

FEBRUARY-MAY 2021

imagine

A MAGAZINE ON MENTAL HEALTH

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

When a distorted
self-image has
debilitating
effects

THE RIGHT FRAME OF MIND

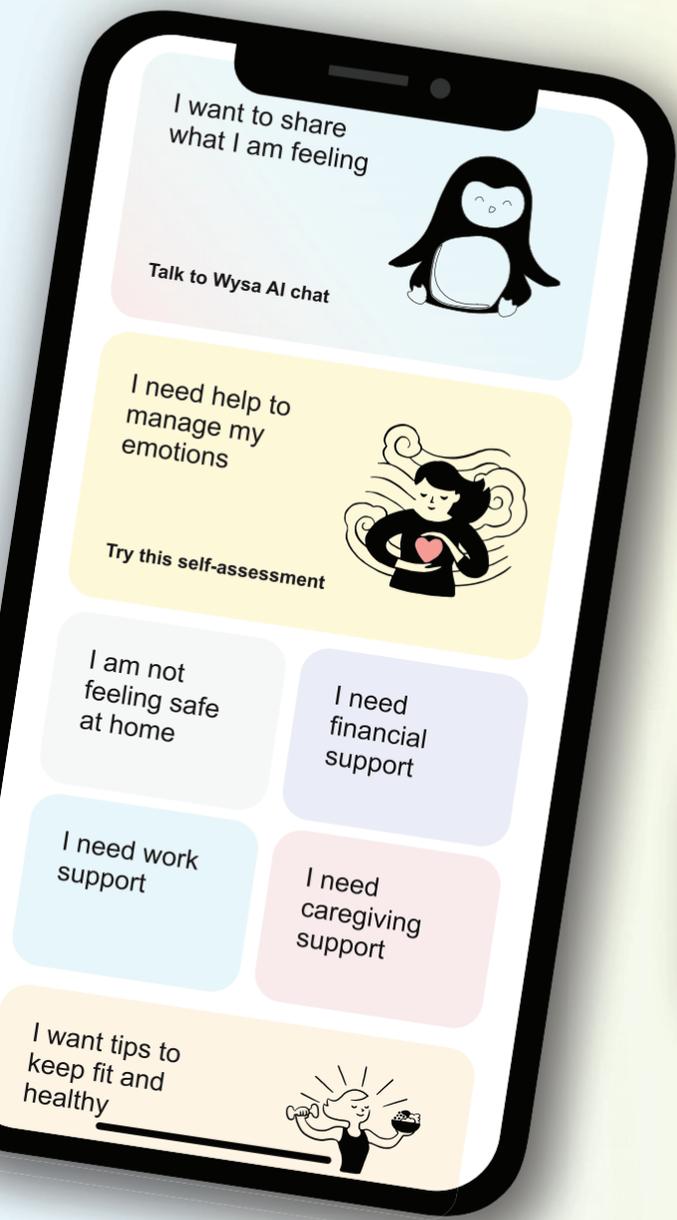
Strategies you can
adopt to maintain
positive mental health
in the year ahead





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04 Live Well
How pets are helping people cope with the isolating impact of COVID-19 lockdowns.



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“People with body dysmorphic disorder tend to over-focus on details, but are unable to process visual information in a holistic manner or see the big picture.”
DR JACKKI YIM
Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

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Spot the difference

ANSWER: The 5 differences below ▼



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CHARTING YOUR OWN COURSE TO WELLNESS

We know it is important to look after our mental health, but what exactly constitutes mental wellness? People often equate this with the absence of a diagnosed mental health condition, but in reality, it incorporates broader attributes such as having a positive mindset, a strong support network and coping skills to handle the stresses of daily life. With this in mind, our cover story (pages 8-11) presents a 'roadmap' for mental wellness. Here, you will find tips for achieving balance, building resilience and maintaining a healthy outlook in the year ahead.

The importance of looking on the bright side cannot be understated. There are those who may suffer from depression or anxiety disorder for instance, but still have positive mental health attributes which enable them to cope well. An example would be our A Life In My Day profile, Mr Ivan Lim, who has met his condition head on, and seeks out happiness wherever he can. His story (pages 12-13) also outlines the importance of early intervention.

In this issue, we also shed light on body dysmorphic disorder (pages 14-15). Far from being a case of vanity, this lesser-known condition can lead to social isolation and even self-harm. Often, those who grapple with it may not be aware that they have a medical issue that warrants proper attention.

Awareness is an important first step. Better mental health literacy will not only help dispel the prevailing negative attitudes and beliefs, but also encourage those affected to come forward and benefit from early intervention. This is something that Professor Chua Hong Choon emphasises in a special interview (pages 16-17) to mark the end of his decade-long tenure as IMH CEO. Here, Prof Chua talks about the work he and his team have done in building community partnerships to improve support for those with mental health conditions, as well as how patients themselves have been empowered to play a greater role in their well-being.

So as the Year of the Ox rolls in, we applaud those seeking to redefine the mental health landscape, as well as everyday Singaporeans who are proactively taking charge of their wellness. May you be surrounded by positive vibes for the rest of 2021, and beyond!

Happy reading.

the editorial team

IMAGINE



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HITTING THE Right Note

What she lacked in formal music training, **Ms Yong Fong Ling** made up for in passion — all so she could share the joy of music with IMH patients.

Interview **KEENAN PEREIRA**
Main photo **KELVIN CHIA**

>> IF YOU WERE TO VISIT IMH ON A SATURDAY MORNING, you might hear the sound of simple but melodic tinkling resonating from one of the rooms. The source of this music is a resonator bar, a percussion instrument that relies on teamwork and coordination between its players, who — in this case — are long-stay patients of IMH. Meet the IMH Ringers, the hospital's resident resonator bar group. The IMH Ringers is the brainchild of Ms Yong Fong Ling, a data analyst who has been volunteering at the hospital since 2013.

Ms Yong's journey began when she noticed how much her younger brother enjoyed his weekly volunteering sessions at the hospital. This led her to join him in organising various activities for the patients, including arts and crafts, festive celebrations, outings and sports. "We wanted to have a range of programmes to cater to the patients' varying needs and interests," she explains. "There wasn't a music-focused activity and I thought it would be fun for them." Music, she felt, could also teach patients skills like teamwork, self-expression and communication.

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

In 2017, Ms Yong raised the idea of starting the musical group and was met with enthusiastic support from IMH's volunteer manager. The next thing to do was to pick an instrument. Ms Yong wanted the group to be as inclusive as possible. "Some may be more musically-inclined than others, but I didn't want to turn away those who are interested but less musical," says Ms Yong, who admits to having no serious musical background apart from "dabbling" in the guitar and drums. "Keeping things



MS YONG FONG LING

Volunteer,
IMH Ringers

simple was also an advantage for me," she recalls with a laugh.

