling lives," says Dr Tang. Patients can expect to see some improvements in their symptoms within two to four weeks of starting medication. A small number of patients may also undergo electroconvulsive therapy, if medication fails to help.

At IMH, patients are also supported in their journey to recovery by fellow patients who have successfully managed their condition and who serve as Peer Support Specialists (PSS). "By sharing their experience, PSS offer newly-diagnosed patients confidence that they too can

overcome schizophrenia," says Dr Tang.

Jamie (*not her real name*), a patient with schizophrenia, tells *Imagine*, "One of the most frustrating things about recovery is the self-doubt — whether you'll ever be back to normal again or not. And hearing from others who have gone through a similar journey helps with that."

Despite advances in treatment, patients with schizophrenia still face an intimidating hurdle: the stigma associated with the condition. Anecdotal evidence suggests that employers are still reluctant to hire people with schizophrenia, despite it being successfully managed. Dr Tang says that this can negate the effect of treatment. "Constant rejection can be a dejecting experience for people with schizophrenia and may perpetuate the condition," she says. Greater awareness of the condition can help to lower these barriers. In its efforts to spread the word on schizophrenia and other mental disorders, IMH opened the CHAT Hub at \*SCAPE in 2009. This resource centre for mental health reaches out to young people and helps them better understand various mental health issues.

## Out of the blue — and into the pink

How decisive intervention enabled one young woman to get her life back on track.

**A**s a working professional in her early 30s, Jamie (*not her real name*) thought little about mental illness. "It didn't affect my family or friends, so I didn't think about it much," she says. That was until she began seeing things at night. "It started with cars in the carpark — they appeared to have their headlights on and be moving, but I knew that they were actually stationary." These hallucinations disrupted her sleep and she found herself staying awake for long periods of time thinking about the cars

and what the drivers were up to — which affected her moods and performance at work. On the advice of her parents and religious leaders, Jamie sought help at a hospital, where she was diagnosed with schizophrenia and prescribed antipsychotic medication. During this time, she also left her job and focused on recovering. Gradually, the hallucinations reduced and Jamie was able to sleep through the night again. The experience has reminded her of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. "In the weeks leading up to my initial

psychotic episodes, I had neglected my health and well-being because of work commitments," she says. Today, Jamie is in a better place and is more mindful of both her physical and mental well-being. She is preparing to re-enter the workforce and is confident of successfully managing her condition. "The coping techniques I picked up along the way will definitely help. For example, I know how to better manage my stress by taking things slow and making time for myself," she says, adding that the support of family and friends is also important. "Loved ones should try to understand the condition and learn how to identify early signs of relapse."



## THE EARLIER, THE BETTER

Schizophrenia is one of the conditions managed under IMH's Early Psychosis Intervention Programme (EPIP). With an emphasis on early detection and treatment, EPIP works closely with healthcare professionals in other hospitals, polyclinics, social agencies and educational institutions to identify the onset of psychosis among young people aged 16-40. Reducing the duration of untreated psychosis can improve the long-term prognosis for patients, shares Dr Tang. The EPIP team is multi-disciplinary in nature; members include doctors, nurses, case managers, psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers and peer support specialists.



**LI ZHONG YING**  
VOCATIONAL SPECIALIST,  
Job Club

## Beyond GETTING A JOB

**Job Club's Vocational Specialist Ms Li Zhong Ying helps clients with mental health issues find a job — and stay in it.**

**T**o the public eye, the Job Club functions like a typical employment agency — sourcing and placing jobseekers in suitable positions. But as its team lead Ms Li Zhong Ying explains, its services extend beyond that. "Job Club is a vocational rehabilitation programme launched in 2009 as part of the National Mental Health Blueprint. It helps people with stabilised mental health conditions gain employment and successfully integrate in the workforce," she says. Besides human resource skills, assisting people with mental illness in their job search requires specialised clinical knowledge. "We need to understand the mental state, functional level and background of each individual and how it may influence him or her at work. The Job Club also provides ongoing intervention and support to help them sustain jobs after their placements," says Ms Li, a principal occupational therapist and trained rehabilitation counsellor. The other vocational specialists at Job Club include psychologists and medical social workers.

