

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **NEW INITIATIVES REACH OUT TO GAMBLERS NOT IN TREATMENT AND THEIR FAMILIES**

1. To better reach out to problem gamblers who are not ready or unwilling to seek treatment, the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) has rolled out two new initiatives targeted separately at problem gamblers who are resistant to traditional means of help-seeking, and their family members.
2. The first initiative is an online interactive self-help workbook for problem gambling, the first of its kind in Singapore. The second is a psycho-education group open to the public, called “Families in Recovery through Education & Empowerment” (FREE).
3. The interactive workbook ([nams.sg/workbook.aspx](http://nams.sg/workbook.aspx)) was first conceived by the multi-disciplinary treatment team at NAMS. Targeted at problem gamblers who are experiencing minor to mild problems and those reluctant to seek formal treatment despite severe problems, the workbook serves as an initial, accessible means for them to gain more insight into their gambling behaviour.
4. Comprising five chapters, the workbook guides users to look at their triggers for gambling, as well as examine their distorted beliefs. The content, developed by the multi-disciplinary team, includes information that challenges the gamblers’ distorted beliefs as well as behavioural strategies like how to say “no” to gambling opportunities and limit their access to money (Please see Annex 2 for the chapter titles of the workbook).
5. Upon completing the workbook, users can print a copy of their responses for reference. If they are unable to complete the workbook in one sitting, they are also able to return to it on the same computer within 24 hours to continue.
6. Lawrence Tan, a NAMS psychologist who was a member of the team which came up with the workbook, said, “Through this workbook, we hope to marry the benefits of the Internet – the accessibility and flexibility it offers – with the non-threatening concept of a self-guided intervention. While this is a fairly new concept, there is empirical evidence that online self-guided interventions are effective. (Gainsbury & Blaszczynski, 2011). However, they are meant only as a treatment adjunct, and as a first step to raise the gambler’s awareness of his own gambling behaviour so that he/she can consider seeking professional

help. Online self-guided interventions are not meant to replace traditional modes of treatment.”

7. On another front, an overseas study (Lesieur & Custer, 1984) has estimated that between 10 to 15 persons are directly affected by a person with an addiction. This includes his/her family and relatives, friends and colleagues.
8. Because gamblers themselves are often resistant or reluctant to seek help, the family becomes an important avenue of intervention. As such, NAMS started FREE as a pilot outreach programme in May 2010, to cater to the needs of families of problem gamblers not in treatment, who were otherwise facing the gambling-related stressors on their own.
9. The objectives of FREE are to help families better understand gambling addiction, how to help their loved one who is not in treatment, how to take care of themselves, and how to seek further professional help (please see Annex 3 for the frequency of the FREE groups, and topics covered).
10. FREE is conducted in separate English and Mandarin sessions, and each session is facilitated by a trained NAMS counsellor. Participants also get the opportunity to have their questions and concerns addressed.
11. Response to date has been encouraging. Some 195 participants attended the sessions during the pilot period from May 2010 to January 2012. Recruitment and registration of family members for FREE were done via the National Problem Gambling Helpline.
12. Typically, an average of six family members attended the English sessions, whereas the Mandarin sessions saw about an average of 10 participants.
13. Feedback collected from 112 participants who attended the FREE sessions was positive. On a scale of 0 to 5 (with 0 being “not relevant” and 5 being “very relevant”), the majority of the participants surveyed (over 81%) ranked the sessions 4 and above in terms of relevance, presentation, discussion and venue facilities.
14. Through FREE, NAMS is expanding its outreach to the larger public. Associate Professor Wong Kim Eng, Clinical Director of NAMS, commented, “The FREE programme makes information and support from addictions professionals easily accessible to families of problematic gamblers not in treatment. Our study (K.M.T. Lee *et al*, 2011) found that despite facing greater psychological disturbance and expressing a willingness to engage in counselling services, utilisation of healthcare services among these family members were not greater than that of the healthy controls. By offering this service, we want to reach out to these families so that they do not have to struggle alone.”
15. Chris (pseudonym), who is in his mid-thirties, got to know about FREE when he called the National Problem Gambling Helpline. He said, “I have two uncles whose successful careers and family lives went downhill because of

their gambling problems. They also borrowed heavily from friends and relatives, including my family. Clearly, they needed help but were unwilling to seek it. Witnessing their problems, I attended FREE with two other close family members. I find that FREE empowers family members with the knowledge of how to identify problem gambling in its various stages, and equips them with a clear action plan to arrest the development of the problem. FREE is also an avenue where affected family members can seek advice, get their questions answered and find support.”