Eventually, Ms Yong settled on the resonator bar, which is ideal for a musical ensemble. Each member is given a bar that plays a specific note. They play their note when it is their turn, and the notes come together to form a tune. "The initial sessions were tough, because everybody was so excited and would just play when it wasn't their turn," she says. But Ms Yong persevered and taught patients simple musical concepts like rhythm and pace. To shore up her own skills, she read up extensively on music theory. These efforts paid off and the IMH Ringers are now regular performers at hospital events. "Performing for an audience was another challenge to overcome," says Ms Yong. "The players would be distracted by the crowds and noise, so I had to remind them beforehand to just look at me and play as they do during rehearsals." The experience of forming an interest group has strengthened Ms Yong's connection with some of the long-stay patients. "They remember my name and are always excited to see me," she says. "The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting restrictions forced us to put the IMH Ringers on hold but I'm itching to go back and see my friends at the hospital again. It is my second home now."

Striking A Chord With Patients

IMH runs music-based programmes to help patients enjoy the therapeutic benefits of the arts. These include:

Drum Circle Long-stay patients learn to play hand-drums and percussion instruments under the guidance of a trainer.



Very Special Outstanding Performers (VSOP) Choir Run by IMH's Occupational Therapy department. Patients are professionally coached in singing and performing skills, and often hold public performances.

Hearts in Harmony

A volunteer-run choir for long-stay patients.



+ HHA AWARD Ms Yong was a recipient of the **2020 Healthcare Humanity Award (Volunteer Category)** for her selfless dedication and efforts to improve the lives of IMH's long-stay patients through activities such as IMH Ringers.

LOVE WELL!



Furry Heroes

PET PURSUITS

The number of pets in Singapore in 2019 (including non-registered and adopted animals):



> DOGS:
111,500



> CATS:
85,100



> SMALL MAMMALS:
(hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits)
92,300

Source: The Business Times

>> The secret to coping during the COVID-19 crisis? A furry friend. The isolating impact of the pandemic has led many to seek the comfort of a pet at home. Dr Janette Young of the University of South Australia observed that there has been a global surge in pet adoptions and purchases during lockdowns. She credits this to people craving the benefits that a pet brings at a time when human touch is discouraged. "Pets seem to be particularly important when people are socially isolated or excluded, providing comfort, companionship and a sense of self-worth," said

Dr Young. From interviews with 32 people, she found that more than 90 per cent of respondents said that touching their pets both comforted and relaxed them. Many also noticed that their pets seem to know when their owners could use a cuddle. This wasn't limited to dogs and cats, added Dr Young. Birds, sheep, horses and even reptiles provided similar comfort. "In the era of COVID-19, social distancing, sudden lockdowns and societal upheaval, our pets may be the only living beings that many people are able to touch and draw comfort from," she said.

THE ROOTS OF Kindness

With the year-end festivities and traditional season of giving behind us, it might be worthwhile to consider the origins of our generosity. >



Researchers from the University of California, Davis, did just that and found that mothers have a big role to play. Examining the behaviours of 54 mother-child pairs, the researchers found that children who had experienced more compassion, love and empathy from their mothers were more willing to be generous to others. The children involved in the study were first tested at the age of four and invited back two years later. At both stages, the children were given 20 tokens for

completing a series of tasks. Before the session ended, they were told they could donate their tokens to other children in need. At the same time, mothers answered questions regarding their views on empathy, compassion and love. The findings showed a correlation between children's generosity and their socialisation experiences. "Compassionate mothers develop emotionally close relationships with their children while providing an early example of prosocial orientation toward the needs of others," researchers said.

The perfect gift

The mystery of the perfect gift may have been solved — at least for children aged 12 and above. New research by the University of Illinois at Chicago suggests that giving them something they can experience actually makes them happier than receiving a material object. Published in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, the research compared the level of happiness children derived from material goods versus that from experiences. The results showed that how old a child was had an effect on how they viewed certain gifts. Children between the ages of three and 12 derive more happiness from material things, whereas older children

derive more happiness from their experiences.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Lan Nguyen Chaplin believes it has to do with the memory capacity of younger children. "Young children do love experiences ... However, for experiences to provide enduring happiness, children must be able to recall details of the event long after it is over," she said.

Thankfully, there is a quick and easy fix to jog their memories. "Take pictures or videos of family walks, playing in the snow, and birthday parties," she added. "Children are likely to appreciate those experiences more if there is something to remind them of the event."



Experience Singapore

You don't need to travel overseas to have an unforgettable time — start right here in Singapore with these activities:

- > **HYDRODASH** Test your ninja warrior skills at Singapore's first-ever floating aqua park. <https://www.sentosa.com.sg/en/things-to-do/attractions/hydrodash/>
- > **FLIGHT EXPERIENCE'S BOEING 737** Take to the skies with Flight Experience's Boeing 737 simulator, which is used by actual pilots as well! <https://singapore.flightexperience.com.sg/pages/737-simulator-flights>
- > **HEADROCK VR** Enter the world of virtual reality at HeadRock VR, an escape from the everyday. <https://www.headrockvr.sg/>
- > **SNOW CITY SINGAPORE** Zip up your parkas and chill out at Snow City Singapore. <http://www.snowcity.com.sg/>
- > **WILDLIFE RESERVES SINGAPORE** Get close to nature at Wildlife Reserves Singapore's four nature parks. <https://www.wrs.com.sg>



> All attractions listed above can be redeemed with SingaporeRediscover Vouchers.

TIPPING the SCALES

The full extent of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on our wellness may prove a mystery for years to come. But early research suggests that it has done more harm than good, with a global survey confirming that it has prompted many to cut back on physical activity and eat more junk food.

Carried out by researchers at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Louisiana, US, the study surveyed almost 8,000 adults across the world.

Researchers observed that the general decline in healthy behaviour during the lockdown was fairly common regardless of geography. More people led more sedentary lives, as the stay-home directives sharply reduced daily commuting needs. But even when people did exercise, it was often at a lower intensity than before the pandemic. Giving in to cravings was also a common theme, with the consumption of sugary drinks and snack foods going up. These trends might explain the researchers' other finding, which showed that about 27 per cent of respondents gained weight in the early months of the pandemic. This figure was even higher among obese respondents.

But there were some bright spots as well: about 17 per cent of respondents said that they had lost weight, pointing to the fact that the lockdowns led them to discover new ingredients and look for ways to cook healthier meals at home.

The results of the study were published in *Obesity*.



EXERCISE (WITH) CAUTION

150 minutes of physical activity a week is all you need to lead a healthier lifestyle, according to the Health Promotion Board. As the nation gradually lifts COVID-19 restrictions, team-based sports such as basketball, football, and dragonboating can be safely resumed.

Those who prefer working out alone can continue to use public stadiums, dance studios, gyms, indoor sport halls and swimming complexes; just remember to book a slot before heading down and follow safe distancing guidelines.

Dealing with body shaming

Being on the receiving end of offhand comments about your changed body can make you feel less-than-secure. Here are tips to take it in stride:



> REACH OUT:

When comments about your body become too personal, turn to trusted friends and family members for emotional support.

> EMBRACE POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS:

Remind yourself that you are

strong, capable and resilient, regardless of size.

> PRIORITISE YOUR HEALTH:

Take steps to improve your physical and emotional well-being. Take time off social media if it is triggering negative thoughts about your body.