Ms Li tells *Imagine* more about Job Club. How does Job Club assist its clients to secure a job? Some clients may not be able to find jobs on their own because of limited job-seeking or poor social skills. Others may have difficulty sustaining a job due to their illness. We network with potential employers to facilitate

job placement for this group of clients based on their needs, strengths and preference. Upon placement, we work with their employers and make frequent workplace visits to follow up on their progress. We also offer those with limited work experience vocational training before we place them on a job.

Clients who are able to find work themselves are usually better-educated, have good social skills and work experience. So we equip them with skills such as writing a resume or preparing for a job interview, as well as share suitable job openings with them. They can also come back for work-related advice even after they find a job.

### What are some challenges Job Club faces in finding employers to collaborate with?

Although mental health awareness has grown in recent years, many employers are still apprehensive about hiring people with mental illness. They worry that these individuals may turn violent when unwell. In reality, relapses are often not so dramatic. To

INTERVIEW  
DENNIS YIN  
// PHOTO  
KELVIN CHIA

**+**  
**JOIN JOB CLUB AS A PARTNERING EMPLOYER**  
Contact IMH Job Club at **6389 2675** or email **enquiries@jobclub.sg**



### WHO CAN JOIN JOB CLUB?

Job Club serves a wide spectrum of clients with different mental health issues, functioning level, and educational background. Anyone with a stabilised mental health condition who

is motivated can be part of Job Club. Besides IMH patients, Job Club accepts external referrals. Contact us at **6389 2904** for more details on the referral process or visit **www.jobclub.sg**.

address such misconceptions, we conduct awareness workshops for potential employers, and a number of them now employ clients from Job Club.

Besides F&B, retail and housekeeping, we are always on the lookout for potential employers from other sectors. We make cold calls and attend job fairs regularly to seek employment opportunities for our clients.

Another challenge is finding employers who are able to make job accommodations for our clients. For example, some clients may benefit from a more gradual start like part-time work arrangement, but this may not suit the employer's needs.

### What is the success rate of these job placements?

It varies. The suitability of the job match, meeting clients' needs and employers' expectations, and Job Club's ongoing post-employment follow-up all contribute to the length of these job placements. We have clients who have been in the same job for years.

### What does Job Club do when a client finds that a job is not suitable after being employed?

Newly-placed clients may face anxiety and adjustment issues. If a client experiences difficulty at work, we will meet up with the client and the supervisor to find ways to overcome these issues. If the client continues to struggle at work or under-perform, we will review the situation and provide the necessary interventions.

### What is the greatest satisfaction you get from your work?

It is very encouraging to see how work has a positive impact on our clients' life. They grow from having low self-esteem and struggling with their conditions to becoming confident and independent working adults in the community. They start paying more attention to their personal image, make new friends, plan for their future, and take pride in their contribution to family and society. I find great fulfilment in witnessing these positive changes and being a part of their journey.





# A SON'S LOVE

Ang Beng Hui, 39, has been caring for his 63-year-old mother, who has schizophrenia, nearly all his life.

ANG BENG HUI, 39  
DEVOTED CAREGIVER

INTERVIEW  
WANDA TAN  
// PHOTOS  
COURTESY OF  
AWWA LTD

**My mother was diagnosed** with schizophrenia when I was four years old. I don't remember much about that time, but one memory that stands out was when my mother forgot to pay for her groceries while at the supermarket with my sisters and me, and she was initially accused of stealing. As her condition worsened, she became more aggressive. To protect us, my father arranged for my sisters and me to live with our grandparents. We were reunited three years later when her condition had stabilised.

