

Study on Factors Related to Wellness



IMH and the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH) are collaborating on a nationwide study on the relation between the sense of well-being and physical health in the adult Singapore population. Known as the Singapore Wellness Study, it will involve some 10,000 participants who are part of a cohort which is currently being followed up by SSHSPH.

Led by SSHSPH's Epidemiology Domain Leader and Principal Investigator, Associate Professor Rob van Dam, this four-year study aims to better understand different aspects of "wellness" in the local population and the factors that enhance it.

Assoc Prof Mythily Subramaniam, Director, Research Division, IMH, and co-investigator said, "The interaction and co-relation between mental and physical health cannot be overlooked as physical health issues contribute to premature deaths in those with mental health conditions. A systematic and detailed study of the wellness of the local population can help provide insights to address key problems and proactively initiate preventive measures."



Representatives from IMH and SSHSPH at the press conference.

The participants will be involved in the study as part of their follow-up assessment which will include an interview and a physical examination. In addition to lifestyle and medical history, the interviews will also assess different aspects of "wellness", including physical health, emotional health, stress and resilience, adapted from a questionnaire developed by the Stanford Prevention Research Center's international observational and interventional study, the Wellness Living Laboratory.

This study on wellness is the first of its kind here as most of the previous research has focused on understanding the biological risk factors for diseases. Mental health and wellness are also of key importance as they can affect future disease risk as well as play a role in managing and coping with age-related chronic diseases well. As such, it is critical to understand the components and different aspects of "wellness" and their respective determinants in the Singapore population. The study is expected to be completed by 2021.

Tele-consultation for Patients in Nursing Homes

As part of efforts to bring mental health services closer to the community, IMH started offering tele-consultation, or consultation via video conferencing, in November 2016 for patients in nursing homes with mild to moderate mental health conditions.

Tele-consultation benefits patients and nursing homes in many ways. They no longer need to travel to IMH for follow-up

appointments or wait to see the doctor at the clinic. This is especially helpful for patients who are unable to travel to IMH due to mobility or medical reasons and require special transportation and manpower to bring them to the clinic.

This translates to cost, transport, time and manpower savings for nursing homes. With the convenience of tele-consultation, there are also no defaults in appointments.

Tele-consultation is currently being offered to IMH patients with stabilised conditions who are residents or enrolled in day care activities at Bishan Home, Simei Care Centre, THK Home for Disabled@Eunos, THK Home For The Disabled Adults @ Chai Chee and Moral Welfare Home. To date, about 114 patients have benefitted. IMH plans to roll out this initiative to another four community homes by the third quarter of 2017.



Paving My Own Way

By Philibert Santhanaraj

Living with a mental illness has its inherent challenges. For me, the hardest thing after being diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder as a young teen in 2009 was accepting that moving forward, the condition would be a part of who I was. But I decided that I wasn't going to let it define me.

As the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl once said, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

I took steps to ensure my condition was well managed. In addition to taking my medication as prescribed, I started paying closer attention to my overall mental wellbeing. Maintaining a stable sleep

schedule, minimising stress, having a proper diet and exercising regularly were no longer optional; they became pre-requisites to a normal life for me.

I began refereeing rugby in 2011 as a hobby. It has kept me fit and the rugby community is an awesome networking platform. I've also been lucky to score a dream job in the

field I love — e-sports. I became a mental health advocate with IMH in 2014, where I share my story to create greater awareness of mental illness and reduce stigma. It has instilled greater meaning to my life.

While I've had many ups and downs in my journey so far, I've always stayed positive. I believe that as long as I was willing

to move forward, however small the step may be, I would be able to overcome any obstacle that may come my way.

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New Counselling Service to Support Families of Persons with Addictions

Mary was feeling overwhelmed due to her son's excessive drinking problem. The 49-year-old mother had crying spells and suffered heart palpitations for six months. At her wits end, she called the National Addictions Management Service's (NAMS) helpline to seek help for herself so she could in turn help her son.

Addiction doesn't just affect those with the illness. Caregivers like Mary suffer from physical and emotional problems as a result of the stress of caring for loved ones with addiction issues. Family members play an important role in their loved ones' recovery journey. However, their needs are often neglected.

With these caregivers in mind, NAMS initiated Family Matters, a counselling service specially tailored to meet their needs and help them cope better. When family members can look after themselves better, they are in a better position to care for the individual with addiction issues and improve treatment outcomes.

Family Matters provides assessment, resources, referrals and counselling by addiction specialists and is available to family members of existing NAMS clients as well as the general public. Launched in May 2017, this pilot service will run for a year and the team will review and refine the service based on feedback from clients.

For more details on Family Matters, please call our helpline at 6-RECOVER (6-7326837).

Caregivers – An Important Part of the Mental Healthcare Team

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of caregivers' role in supporting persons with physical, psychological, or developmental needs. In addition to seeing to the patients day-to-day needs, they serve as an important link between the mental healthcare team and the patient.

Caregivers are familiar with their loved ones' behaviours outside the hospital and can convey their observations to the healthcare team. This gives the healthcare team a broader picture beyond what happens in the consultation room, and helps them to provide better care for the patient. Caregivers may also help to articulate their loved one's care preferences, and liaise with the healthcare team on the patient's needs.