THIS IS WHAT LONELINESS LOOKS LIKE



The effects of loneliness — such as the increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia — are widely known. But exactly how loneliness presents in the brain is less clear...until now. Scientists from McGill University in Canada have found that people who are struggling with loneliness have brains that are distinct from the general population. According to their research, the brains of lonely people featured a higher volume of grey matter in the default network, which is the part of the brain responsible for processes like reminiscing, future planning, imagining and thinking about others.

"In the absence of desired social experiences, lonely individuals may be biased towards

internally-directed thoughts such as reminiscing or imagining social experiences," said the study's lead author Dr Nathan Spreng. "This heightened focus on self-reflection, and possibly imagined social experiences, would naturally engage the memory-based functions of the default network." The results of their study were published in *Nature Communications*.

#KNOW THIS

Loneliness kills; literally. According to the 2015 Singapore Longitudinal Ageing Studies headed by the National University of Singapore, seniors who live alone are **1.7 times more likely** to die prematurely than seniors living with others.

REDISCOVER RESILIENCE

An online survey of some 3,500 individuals by Ohio State University and online health portal *Everyday Health* has unearthed some interesting trends about the state of resilience.

For instance, researchers have found that a passive "it is what it is" mindset is more prevalent in less resilient people. They also tend to overthink or overanalyse issues. Meanwhile, those who are more resilient are less resigned to their situations and are able to keep their problems in perspective. The survey also found that over a quarter of respondents had over-estimated their levels of mental and emotional resilience.

With a growing canon of research highlighting that higher levels of resilience are directly related to better outcomes when living through a crisis and improving emotional and physical health, it is more important than ever to focus on building up our resilience reserves.

Fortunately, resilience can be built through constant practice. Start with these tips from the Health Promotion Board:

> BE OPTIMISTIC

When dealing with setbacks, focus on the positives instead of dwelling on the negatives. Being optimistic can also improve your problem-solving skills, as it helps you focus on the possibilities instead of the problem.

> ADD OBJECTIVITY

When faced with a setback, it's normal to think that the situation is worse than it actually is. Objectivity allows you to see things in perspective and prevents you from making a mountain out of a molehill.

> TAKE A BREAK

Giving your body and mind a chance to recharge can equip you with the energy needed to face your problem head-on.



The #HYGGE way of life

The *hygge* hashtag on Instagram has led to nearly seven million posts — proof of the growing global obsession with this centrepiece of Danish culture that has been linked to a reduction of stress and increase in overall well-being.

If the term (pronounced *hoo-guh*) raises more questions than answers, here's a quick introduction: it refers to the art of getting comfy and cosy — and this loose definition means that everyone sees *hygge* differently. Ultimately, *hygge* is about who you choose to surround yourself with and what you choose to spend your time doing. Here are some common elements that can help you get started on your *hygge* journey:

> AT HOME

Dim the lights and light some candles in the evening. Research has shown that warm yellow light is often perceived as more

relaxing than harsh and cold white light. Find comforting fabrics and choose casual wear whenever you can.

> WITH GOOD COMPANY

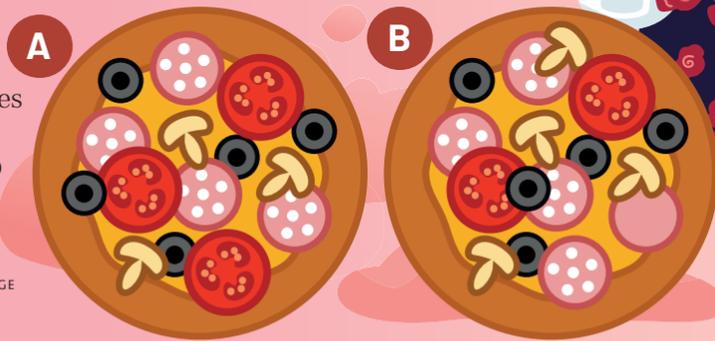
Nurture relationships that allow you to feel supported and heard. Enjoy precious bonding time by hanging out with a small circle of close friends or loved ones.

> GET COOKING

Freshly-baked foods have been shown to be some of the warmest, most *hygge*-inducing scents around, so warm up the oven and get baking!

Spot the difference:

Can you spot 5 differences between these two pizzas?



REFER TO THE CONTENTS PAGE FOR PUZZLE ANSWER

Going back to basics

We're well into 2021, and our resolutions to live better may have taken a backseat as the stresses of daily life seep in again. Make it a point to return to the fundamentals of wellness and prioritise positive mental health.

Text KEENAN PEREIRA in consultation with MS JEMIE WANG, Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH



Take your mind back to the start of the year: did you make a resolution to lead a better, healthier life? If you did, you are not alone – changes to improve our health and quality of life are among the most common resolutions made at the dawn of a new year. But in the weeks that have passed, we may have already neglected to prioritise our mental well-being, which is central to living better. Don't be disheartened though – as Ms Jemie Wang, Clinical Psychologist,

Department of Psychology, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), shares, you can make a conscious effort to develop and maintain positive mental health at any time of the year.

Achieving positive mental health needn't be an uphill or gruelling task, as Ms Wang explains. It starts with going back to the basics of ourselves: how we deal with change, how we care for ourselves and how we build healthy relationships with those we love. Here, *Imagine* looks at ways to get started:

01 Embrace Challenges >>

2020 offered a stark reminder that each passing year brings its own set of unique challenges that can upend our lives. Predicting or avoiding change isn't always possible, so Ms Wang suggests shifting our mindset instead. "Learn to groom a growth mindset," she advises. "Tell yourself that you can choose to interpret the obstacles or difficulties that lie ahead of you as an opportunity to thrive – instead of just survive – and any failures that you face will be lessons to learn from to do things differently."

NOTE THESE TIPS TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES AND SITUATIONS:

Visualise your thinking patterns to understand how you approach problems. One way to do this is by journaling regularly: writing down the ideas swimming in our head allows us to get a grasp on them and identify unhealthy thinking patterns that lead to rigidity and pessimism. "We can then set an intention to focus on gratitude, personal strengths, or the positive aspects of our circumstances. This can assist us in proactively modifying the way we view and handle challenges," says Ms Wang. This is a journey and you'll get better over time. The key is to start at some point.

Practise mindfulness to stay in the present. "We cannot change the past nor have we arrived at the future, so the present is what we should focus on," says Ms Wang. This means shifting mental gears to get out of our old ways of thinking, feeling and acting, and focusing on what is here right now.

Practise self-compassion, especially in a time of rapid change. Realise that adapting to change isn't easy and acknowledge that you did the best you could. "Ignore the overly critical voice of self-judgment and be as kind to yourself as you are to your loved ones," advises Ms Wang. "We deserve kindness, warmth and care – the same qualities we offer to others we care for." >>



A Positive Spin

Remember that positive mental health encompasses more than just the absence of mental disorders. It is possible for a person with a diagnosis of mental illness to have a high level of positive mental health. Conversely, people who are not diagnosed with a mental illness may fail to prioritise their mental well-being. For instance, an individual who regularly works long hours, feels overwhelmed by commitments and neglects self-care may not have the best mental health.