**From the age of seven,** I was already helping my father to care for her. He was then my mother's

main caregiver, and he taught me how to fill up her medication box. He brought me along for her hospital and polyclinic visits. By the time I was 12, I was making sure that she took her medication as prescribed and bringing her to see the doctor on my own. There were many times when I cried to myself and wondered why this had to happen to us. But my father told me that I had to be strong and that as the oldest child in the family, it was my responsibility to take care of my mother.

**Most of what I know** about schizophrenia, I found out for myself. Caregiver training was unavailable back then, and my father never

fully explained the condition to me because he didn't understand it either. After I turned 12, I started researching and talking to doctors during my mother's medical appointments to learn more about schizophrenia.

**After my father died in 2013,** my mother — who by then

**ABOUT 1 IN 100 ADULTS IN SINGAPORE HAS SCHIZOPHRENIA.**

had also developed diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol — suffered a relapse. At the time, I was struggling to balance my caregiving duties and my job as a technical officer as well as my part-time studies. Her doctors and social workers discussed various care options with me to help ease my burden. I hired a live-in domestic helper to handle daily activities such as bathing my mother and preparing her meals. I also taught the domestic helper how to manage her behaviour and what symptoms to look out for.

**Another source of support** is the community nurse who visits monthly to check on her and give her depot injections\*. My mother has grown very fond of her and they always engage in a bit of chit-chat when they meet up. Both my sisters are busy raising their own families, but they help out financially from time to time. My boss and colleagues know about my mother's condition and let me leave work early whenever I need to be with her. I got married recently and my wife is supportive of my caregiving duties.

**I picked up running** in April 2016 as a way to keep fit and unwind from the stress of caregiving. Now I usually run 10km two or three times a

week. On weekdays, I run by myself along the park connectors near my house. Every Sunday, I run with a group of ex-schoolmates at different places such as Bukit Timah Hill and Sentosa. Early this year, I took part in my first half-marathon, and I'm currently training for my first full marathon in December.

**Last October, I was invited by IMH to a caregivers' workshop**

to share my experiences with fellow caregivers. I told them that although the caregiving journey is very tough in the beginning, things will eventually get easier as caregivers become more experienced in taking care of their loved ones. The key is to stay positive and not give up. It's also important that caregivers set aside time for themselves and ask for help when they need it. I thought I could manage alone, but I was wrong.

\*Depot injections are a slow-release form of medication.

“ALTHOUGH THE CAREGIVING JOURNEY IS VERY TOUGH IN THE BEGINNING, THINGS WILL EVENTUALLY GET EASIER AS CAREGIVERS BECOME MORE EXPERIENCED IN TAKING CARE OF THEIR LOVED ONES. THE KEY IS TO STAY POSITIVE AND NOT GIVE UP.”

Ang Beng Hui



Mr Ang has been by his mother's side through thick and thin



## A MODEL CAREGIVER

In recognition of his devotion to his mother, Mr Ang received the Model Caregiver Award (Individual) at the 2017 Model Caregiver Awards ceremony in March. Established in 2007 by AWWA Ltd, the Awards are held biennially to affirm the significant contribution of family caregivers.

Mr Ang felt “thankful and happy” to win the award, but in his typically humble manner did not tell anyone about it. However, his boss — who until then had been unaware of his mother's illness — caught wind of the news. “After my boss read my story in the newspaper, he spoke with me and expressed his support for my situation,” Mr Ang says.



Mr Ang receiving the Model Caregiver Award

# WHEN THE CYBER BULLY STRIKES

What should we make of cyber bullying? *Imagine* finds out more.

TEXT PHYLLIS HONG // IN CONSULTATION WITH DR ONG SAY HOW, SENIOR CONSULTANT AND CHIEF, DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY // PHOTOS COURTESY OF IMH & GETTYIMAGES

**B**ullying has a new face or rather, it has become faceless. Most victims know who their physical bullies are but in the social media age, cyber bullies hide behind a mask of anonymity. Bullying is defined as frequent aggressive acts with the intention to hurt a person on purpose, and where there is an imbalance of power as the victim finds it difficult to defend himself or herself. Technology enables, and you could even say, empowers bullies to carry out such acts with ease.

