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Media Release

2ND SINGAPORE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS' DAY – WELLNESS THROUGH ACTIVITIES

Occupational therapy in a psychiatric hospital is unique.

For many of us, taking a bus or ordering food at the food centre is a routine that has become second nature that we often take for granted.

But for people coping with or recovering from mental conditions, they need to re-learn some of these seemingly simple social skills to help them integrate back to society. It can sometimes be very challenging for some of these patients to remember which set of skills to use during the various situations. This is where the occupational therapists at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) come in - to help these patients get back on their feet.

While occupational therapy (OT) in the mainstream hospitals focuses on physical rehabilitation, OT for psychiatric patients is all about mental and emotional rehabilitation. The OT team at IMH works with patients and trains them in community living skills such as home management, personal grooming, job preparation and community integration. The team of 19 occupational therapists oversees the rehabilitation programmes at the hospital and three other day centres.

Besides creative therapies such as craft, pottery and gardening for in-patients, the OT department has recently introduced aromatherapy to calm and soothe geriatric patients while sand-play was started for children who need a safe avenue to ventilate their pent-up emotions.

There are also various transitional employment programmes to equip out-patients with skills to increase their employability. Patients are trained in food preparation, customer service in retail sales, car washing, general cleaning and clerical skills. Upon completion of the programme, the occupational therapists will even go to the extent of assisting them with job placement. They will also conduct regular job site visits to provide support for patients so as to ensure that they sustain their jobs.

Occupational therapists thus play an integral role in helping patients rebuild their self-esteem, self-respect and independence. To see a patient gaining confidence and getting back to the normalcy of life is one of the intangible rewards of this

profession. To some patients, the therapist is more than a healthcare worker; she is like a trusted friend who oversees their welfare and follows up with them frequently to ensure that they are adjusting well out of the hospital environment.

Today we pay tribute to this special group of people whose work behind the scene often goes unnoticed and unappreciated. Since last year, the Singapore Association of Occupational Therapists has designated 11 January as Occupational Therapists' Day to recognize the important roles played by occupational therapists in the local healthcare scene.

The OT department of IMH has put together a talk and an exhibition to showcase the various programmes and activities for the mentally ill. Some of the event highlights include car wash services provided by the patients, sale of pottery pieces created by the patients as well as an auction of our patients' paintings. The patient-trainees at Juiceworks, our in-house juice and sandwich, will sell pastries and juices. The event is a good opportunity for the patients to showcase their skills which they have learnt through the various rehabilitation programmes at IMH.

Our special guest for the event is Mrs Josephine Teo, MP for Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC, and chairperson of the Programme Development Sub-Committee of ComCare Enterprise Fund, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS).

IMH Occupational Therapy Fact Sheet:

19 occupational therapists (including 1 at the Child Guidance Clinic, HPB Building and another attached to the Forensic Psychiatry Dept).

8 therapy assistants

11 health attendants

216 active patients attend **3** day centres

50-60 outpatients undergo intensive vocational training every year

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