In 2012, IMH developed a Positive Mental Health (PMH) instrument – an assessment tool to measure PMH in the local population – as part of the Singapore Mental Health Study. It comprises six components that influence our well-being and contribute to positive mental health. Read on to find out more about them:

- General coping:** How we react to a stressful or difficult situation matters. "Tough times don't last, tough people do" may be a cliché, but it's rooted in truth. When facing a challenge, we might feel stretched for a period, but like a rubber band, resilience allows us to bounce back. To build resilience, think positively and engage in pleasurable and relaxing activities.
- Interpersonal skills:** Strong bonds and good relationships will help see us through life's ups and downs. Building such bonds requires skills like empathy and communication. Put these to good use by making time for family and friends.
- Emotional support:** It can be natural to withdraw from others when facing a tough time. But the emotional support that family and friends provide can give us the assurance of feeling loved and wanted, and lighten our load.
- Spirituality:** Spiritual and religious practices and beliefs can serve as a coping mechanism and influence our behaviour.

- Personal growth:** Setting goals reflects one's confidence, freedom and ability to take control of situations. Being open to new experiences will help us learn new things about ourselves. If things don't go as planned, don't be discouraged. Failure is a part of life – what is more important is to learn from our mistakes instead of dwelling on them.



- Global affect:** Positive moods are indicative of emotional stability and vitality. But positive moods, like all others, are transient. "We need to understand that our brains have a 'negativity bias', and tend to fixate on bad things. Thus, we need to develop the ability to focus on what is pleasurable or meaningful," says Ms Wang. "Look for opportunities to slow down and savour a beneficial experience. Stay with the experience for a breath or longer, fully sensing it in your body, and focusing on what feels good about it."



FIND THE RIGHT PACE

Overwhelmed by the tasks at home or work? Breaking up your workload into smaller mental buckets is a way to avoid feeling burned out; the buckets can be:

✓✓✓
An urgent pile

✓✓
A not-so-urgent pile

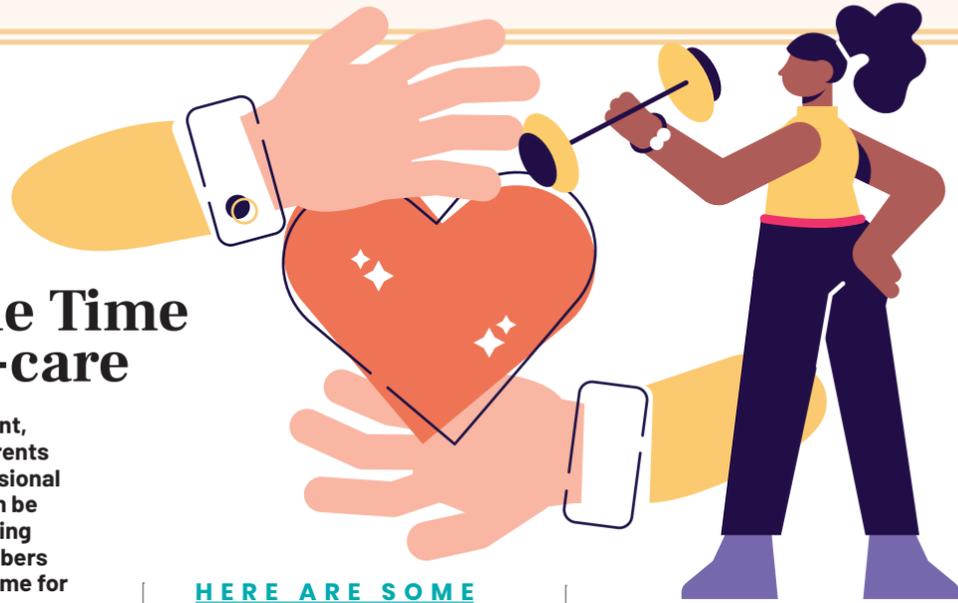
✓
A pile you can take on later in the week

Think about your tasks before you dive into them, so you can plan and prioritise them better.

02 Set Aside Time for Self-care

We know self-care is important, but what exactly is it? For parents juggling domestic and professional responsibilities, self-care can be something as simple as splitting chores with their family members so they can carve out some time for themselves, while teenagers may find hanging out with friends to be a boost. Those who are more visual may enjoy the soothing nature of art and be stressed by the thought of a Sudoku puzzle, while the opposite may be true for the numerate among us.

The underlying principle of self-care is to identify and meet our personal needs, be it for rest, connection, or self-expression. These needs can be broadly categorised into ones that are physical, psychological and social in nature. "Each person's needs differ greatly and there's no one-size-fits-all self-care solution," says Ms Wang. "We should try to engage in at least one activity that is pleasurable or relaxing to us every day. This will help us better handle life's stressors and manage our mental, emotional and physical health."



HERE ARE SOME ACTIVITIES YOU CAN START WITH:

- Reading
- Listening to music
- Gardening
- Meeting friends for coffee/tea
- Watching movies/TV
- Meditation
- Sports
- Walking



RELAX, TAKE IT EASY

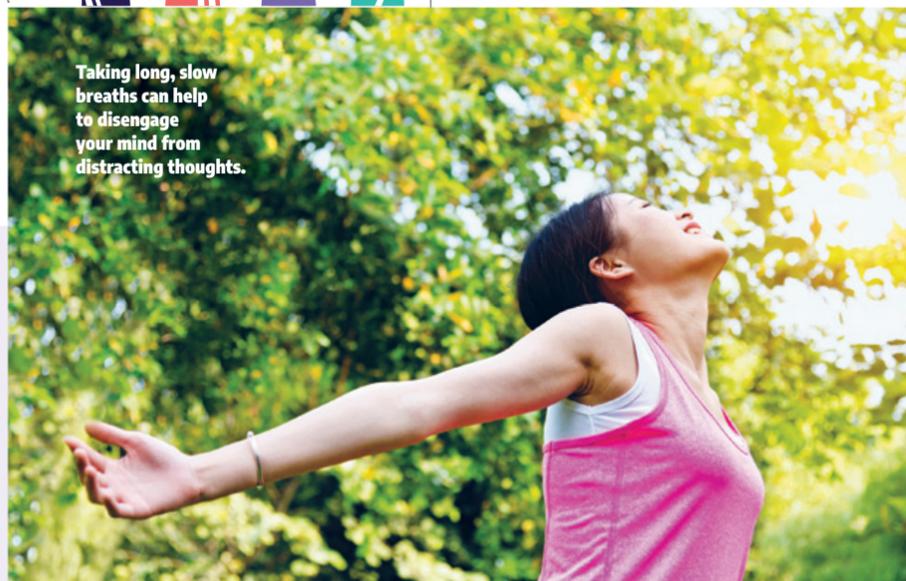
BREATH FOCUS IS A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE WAY OF COMBATTING STRESS. TRY IT BY **TAKING LONG AND SLOW BREATHS**. WITH EACH BREATH, GENTLY DISENGAGE YOUR MIND FROM DISTRACTING THOUGHTS AND SENSATIONS. JUST A MINUTE OR TWO CAN HELP YOU FEEL LESS OVERWHELMED AND STRESSED.



HIGH STRESS, HIGH COST

Singapore spends **\$3.1 billion** on stress-related illnesses annually.