Growing concerns over cyber bullying have prompted action by several countries. Singapore – which has one of the highest Internet penetration rates in the world at 82 per cent – is one of them.

In 2013, Singapore participated in the Safer Internet Day, a global initiative that promotes safe and responsible use of technology especially among children and youths. The Media Literacy Council has introduced several initiatives to educate students. For example, the Media Literacy Badge programme teaches students about netiquette and cyber-security. In addition, a new Protection from Harassment Bill that covers cyber bullying was passed in 2014.

## IS IT COMMON?

A survey conducted by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and the Singapore Children's Society (SCS) in 2014 found that cyber bullying is less common than its physical counterpart. Researchers at the Oxford Internet



**IN NUMBERS:**  
In a study of more than 3,000 students conducted by IMH and SCS



**1 in 9**

ADOLESCENTS HAD BEEN VICTIMS OF CYBER BULLYING

**40%**  
OF VICTIMS HAVE ALSO CYBER BULLIED OTHERS

Institute came to the same conclusion in their study published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* in July 2017. Out of more than 120,000 English 15-year-olds surveyed, 30 per cent reported bullying of some form. Of these victims, three per cent said the bullying happened both on and offline. Online bullying occurred

## FIST VS FINGERS

- ▶ Cyber bullying can occur **anywhere, any time or any day** while traditional bullying is more confined to a controlled setting such as the school.
- ▶ With the Internet as a public domain, the number of **potential bullies grows exponentially**.

Dr Ong says: "For traditional bullying in school, you may face 40 other classmates who don't like you. But when you are online, negative comments could run in the thousands."

- ▶ Cyber bullies tend to **feel less empathy and guilt** as they do not see the victim's reaction and they get to stay anonymous by using fake profiles.



## WHAT IS CYBER BULLYING?

Cyber bullying is using the Internet, cell phones, video game systems, or other technology to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person. It is also defined as acts of aggression through computers, cell phones and other electronic devices.

— THE SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY



## ON WHETHER CYBER BULLYING IS A CAUSE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

"Many other psychosocial factors can predispose someone to mental health problems. For example, parent-child conflicts, rocky peer relationships and school stress can cause anxiety and mood changes too."

DR ONG SAY HOW, Senior Consultant and Chief, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at IMH

for less than one per cent of the victims.

In Singapore, the IMH and SCS survey of more than 3,000 students aged between 12 and 17 years found that one in nine adolescents has been a victim of cyber bullying, and about 40 per cent of victims have in turn cyber bullied others. The top tactics of cyber bullies are shaming, calling the victims names and spreading rumours about them on social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as through text messages. "Bullies tend to go after victims' online reputation, which is important to adolescents," says Dr Ong Say How, Senior Consultant and Chief, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at IMH.

## JUST CHILD'S PLAY?

According to the IMH/SCS study, victims of cyber bullying are more likely to have recurring headaches,

socio-emotional and behavioural problems, as well as suicidal thoughts – compared with those who have not been bullied. There is also the danger of excessive self-criticism and low self-esteem. "The victims are more likely to think 'I am bullied because I am lousy' than 'I am bullied because that person is mean and bad to others'," explains Dr Ong.

Whether involved as a victim, a bully, or both – cyber bullying has also been associated with a higher level of reported self-harm. But Dr Ong cautions against concluding that cyber bullying causes self-harm as cyber bullying is rarely the sole stress factor. "Many other psychosocial factors can predispose someone to mental health problems. For example, parent-child conflicts, rocky peer relationships and school stress can cause anxiety and mood changes too," he says.

## DEBUNKING THE MYTHS

Another common misconception, Dr Ong says, is that bullying in general results in a large number of suicides in Singapore. "Without normalising or trivialising bullying, it is something faced by many in the passage of growing up. Most of us would have been called names when we were young, and learning to manage this is part of our personal development." He adds that most young people are resilient and have natural coping mechanisms but parents and friends should step in to help if they notice serious signs of distress such as severe mood swings, withdrawing from family and friends, and long-term school avoidance.

