

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TWO NEW INITIATIVES TO EQUIP PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS IN ADDICTIONS KNOWLEDGE

1. The National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) is roping in primary care physicians (PCPs), namely general practitioners (GPs) and family physicians, in its push for early detection and treatment of addictions. Two new initiatives have been rolled out, which aim to equip PCPs to detect, provide brief intervention, and refer persons with addiction problems for further help as needed.
2. The first initiative is a toolkit for PCPs, which aims to help PCPs identify and provide advice to patients who may present with symptoms of alcohol use disorders and gambling addiction.
3. The toolkit, in the form of an information brochure, uses a simple three-step approach. The toolkit first lists the warning signs of possible alcohol use disorders and gambling addiction. It then guides PCPs to use a simple screening tool for either addiction, each of which takes no more than five minutes to administer. In the final step, the toolkit teaches PCPs how they can advise and assist their patient, based on the results of the screening.
4. Associate Professor Wong Kim Eng, Clinical Director of NAMS, commented, "Early intervention is important in recovering from an addiction. Often, addicts are reluctant to seek help from a mental health facility, or do so only at a very late stage when the addiction has become rather severe. PCPs are well-placed to pick up cases of alcohol use disorders and gambling addiction and refer their patients to NAMS or other treatment agencies, if there is a need."
5. Nationwide, population-based data on alcohol use disorders and problem gambling have been released recently. The results of the Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS) showed that a small percentage of Singaporeans develop alcohol problems, with a lifetime prevalence of 3.1% for alcohol abuse and 0.5% for alcohol dependence in the overall population which is 18 years and above. The study also showed a large gap in help-seeking behaviour among those with alcohol abuse, with 96.2% of those affected not seeking help.

6. As for gambling, a [2011 NCPG survey](#) found that in terms of a single point estimate, the proportion of respondents classified as probable pathological gamblers is 1.4%. The less severe category of probable problem gamblers was at 1.2%.
7. A/Prof Wong added, "Although the nationwide rates of these two problems may seem small, they are worth tackling at this stage. We wanted to raise greater awareness of these two types of addictions among PCPs, particularly since the warning signs of these addictions tend to be subtle at the early stage. We hope to engage them to be the ears and eyes on the ground, in a combined effort to reach out to more people with addictions, and extend the network of care."
8. The toolkit will be mailed out to PCPs island-wide by October 2012.
9. The second initiative is to hold periodic training sessions for medical doctors, to equip them with knowledge on various addictions and how to refer those affected for help. PCPs who attend these sessions are awarded Continuing Medical Education (CME) points by the Singapore Medical Council (SMC). The inaugural session, which was on alcohol use disorders, kicked off on Thursday, 6 September. A consultant psychiatrist and senior psychologist from the NAMS multidisciplinary treatment team provided updates on treatment, as well as information on how GPs can assess if their patients may be suffering from an addiction, and what they can do.
10. NAMS has organised similar talks to reach out to community partners. In FY11, NAMS conducted 17 talks and training sessions to community partners which included frontline staff like medical social workers and doctors from public hospitals, and officers from voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs), community development councils (CDCs) and family service centres (FSCs). Four-hundred-and-forty-five professionals attended these sessions, which were mainly on alcohol use disorders and gambling addiction.
11. Dr Gomathinayagam Kandasami, Chief of the Addiction Medicine Department, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), and a consultant psychiatrist at NAMS, who was also a speaker at this inaugural talk said, "By organising these training sessions, we aim to leverage on our multidisciplinary expertise as a specialised treatment centre and equip other medical professionals to identify and help manage various addictions."
12. Over the last five years from FY*07 to FY11, NAMS has treated about 5,400 new outpatients. The top three addictions treated were for drug abuse, alcohol abuse and gambling addiction.
13. Dr Eileen Tan, a family physician who is from Prohealth Medical Group @ Buangkok Pte Ltd said, "I signed up for this training session as I found it relevant to my practice. I wanted to get updates on treatment, since I do come across patients who seek help for alcohol use disorders." On the toolkit, she added, "It is a good reference for a busy PCP like myself, as the screening questions help us to identify patients who may benefit from early intervention. The helpline numbers are also a useful resource."

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ANNEX A: 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
Addiction Medicine Department	戒瘾部
Associate Professor Wong Kim Eng Clinical Director, National Addictions Management Service Emeritus Consultant	王金英副教授 国立成瘾治疗服务临床总监 荣誉顾问
Dr Gomathinayagam Kandasami Chief, Addiction Medicine Department, IMH Consultant, National Addictions Management Service	甘达萨米医生 心理卫生学院戒瘾部主任 国立成瘾治疗服务专科顾问
Dr Melvin Wu Resident Physician, National Addictions Management Service	吴壮伟医生 国立成瘾治疗服务驻院医生
Problem Gambling Helpline	嗜赌援助热线
Lawrence Tan Senior Psychologist National Addictions Management Service	陈洁嘉 滋生心理学家 国立成瘾治疗服务
Low Mun Heng Principal Therapist Head, Allied Health Service National Addictions Management Service	刘文兴 首席治疗师 医疗辅助服务主任 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