Source: The Straits Times



Taking long, slow breaths can help to disengage your mind from distracting thoughts.

ACCORDING TO A 2019 SURVEY, **3 IN 10** SINGAPOREANS polled said they did not know how to relax.

Source: Todayonline



03 Declutter Your Life

"Out with the old, in with the new" is often heard around the start of a new year, as people begin decluttering their physical spaces. This is a positive move, as several studies have shown that physical clutter can increase levels of stress, sap energy, lower productivity and have an overall negative impact on our well-being.

Clutter, however, can take many shapes and forms. More than just following those Marie Kondo-inspired home organisation tips, Ms Wang recommends going a few steps further to remove digital clutter and unhelpful relationships from your life as well.

“Humans are hardwired for connections and we benefit from forming social relationships to survive, for optimal functioning and for our personal well-being. Quality social relationships that are loving, affirming and nurturing go a long way towards promoting positive mental health.”



MS JEMIE WANG, Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

A Digital Detox

It is not unusual to be bombarded by notifications on our smartphones throughout the day.

While some of these — like text messages from loved ones — are important, those reminding us of flash sales and social media 'likes' add little to our lives. "These interfere with our cognitive processes by reducing our attention and focus, and can also adversely affect our psychological well-being and stress levels," says Ms Wang, who recommends a "digital detox". The term might frighten some, as it conjures up images of an entirely disconnected world. In reality, Ms Wang shares that a digital detox can be as simple as setting boundaries and limits, rather than giving up our smartphones entirely.

SET BOUNDARIES > It may be useful to designate spaces such as the dining table and bed as "no smartphone" areas, so you can practise mindfulness while eating and resting.

IMPOSE TIME LIMITS > Most apps, including Instagram and Facebook, now come with daily reminders that can help you control the time spent on them. "These apps can give you curated and false depictions of other people's lives, which can affect our self-esteem and self-worth," explains Ms Wang.



BEEP BEEP

The average smartphone user gets

46

PUSH NOTIFICATIONS EVERY DAY.

Source: Business of Apps

The Social Network

Prioritising positive mental health also entails taking a closer look at our social life.

Some relationships, like those with loved ones who support, inspire and uplift, should be given more attention, says Ms Wang. Conversely, there are relationships that cause unnecessary stress and seem to be rooted in negativity — for instance, hyper-critical people in our lives who create a sense of inadequacy or even defectiveness in us. Ms Wang's advice for dealing with these? Actively speak up for your own well-being. "Be discerning of what has been said to you. Then take charge of the situation by expressing yourself in an assertive manner and drawing your boundaries with them." But steer clear of the temptation to become a recluse and avoid people altogether, as this may make us feel lonelier and sadder. Instead, reach out to positive sources of social support when you need it. Accept the help they give — needing or accepting help is not a sign of weakness.



Downside Up

Depression might have interrupted his life, but Mr Ivan Lim took the pause in positive stride to rebuild a better life. Interview KOH YUEN LIN Photos KELVIN CHIA

MR IVAN LIM

54, Author and musician

About 20 years ago, I had a great career as an entertainment journalist and was becoming increasingly well-known as a writer. On the personal front, I was doing well too. I was living in a three-storey home, owned a car, and was in a happy marriage. Yet there was an emptiness within me and I was getting increasingly unhappy and reckless. I was drinking heavily, and even got into a car crash while in a drunken state. Things spiralled to the point where my wife and I decided to get a divorce. One day, in the wee hours of the morning,

my mother found me alone in the study, in a stupor. I was so deep in the situation that I didn't recognise what was happening to me, but she saw the signs and made arrangements for me to see a psychiatrist the next day. The psychiatrist had a long chat with me. He later diagnosed me with depression and put me on medication.

Through the discussions with my psychiatrist, I came to realise that alcohol actually made me feel lousy. I had to remove myself from situations that required me to drink, including

visiting bars and clubs – which was what I needed to do for my work at that point. The psychiatrist said to me point-blank: "Then maybe you should change your job." So I did that. It prevented me from going down the road of alcohol abuse, and it made it easier for me to recover from depression.

I told one of my closest friends about my diagnosis. His response was: "Wow, you are so Hollywood!" as though depression was something trendy and something only celebrities would have. In reality, when I went to

seek help, I was in the least glamorous state ever, and the incongruity of it made me chuckle. However, my friend was trying to lighten things up, as the topic was probably too serious for him to take. This was in 2001, and though there was some level of mental health awareness among the general public at that point, most people were still not entirely comfortable talking about it, especially if it struck too close to home. Having an incomplete knowledge of mental health issues makes it an uncertainty that is frightening – like ghosts! So some of my friends stopped hanging out with me out of this fear of the unknown. They might have thought: "Oh this person has mental health issues, he might flip on me and go completely crazy."

"Wah, you actually went (to get diagnosed)? It's going to be on your records permanently!" some said. But while seeking psychiatric help seemed like my first recourse, it was also my last resort. It was something I had to do, and I cannot imagine what might have become of me otherwise. My mother – an educator who is quite in tune with mental health issues and now a very progressive grandmother to my son – helped me find the right help. And the diagnosis was a realisation of what was happening. I accepted it for what it was, processed it, and did what was necessary to get better – I took my medicine daily, managed my feelings and quit my job to avoid clubs and bars.

“When you have a big enough support network, they will look out for you. You don't have to be ashamed about needing this network either, for you are part of somebody else's network too, and can serve as a pillar of strength as well.”

Music has always been a part of my life. It allows me to express my emotions and makes me feel comfortable with my own feelings, be they positive or negative. Even before my diagnosis, I always listened to Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor whenever I was feeling down. It starts off grandly and then goes into a very heart-wrenching second movement, before ending with a triumphant third movement – I always feel like I am going through all the emotions that I need to express while I am listening to it. Incidentally, he wrote the piece after he came out of clinical depression and dedicated it to the physician who helped him get back on his feet. I don't know if he wrote the piece to help people with depression, but it certainly speaks to me.

Surrounding myself with people who have a positive effect on me – mentors, friends, family – is important. Conversations with my wife and just sharing a laugh with her, talking to friends who know what I am going through and can sense if I am not in a good state of mind, or even just receiving a text message from a friend asking how I am... all these help to keep my state of well-being in check. When you have a big enough support network, they will look out for you. You don't have to be ashamed about needing this network either, for you are part of somebody else's network too, and can serve as a pillar of strength as well.

My advice to those going through depression is to know that it's okay to not be okay. I have lost a number of friends through suicide as a result of depression, and every incident came as such a shock. I have met exuberant personalities with so much to look forward to and live for, yet they ended up killing themselves – perhaps because they

felt they couldn't speak to anybody about their condition due to the stigma that surrounds it. But there are many ways you can get help. If you're not comfortable talking to someone about your feelings, try apps like Wysa* on mindline.sg. It's a chatbot that takes the form of a friendly little penguin and helps you process your feelings. I tried it and thought it would be useful to someone who is a bit shy or embarrassed to talk to another person about his or her mental health condition. Help is available and accessible – and you are never alone, even if you think you are.