"Bullying is also not just a health issue but a social and education matter too," says Dr Ong. "Reining in bullying requires the support of the whole 'village'." For example, schools can promote anti-bullying campaigns while parents should educate adolescents on how to react if they are a victim or if they see someone being bullied. There are also school counsellors available to help victims of bullying, who would be referred to specialists if they need more serious medical attention.



## TERMINATE THE TORMENT

### ▶ PARENTS:

- Establish house rules on Internet usage at a young age.
- Educate your child on how to cope with bullying and how to be responsible digital citizens.
- Observe your child's reaction and mood when he uses social media. If he seems distressed, talk to him and find out why. Avoid overreacting as this may cause your child embarrassment. Instead, be encouraging and convey your unconditional support.
- Cooperate with your child's school and teachers. They can keep a lookout for bullying in school and share about anti-bullying programmes.

### ▶ CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

- Report inappropriate behaviours and acts to teachers or the webmaster.
- Stand up for yourself by being assertive but not mean. Do not repeat the same hurtful actions or language on the bully.
- Save all online communication with the cyber bully via print screens. They can be used as evidence in a legal case.
- Talk to your parent or teacher.
- Restrict interaction with bullies or block all communication with cyber bullies.

TO FIND OUT MORE, VISIT [BULLYFREE.SG](http://BULLYFREE.SG)

ASK THE

# EXPERTS

IMH clinicians answer your questions.

## ON THE VERGE OF A BREAKDOWN

I think I'm on the brink of a burnout. I find myself crying every day because I feel so stressed at work. But I'm afraid my career will be jeopardised if I approach my supervisor with my issues. I don't want to appear weak or fragile. How should I tackle this problem?

While it is helpful to recognise that you are experiencing burnout from the demands of work, you should also consider if there are stressors in other areas of your life that may be causing you to feel this way.

Try speaking with someone you trust, such as a family member or close friend. They can provide support and help you break down the challenges you are facing. You should also take a break from work for pleasurable activities, including hobbies as well as spending time with loved ones. These activities can translate to positive mental health and, hence, greater resilience when faced with work stressors.

Meeting your daily needs is equally important.

Have a regular sleep pattern, eat a well-balanced diet and exercise regularly. If your low mood persists, seek help from a mental health professional.

**MS JOANNA TAN** Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology



## CAN'T STOP BETTING

My father was gambling heavily some years back. But he managed to give up the habit and has stayed 'clean' since. However, I suspect he has started to gamble again. Is his addiction a mental health problem or just due to weak willpower?

Individuals with a history of gambling addiction sometimes do relapse. This is the nature of addiction and this is why we often describe people as recovering from an addiction, and not "cured".

There are many reasons why your dad could have relapsed. Often, someone who hasn't gambled for a long time may think he is cured and, hence, assume it's safe to gamble again. People also relapse when they are stressed, or encounter situations that trigger them to start again such as meeting someone they used to gamble with. It is also not entirely

about willpower — addiction can be powerful, and a lack of knowledge about addiction, when combined with stress and other triggers, can lead to a relapse.

Tell your dad how you feel about him gambling again and encourage him to seek professional help. You can call the National Problem Gambling Helpline at **1800 6 668 668** for more information, including treatment options.

**MR VIKNESAN** Senior Counsellor, National Addictions Management Service

## OPENING UP ON DEPRESSION

The recent unexpected suicides of high-profile musicians (like Chester Bennington and Chris Cornell) suggest that those with depression oftentimes suffer in silence. As a parent, how can I talk openly about mental health with my teen children without coming off as being paranoid?