16. Prior to the FREE programme, NAMS ran one group for family members – FRESH, short for Families in Recovery through Education, Support & Hope. This weekly psycho-education-cum-support group is meant for family members of NAMS patients and covers a series of 12 in-depth topics on addiction over six months.
17. In FY2010 (1 Apr 2010 to 31 Mar 2011), NAMS treated 398 patients for gambling addiction. Of these, 259 were new patients. This number makes up about 21% of all new addiction cases seen at NAMS.
18. From FY07 to FY10, gambling addiction remained the third most common condition seen at NAMS, after drug addiction (most common) and alcohol addiction (please see Annex 1 for the figures on gambling addiction). The increasing trend we see in the patients seeking help for gambling addiction is likely due to the increased awareness of problem gambling and treatment services available, arising from the active public education efforts by the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) and NAMS.

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ANNEX 1: CHAPTER TITLES IN THE ONLINE INTERACTIVE SELF-HELP  
WORKBOOK FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING

1. What is Gambling?
2. Am I gambling more than I can afford?
3. Identifying my high-risk situations
4. Understanding my high-risk situations
5. Managing my high-risk situations

## ANNEX 2: TOPICS COVERED IN THE FREE AND FRESH GROUPS

### **FAMILIES IN RECOVERY THROUGH EDUCATION & EMPOWERMENT (FREE)**

When: Twice a month, in the evening

Conducted in: English (first Monday of the month) and Mandarin (third Monday of the month)

Topics Covered:

1. Understanding Gambling Addiction
2. Signs and Symptoms of Gambling Addiction
3. Impact of Addiction on the Family
4. Do's and Don'ts for Family Members
5. Treatment Services at NAMS
6. Other Community Resources

### **FAMILIES IN RECOVERY THROUGH EDUCATION, SUPPORT & HOPE (FRESH)**

When: Thursday evenings

Conducted in: English

Topics Covered:

1. Understanding Addiction as a Family Disease
2. Barriers in Treatment for Addicts and Families
3. Impact of Addiction on Family
4. Roles of Family in Addiction Recovery
5. Understanding Stages of Change
6. Understanding Relapse
7. Healthy Boundaries
8. Effective Communication
9. Building Trust and Honesty
10. Effective Feelings Management
11. Tough Love
12. Letting Go and Self-Care

### ANNEX 3: ENGLISH-CHINESE GLOSSARY

Institute of Mental Health (IMH)	心理卫生学院
National Addictions Management Service (NAMS)	国立成瘾治疗服务
National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) Clinic	NAMS 成瘾专科门诊部
Institute of Mental Health (IMH)	心理卫生学院
Addiction Medicine Department	戒瘾部
Specialist Outpatient Clinic	专科门诊部
Associate Professor Wong Kim Eng	王金英副教授
Clinical Director, National Addictions Management Service	国立成瘾治疗服务临床总监
Senior Consultant	高级专科顾问
Families in Recovery through Education & Empowerment (FREE)	赌博者家属咨询小组
National Problem Gambling Helpline	全国预防嗜赌援助热线
Lawrence Tan	陈洁嘉
Psychologist	心理学家
National Addictions Management Service	国立成瘾治疗服务
Low Mun Heng	刘文兴
Principal Therapist	首席治疗师
Acting Head, Allied Health Service	医疗辅助服务常务主任
National Addictions Management Service	国立成瘾治疗服务
All Addictions Helpline	戒瘾援助热线
Recovery Support Group	康复帮扶小组
Counsellor	辅导员
Families in Recovery through Education, Support & Hope (FRESH) Programme	成瘾者家属互助小组