**Wysa: An emotionally intelligent AI chatbot that individuals can chat with and use to access a wide range of self-management and cognitive behavioural therapy exercises. Wysa can be found on mindline.sg, a Singapore-developed stress management and coping website that consolidates access to many carefully-selected local resources, including a clinically validated self-assessment tool for emotional well-being.*



Ivan is now re-married and runs an independent art and editorial business with his wife, with whom he has a teenage son. He is also a classical guitarist, and performs with 3am Music Collective, a local music group that writes and produces songs to raise awareness and promote acceptance of mental health issues.



More than just vanity

Body dysmorphic disorder is a debilitating mental health condition that goes far beyond insecurities and self-obsession.



Interview
DENYSE YEO
in consultation with
DR BHANU GUPTA,
Senior Consultant,
Department of Mood
and Anxiety, IMH; and
DR JACKKI YIM, Senior
Clinical Psychologist,
Department of
Psychology, IMH //
Photos GETTYIMAGES

SEEK HELP
The condition can improve with correct treatment and support.

>> APPEARANCE IS EVERYTHING,

or so the cliché goes. For most of us, our concern over the way we look is fleeting. We forget our physical imperfections once we turn away from the mirror. And worrying about our blemishes, features or weight does not disrupt our daily activities. But for people with body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), the fixation with their appearance takes over their lives completely. They often shun social interactions and, in extreme cases, do not step out of the house – sometimes for years – to avoid being seen or potentially ‘judged’ on their perceived flaws, which are often unnoticeable to others. If they have to go outside, they do so at night when others are asleep. “BDD is not about vanity,” clarifies Dr Jackki Yim, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, Institute of Mental Health (IMH). “It’s a mental health disorder, which has a substantial impairment on the day-to-day functioning of those afflicted. It impacts the individual’s everyday life, and that is the difference between BDD and merely being vain.”

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS

Often underreported, BDD affects about two per cent of people worldwide. In Singapore, the disorder

has not been studied at full scale, but a preliminary study by the National University of Singapore suggests a similar prevalence here, says Dr Bhanu Gupta, Senior Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, IMH. “At our tertiary centre, we see very few cases, which is probably due to sufferers not seeking help or not recognising it as a psychiatric condition,” Dr Gupta notes.

BDD is, however, a serious issue. If left untreated, it can result in complications including depression or, worse, suicide. According to Dr Yim, global studies have found that 70 per cent of people with BDD suffer from

co-morbid depression, more than 60 per cent reported having suicidal thoughts, and around 24 to 28 per cent attempted suicide. “As it’s unlikely that BDD goes away by itself, it’s vital to seek treatment as early as possible for better outcomes,” she says.

SPOTTING THE SYMPTOMS

Typically, the onset of the disorder starts at adolescence, before the age of 18. BDD can affect both men and women, although about 40 per cent of BDD sufferers are men and 60 per cent are women. Women tend to report more severe symptoms, and usually have more areas of concern, such as skin imperfections, facial features and hair.

“At our tertiary centre, we see very few cases, which is probably due to sufferers not seeking help or not recognising it as a psychiatric condition.”



DR BHANU GUPTA, Senior Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, IMH

On the other hand, men are often more preoccupied with their build or muscle tone, and tend to engage in excessive training at the gym, overuse protein supplements and even abuse steroids.

Between the sexes, common symptoms include an extreme preoccupation with perceived flaws in their appearance. Says Dr Yim, “They have a strong conviction of a defect in their appearance and that they look ugly. They believe other people judge them in a negative way. And they often engage in repetitive behaviours – such as trying to fix or hide the perceived flaw – which are very difficult to control.” Other signs include comparing their appearance with others. Those who have BDD tend to underestimate their physical attractiveness and overestimate other people’s attractiveness, which is why they feel anxious or distressed, says Dr Yim. They often avoid social situations. And they tend to seek cosmetic procedures, although it is important to note that not everyone who does this suffers from BDD.

Although the exact cause of BDD is still debatable, studies suggest a combination of different factors, including environmental and biological reasons. “The condition seems to develop in people with extreme self-consciousness and self-focused attention, and who may have been teased or bullied in their childhood or adolescent years and do not seem to have overcome it,” says Dr Gupta. Neuroscientific research also points to differences in brain function related to the processing of visual and perceptual information. Says Dr Yim, “People with BDD tend to over-focus on details, but are unable to process visual information in a holistic manner or see the big picture.”

COPING WITH THE DISORDER

The condition can improve with correct treatment and support. This often involves a combination of medication and cognitive-behavioural therapy, which is also used



“It impacts the individual’s everyday life, and that is the difference between BDD and merely being vain.”

DR JACKKI YIM, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

in treating other conditions such as depression and anxiety.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy aims to educate individuals with BDD on their condition and challenge them to reframe their unrealistic negative thoughts about their appearance. It also teaches them to refrain from repetitive, compulsive behaviours and encourages them to face their fears, says Dr Yim. For instance, she recalls telling one patient who worried excessively about acne not to apply any makeup, then have lunch with her friends and see whether they judged her or said anything. Nothing happened – her friends had not noticed, and their lunch took place without incident. Dr Yim says, “The purpose is to help them reach a conclusion that what they interpret or think might not be accurate.”

Recovering patients are more in touch with reality, and do not avoid social situations or camouflage their appearance. They are more aware and comfortable with going out to meet people, says Dr Yim. And it is critical that once patients learn to manage their condition, they continue to use these tools to keep their condition in check.

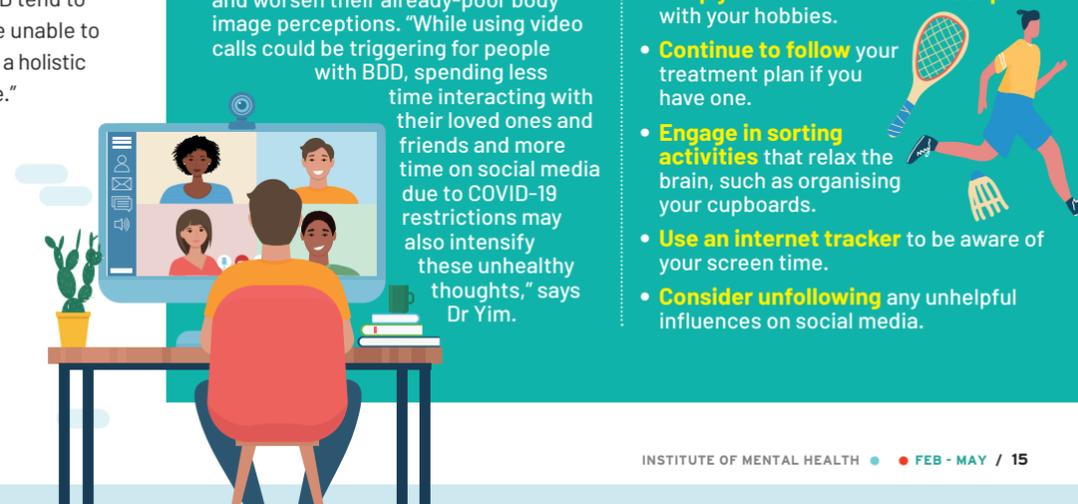
Dr Yim advises those who suspect that they are suffering from BDD symptoms – or know of someone who is – to seek help. “Don’t let unfounded fears about treatment get in the way of reducing your suffering and improving your life. Give treatment a try. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain,” she says.