A good way to start will be to highlight the different emotions a person has and how it is acceptable to have these emotions. Often, family and society put pressure on us to not openly display certain emotions, such as sadness or anger. Allowing your children the space to show such emotions will be vital in helping them manage their feelings. Next, discuss with them the strategies to

manage these emotions — for example, identify what they can do when they feel down and who they can talk to when things get too stressful. And highlight that help, if needed, is available. An accepting home environment will help your children to open up about their struggles.

**MS HAANUSIA PRITHIVI RAJ** Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

PHOTOS GETTYIMAGES



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



## DEEPER INSIGHT ON WELLNESS

With the increasing life expectancy of Singaporeans, as well as the rising prevalence of chronic diseases, IMH and the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH) jointly embarked on a nationwide study to look into the different aspects of

wellness and how they may affect future disease risks. The Singapore Wellness Study is the first of its kind here and will involve some 10,000 participants who are part of SSHSPH's Singapore Population Health Studies cohort that is currently being followed up. By the end of the four-year-long study, healthcare providers will be able to better understand the different aspects of wellness in the local population and the factors that enhance it, which will help them to address key problems and initiate preventive measures.



## WEB ADVICE

Do you know of any distressed youth or young adults who are afraid to seek face-to-face help for mental health concerns? Refer them to "webCHAT", a new e-Mental Health Check service launched in June 2017 by the Community Health Assessment

Team (CHAT). It aims to help troubled individuals aged between 16 and 30 years old understand their distress and the support services available to them. Visit [www.chat.mentalhealth.sg](http://www.chat.mentalhealth.sg) and click on "webCHAT", from Tue to Fri, 1pm to 8pm.



## BONDING OVER BREAKFAST

As part of an improvement project to reduce disruptive behaviour in IMH's children's ward, the staff came up with the idea of engaging their young patients over breakfast. The multi-disciplinary team, observed that patients tend to be more relaxed in informal settings and are more open in communicating their thoughts and feelings. This led the team to introduce regular breakfast sessions with the inpatients in 2016. The kids enjoy the treat as much as staff who appreciate building rapport with them during these sessions.

When Ronald McDonald House Charities Singapore came to know of the project, the charity started sponsoring the meals from May 2017 and it is still ongoing.



## A HELPING HAND FOR CAREGIVERS

Providing care for persons with mental illness can be challenging. Caregivers are concerned about their loved ones but are often frustrated or fearful in their caregiving journeys due to lack of knowledge and skills. To address this, IMH started a new Caregivers' Roadshow for members of the public supporting loved ones with mental illness in Aug 2017. The monthly roadshow features talks in Mandarin and English, and covers topics such as understanding mental illness, medication management, the role of occupational therapy in recovery and community resources. If you are keen to attend the roadshow, email [MSW\\_Caregiver@imh.com.sg](mailto:MSW_Caregiver@imh.com.sg).

# PETAL POWER

**Gardening, research reveals, is healing and has a positive effect on mental health.**

**TENDING TO PLANTS HAS BEEN SHOWN TO IMPROVE ONE'S MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH.**

*Being amid nature – or even viewing scenes of nature – reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings. Exposure to nature also contributes to physical well-being as it reduces blood pressure, heart rate and muscle tension, as well as the production of stress hormones. For anxious people who constantly feel overwhelmed, gardening is a good way of gaining a sense of control, making the activity a particularly satisfying experience.*



## HORTICULTURE THERAPY

Gardening is one of the activities offered to long-stay patients at the Institute of Mental Health. Conducted as a group activity, it encourages participating patients to get outdoors and reap the benefits of exposure to sunshine and nature.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

## NATURE GIVES BACK

Another potential benefit of getting your hands dirty comes from bacteria found in soil. Researchers at the University of Bristol reported that mice exposed to *Mycobacterium vaccae* performed better in tests designed to assess the performance of antidepressant drugs, and had higher levels of serotonin – the brain's “happy” chemical.

# 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 (24 hours)

## 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

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](http://www.chat.mentalhealth.sg), or contact us to find out more.

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



Community Health  
Assessment Team