Dedicated caregiver Mr Ang Beng Hui with his mother. Photo Credit: AWWA Ltd

year's AWWA Model Caregiver Award (Individual), he is primary caregiver to his 63-year-old mother. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was just four years old, and also has diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. Beng Hui oversees all of his mum's medical needs, including accompanying her for her appointments at IMH every two to three months, as well as her quarterly polyclinic appointments.

Commenting on the collaborative approach to patient care, Beng Hui said, "When my mum does not respond well to her medications or depot injections, I flag this out to her doctor during her appointment. If we are in between doctor's appointments, I share my feedback with her community mental health nurse instead. I am glad that the team

One such caregiver who has partnered IMH to manage his mother's condition is Mr Ang Beng Hui. The main recipient of this

values my inputs as a caregiver, and takes my observations into consideration for adjusting my mum's medication."

Unsung Healthcare Heroes Receive Recognition

On 25 April 2017, three IMH staff and a caregiver received the Healthcare Humanity Award (HHA), which pays tribute to healthcare workers and persons who exemplify exceptional qualities and dedication in helping others. They were among 98 individuals across various public healthcare institutions, and intermediate and long-term care providers who were presented the HHA.

Dr Ong Lue Ping who heads IMH's Psychology Department was recognised for providing exemplary care for his young patients. He once helped a 12-year-old student who refused to attend school due to anxiety. Dr Ong worked tirelessly on her case; he conducted home visits after his work hours, engaged her father in therapy sessions as well as worked with the school to facilitate her return. That year, the girl managed to graduate to a secondary school.



HHA winners from IMH: (from left to right) Mr Ashley Jayapaul, Mdm Esah, Mr Lee Poh Leng and Dr Ong Lue Ping.

As a principal occupational therapist with the Adult Neurodevelopmental Service, and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department, Mr Ashley Jayapaul cares for individuals with intellectual disabilities. While they are likely to be slower in picking up new information and skills, he never gives up on them. He believes that with intervention, they can continue to improve and develop.

The first time Mr Lee Poh Leng volunteered in IMH two decades ago, he felt apprehensive as he had little understanding

of patients with mental illness. Inspired to do more for them, he established Achievers, one of the largest volunteer groups in IMH today. In 2010, he joined IMH as a volunteer coordinator.

Despite the challenges of caring for her 27-year-old son with severe autism, Mdm Esah still finds time to participate in caregiver support groups and share her journey with other parents in similar plight. She has inspired many fellow caregivers and sparked hope in them.



Polypharmacy

By Mr Ying Yick Tim, Senior Pharmacist and Ms Lim Wei Ching, Pharmacist, IMH

What is polypharmacy?

Polypharmacy is typically defined as using five or more medications – this includes prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines (e.g. Traditional Chinese Medicine and supplements). Polypharmacy may also occur when additional medication is prescribed to treat the adverse effects of other medications – this is known as the “prescribing cascade”.

Is polypharmacy common?

Yes, polypharmacy is common in the elderly population, especially in patients with multiple medical and mental health issues.

Why is polypharmacy a concern?

It is important to handle a polypharmacy situation well, so the patient can take all his medications safely and manage his different health conditions as effectively as possible.

If a patient needs to take many medications, it may be difficult for him to keep track of instructions for them, and he may accidentally take the wrong medication or the wrong dose.

It is therefore important for him and/or his caregiver to get organised and ensure that the doctor and pharmacist know about all of the medications he is taking. This helps them to obtain an accurate medication history for a medication review, and also prescribe suitable medications. This also allows them to watch out for any potential interactions among the medications, which may result in more side effects for the patient.

Is it safe for someone who is on multiple medications to also take vitamins or supplements?

Vitamins or supplements help to provide essential nutrients for vital bodily functions, but they are not without any risk. Many supplements contain active substances that have strong effects on the body, which could make them unsafe in some situations. This effect might be further complicated in someone who is taking multiple medications concurrently. Before deciding to take a supplement, consult your doctors or pharmacists.

What must I take note of if I or my loved one is taking multiple medications?

• Get involved

Don't be afraid to ask your doctor or pharmacist questions to learn more about how to manage your medications. Be ready to share a list of all your medications with them, particularly if you are following up with different doctors, so they are aware and can alert you to possible interactions.

• Get organised

Use pill organisers, timers and alerts to help you take the right pill at the right time.

• Medication review

Bring along all your medication (prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines) to your doctor's appointment periodically (every 3-6 months) so your doctor or pharmacist can review them.

• Update it

Keep an accurate list of all your medications. Know the names, doses and indications for the medications, as well as other cautionary instructions to take note of. This is particularly important for medications that are used on a “when necessary” basis.

Institute of Mental Health, Singapore | t (65) 6389 2000 | f (65) 6389 2986 | www.imh.com.sg | enquiry@imh.com.sg

EDITORIAL TEAM

Advisor

Ting Mei See

Circulation Coordinator

Chris Ngiam

Editor

Lalitha Naidu

Designer

Ng Yee Choo

Contributors

Vera Soo, Corporate Communications

Penny Chua, Corporate Communications

Sum Foong Yee, Corporate Communications

Fiona Foo, Corporate Communications