ZOOM CALLS AND BDD: The good, the bad and the ugly

These days, video conferencing tools like Zoom play a key role in connecting with the outside world. Yet, video calls can have a negative impact on people with BDD. In the US and Europe, many are reporting that video calls, where participants see a thumbnail of themselves, aggravate their condition and worsen their already-poor body image perceptions. “While using video calls could be triggering for people with BDD, spending less time interacting with their loved ones and more time on social media due to COVID-19 restrictions may also intensify these unhealthy thoughts,” says Dr Yim.

The key is to moderate the use of video conferencing tools. Here are some additional tips to manage one’s mental health and well-being from the UK-based Body Dysmorphic Disorder Foundation.

- **Follow a daily routine** including meals, exercise and self-care activities.
- **Speak to someone** among your social connections and support networks.
- **Keep your mind and hands occupied** with your hobbies.
- **Continue to follow** your treatment plan if you have one.
- **Engage in sorting activities** that relax the brain, such as organising your cupboards.
- **Use an internet tracker** to be aware of your screen time.
- **Consider unfollowing** any unhelpful influences on social media.



A JOURNEY OF **Change,** Collaboration and **hope**

As he moves into a new role, IMH's former Chief Executive Officer **Professor Chua Hong Choon** looks back on changes in Singapore's mental healthcare landscape over the years. Interview **KOH YUEN LIN** Photo **COURTESY OF IMH**

The posting to the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) in 1993 was something Professor Chua Hong Choon had eagerly anticipated. "After medical school, I did my housemanship followed by medical rotations in the Neurosurgery and Neonatology departments. The Neurosurgery posting got me interested in psychiatry and I really wanted to go to IMH to learn more," recalls Prof Chua. However, while he looked forward to joining IMH, some friends and acquaintances displayed general disappointment. "They said things like 'What a shame — you have such potential for a good career'," he says. "It was a reflection of the prevalent stigma surrounding mental illness at that time. There were a lot of misconceptions then, too, not just about people with mental health issues but also the healthcare professionals who treated them. For instance, people used to think that the behaviour of mental health patients would rub off on psychiatrists and healthcare workers."

Seeking Change

Despite the discouraging response from those around him, 1993 proved to be an exciting year for Prof Chua — and one that would shape his approach to how IMH provides care. "It was a time of change. The hospital, then known as Woodbridge Hospital, was going through a big move to our new premises in Buangkok Green Medical Park. In this state of transition, there were a lot of opportunities to improve or even come up with new ways of doing things — from procedures for seeing new patients to services we provided and even small things like

designing a doctor's rest room, where many logistical and scheduling discussions were held," shares Prof Chua. "As a young doctor, I had the opportunity to participate and be involved in making these decisions. I like to think that it helped me to see early in my career that change is a constant, and it can be harnessed for betterment."

As someone with a naturally positive attitude, Prof Chua always sees the silver lining in challenging situations. Take for example the quarantining of all of IMH's patients and staff after a false alarm during the 2003 SARS outbreak. "It was a major incident but it led to positive outcomes," he says. "As a result of that episode, there was a heightened awareness of the vast number of vulnerable patients and staff at IMH, and a greater emphasis on infection control and the physical health of the patients here." He also shares that in-house medical services and facilities were set up within the hospital in the wake of the incident to handle any similar situations in the future. "Sometimes, unexpected things happen, and you need to grasp the opportunity to make the best out of it."

Building a Community

In Prof Chua's view, a holistic and multi-agency approach is needed to promote mental wellness and manage mental health issues in the population.

The National Mental Health Blueprint, launched by the Ministry of Health in 2007, was a landmark development in this respect. It formed the backbone of a five-year plan

to transition Singapore's mental healthcare from an institution-based care model to one focusing on the community, recovery and integration. Then one of the deputy leaders in IMH, Prof Chua was part of a team tasked to research and draft the blueprint, which introduced several programmes that tapped on ground resources like schools, general practitioners and community services to promote the prevention and early detection of mental health issues as well as enable continuity of care for discharged patients.

"We had the resolve to do this, but realised that we didn't have that many 'friends' beyond the confines of the hospital," he recalls. "So we set out to build a network of community partners, and actively helped them become stronger in terms of mental health awareness and capability to be able to do more to support individuals with mental health issues."

To support the expanded reach and the different agencies involved — from partners to patients — Prof Chua spearheaded the development of the Integrated Patient Assessment & Continuous Engagement

(iPACE) programme. "With community-based care, our patients are no longer confined within our hospital. This calls for a system of communicating with the different parties in our network so that patients' needs are taken care of," he shares.

Under this programme, case managers in IMH serve as a bridge between patients, community partners and the healthcare team. They keep in close contact with discharged patients and outpatients, monitor their condition, and connect them to the various social services and resources available to them. This has been instrumental in improving continuity of care for patients with severe mental illness — the iPACE programme has resulted in more than 90 per cent of such patients returning for follow-up treatment after their discharge and staying well in the community.

To Inspire and Empower

Another significant undertaking for Prof Chua was giving patients a voice, which he sees as a vital component in the ecosystem at IMH. "Mental healthcare is not about treating our

patients as weak and helpless," he says. "From my early days of leadership, I have emphasised the need to empower our patients, so they can be more involved in their treatment and take ownership of their mental health and recovery. Just as we put our community partners on an equal footing, we also needed to rebalance our relationship with our patients."

The Voices of Experience (VOE) programme, launched in 2014, is a step in this direction. It gives patients, caregivers and other advocates a platform to share their

“From my early days of leadership, I have emphasised the need to empower our patients, so they can be more involved in their treatment and take ownership of their mental health and recovery.”

concerns as well as raise awareness of mental health issues. "VOE is a triangle: the voice of the patient, the caregiver, and that of the medical professional. Only when these voices are equal can we get a more balanced view of what is going on," says Prof Chua.

IMH also started employing persons in recovery as peer support specialists to work alongside psychiatrists, nurses and allied health professionals in various departments and programmes. They use their lived experiences to give hope and inspire others who are in a similar situation to overcome their mental health conditions. "I find people dealing with mental illness amazing," says Prof Chua. "They go through a tough time because their emotions and thinking are affected in a way that you and I may not be able to fully comprehend, yet they strive to recover and go on with their lives. They want the same things as any of us: meaning, purpose, relationships, to be part of the community. They are no different and these desires are not diminished. There is much that we can learn from them. I've learnt a lot from my patients."

THE BEST OF TIMES

After 10 years as CEO of IMH, Prof Chua has taken on the role of CEO at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital and Yishun Health from 1 February 2021. He looks back fondly at his time in IMH. "My relationship with my colleagues in IMH has shaped who I am today. I treasure the friendships forged and the lessons learnt. It has been a great privilege to work with so many passionate individuals to improve mental healthcare and awareness in Singapore," he says.



PROFESSOR CHUA HONG CHOON
Former Chief Executive Officer, IMH (2011-2021)

Q&A

ASK THE

Experts

IMH clinicians answer your questions.

01: I'M A 40-YEAR-OLD MALE. I WAS RETRENCHED EARLY LAST YEAR BUT, THANKFULLY, HAVE FOUND ANOTHER JOB. WHILE I'M EXCITED ABOUT RESTARTING MY CAREER, I'M NOT SURE IF I CAN COPE WITH THE DEMANDS OF THE WORK.

You see, my new job involves customer service, but I feel very shy and uncomfortable in front of strangers and large crowds. What can I do to manage my social anxiety?

A: Social anxiety is a very common phenomenon. In fact, experts estimate that about a third of people experience mild anxiety in social situations. This often becomes more pronounced during developmental stages like early childhood or adolescence, or life transitions such as marriage and a career change. During these periods, there is often an increased need for social interactions, as well as worries about scrutiny or embarrassing oneself. It is important to first realise that such anxiety is normal and understandable, and that it is likely to diminish with time. Looking

after your physical and emotional well-being during this period of adjustment will certainly help.

However, when we talk about social anxiety disorder, or social phobia, we are describing a more serious condition, where individuals experience marked distress during social situations, such as overwhelming feelings of anxiety accompanied by physical symptoms like trembling, sweating, difficulty breathing and "freezing up" or "blinking out". This often makes it difficult for them to

accomplish what they set out to do, or compels them to cope by avoidance, leading to limitations in educational, occupational or social pursuits. In this case, antidepressant medications and/or psychological therapy (or "talk therapy") can be of great help. It is important to treat this as early as possible, lest it keeps individuals from realising their full potential.

DR LAU BOON JIA
Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety

SOCIAL ANXIETY

Experts estimate that about a third of people experience mild anxiety in social situations.



SEEK HELP
Speaking with a counsellor may help you better manage your own feelings.

02: MY HUSBAND AND I ARE IN THE MIDST OF FINALISING OUR DIVORCE. WE HAVE AN 11-YEAR-OLD SON AND HAVE SPOKEN TO HIM ABOUT OUR SEPARATION.

He seems unaffected by our decision and has not displayed any unusual behaviour. I'm concerned, however, that when we actually do start to live apart, it may impact him negatively. What can we do to help him adjust to this big change?

A: Divorce has varying impact on children depending on factors such as the child's age and temperament; the context of the divorce; how parents handle the process; and the type of relationship the child has with parents and caregivers. Explain the situation to your child, and provide reassurance that the divorce is not his fault and that both of you will still be caring for him as parents. Provide adequate opportunities for your son to talk about the divorce or issues he may be concerned about (e.g. changes to living or schooling arrangements). It is critical for parents to maintain a cordial

relationship, and for your son to be encouraged to maintain a relationship with the non-custodial parent. Where possible, stick to your child's routine to foster a sense of safety and predictability.

Look after yourself too. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed by the divorce, it may help to speak with a counsellor to better manage your own feelings. This would then allow you to be emotionally available, and better able to support your son as he gradually adjusts to the changes.

MS FOO CIRONG
Senior Medical Social Worker,
Department of Developmental Psychiatry



News

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

happenings • IMH SCENE

COMMEMORATING 50 YEARS OF CHILD MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

IMH celebrated the milestone in 2020 with two unique projects.



To access CGC – 50 Years On and Beyond "Guidance", go to www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/policy_history/ or scan the QR Code:



BEHIND THE NAME

The Child Guidance Clinic (CGC) was set up in 1970 to better understand, manage and prevent mental health issues in young Singaporeans. But how did the name originate? Learn about this and more in the online resource *CGC – 50 Years On and Beyond "Guidance"* put together by IMH in collaboration with the Singapore Policy History Project by the National Archives of Singapore. The project features a curated collection of newspaper articles and government records that provides a glimpse into the early years of child mental health services in Singapore and the policies that shaped CGC's development.



VISUAL APPROACH

The Stress Wars, an illustrated novel – co-authored by IMH senior leaders Associate Professor Daniel Fung and Adjunct Associate Professor Ong Say How, and Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) senior lecturer Ms Shirlyn Goh – charts the growth of child mental health services through fun, whimsical illustrations by students of NYP. The book also provides a guide for families on how to look after the mental health of every member in the household. These include respectful communication skills, understanding difficult emotions and strategies for calming stress responses.

To purchase a copy of *The Stress Wars*, go to www.imh.com.sg/eShop/ or scan the QR Code:



Get your copy now!



CHANGES IN IMH LEADERSHIP

Appointment of New Chief Executive Officer, IMH

Associate Professor Daniel Fung was appointed CEO, IMH with effect from 1 February 2021. A/Prof Fung started his career with Woodbridge Hospital (now IMH) in 1993 as a Medical Officer. Having a strong passion in child and adolescent psychiatry, he rose through the ranks to become Chief of IMH's Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 2006 before being appointed Chairman, Medical Board on 1 December 2011.

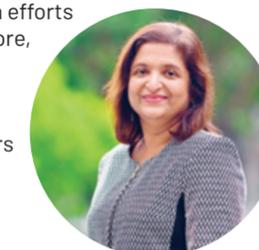
A/Prof Fung is widely recognised as a strong advocate for mental health and has taken on multiple leadership positions. He is the current President of the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions, and President-elect of the College of Psychiatrists, Academy of Medicine Singapore.



Appointment of New Chairman, Medical Board, IMH

Associate Professor Swapna Kamal Verma was appointed Chairman, Medical Board, IMH with effect from 1 December 2020. A/Prof Swapna joined IMH in 2001 and was the Chief and Programme Director of the Early Psychosis Intervention Programme (EPIP) from 2006 to 2016. Under her leadership, EPIP became part of the first National Mental Health Blueprint, which launched CHAT, an innovative youth mental health service dedicated to reducing the mental health treatment gap in young people.

As part of IMH's clinical re-organisation efforts in 2017 to better serve residents of Singapore, A/Prof Swapna was appointed Chief of East region as well as Chief, Department of Psychosis. She worked closely with SingHealth and various community partners in the east to improve population health, as well as developed best practices and evidence-based guidelines for improving schizophrenia care.





A not-so-good Newsflash

Finding it hard to stop reading the news? You're not alone, but **be aware** of the ill-effects of the over-consumption of news, especially bad news.

Singapore's online news consumption reached an all-time high last March, largely due to COVID-19. While keeping abreast of events and happenings is important, constantly catching up with the news can have a downside as well. Research shows that excessive consumption of news, especially negative news, can take a mental and emotional toll on both the body and mind.

How so? Well, our brains process troubling information as threats and activate our fight-or-flight response. This in turn spurs the release of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones can deregulate our immune system and cause symptoms of acute stress — like fatigue, anxiety and trouble sleeping.

The wisest course of action is to strike a balance between being informed and being overwhelmed.



SMART(PHONE) TIPS

A vast majority (81 per cent) of us in Singapore stay tuned to news and current affairs via smartphones, according to the 2020 Reuters Institute Digital News Report. Start by turning off push notifications on your phone or by setting aside specific times to check the news. By setting a limit on your news consumption, you can create the space and time to soothe your stress response and return to normal.



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