



1. Guest of Honour Mr Amrin Amin (4th from left), Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health with Mr Shamsul Kamar (3rd from left), Vice Chairman of NECDC and Adviser to Kaki Bukit GROs and senior management from IMH and NAMS and local artiste Nat Ho.
2. (From left to right) Emcee Ross Sarpani, artistes Rafaat Hamzah and Irene Ang, and NAMS Senior Counsellor William Teo chatting about their experiences.



Bringing Home a Message of Hope and Recovery

Residents from the north-eastern region of Singapore learnt more about addictions and its ills during National Addictions Awareness Day (NAAD) held on 10 March at Our Tampines Hub. Themed “Add Life to Your Years”, the event was jointly organised by the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) and the North East Community Development Council (NECDC) to bring a message of hope and recovery. Guest of Honour Mr Amrin Amin, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health graced the event with Mr Shamsul Kamar, Vice Chairman of NECDC and Adviser to Kaki Bukit GROs.

“Since NAMS was established 10 years ago, we have continuously explored new platforms to extend our services and programmes beyond our campus to make them more accessible to the community. The NAAD is one of our key outreach programmes,” said A/Prof Lee Cheng, Vice Chairman Medical Board (Clinical), IMH and NAMS Programme Director. “Behind closed doors, many are still struggling with addiction issues in silence. Sometimes, the stigma prevents them from seeking help. Together with NECDC, we hope to reach out to and support more persons and families affected by addictions.”

This is the 4th NAAD since the event was first initiated in 2013. Through the series of NAAD, NAMS had earlier reached out to the communities in south-west, south-east and north-west Singapore.

Key community partners engaged residents through interactive booths to acquaint them to the range of services and programmes available for those seeking help for various

addiction issues. To mark the 10th anniversary of NAMS, a book titled *Hope in Adversity*, comprising personal stories of addiction and recovery, was launched at the event and distributed to the public.

Singing duo Jack and Rai performed the official NAAD song “It’s Not Too Late” which they had specially composed to encourage persons with addictions to take the first step towards recovery. Local artistes Nat Ho, Irene Ang and Rafaat Hamzah were also at the event to show their support and share their stories.

Following the NAAD, NAMS and NECDC will be co-organising talks on topics such as the hidden costs of problem gambling, the dangers of substance abuse, cyber addiction and excessive online usage for the residents. NAMS will also reach out to the schools in the north-east region to educate students about various addiction issues that commonly affect youths.

For a copy of *Hope in Adversity*, please email nams@imh.com.sg.



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”

A/Prof Lee Cheng, Vice Chairman Medical Board (Clinical), IMH and NAMS Programme Director.

Coming Out of the Dark

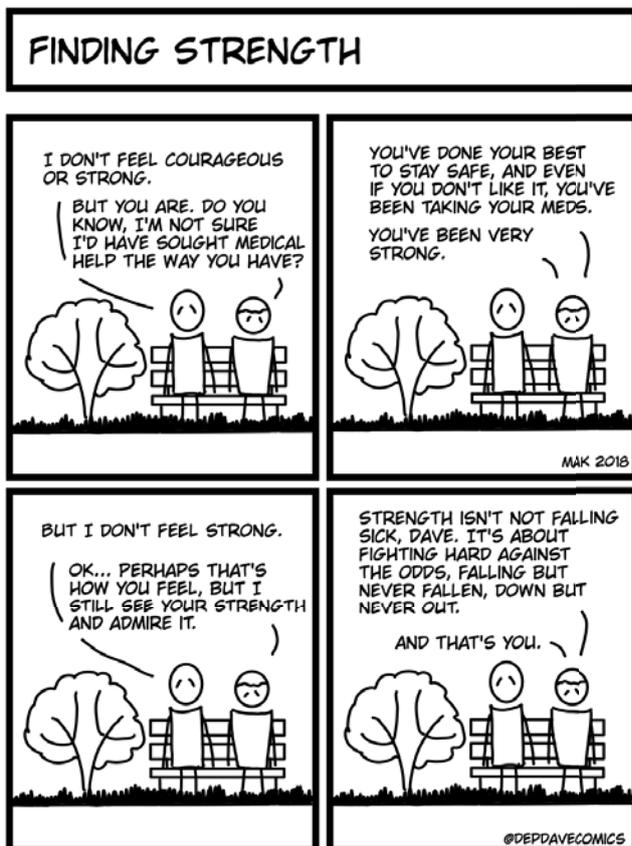
By: Mak Kean Loong

Depression is a dark master. It invades everything, from your sleep to your appetite. It leeches the ability to feel, especially enjoyment and happiness. It compels negativity, and kills any desire to be social. It even brings physical pain — my heart hurt, and breathing was difficult.

It got to a point where breathing became too painful, and when that point came, I walked into a hospital, and ended up being warded for my own safety. I didn't tell my wife, so imagine her shock when she found out that I'd made plans to end my life. But I was safe, and alive.

I've not been able to work because of my depression. But with the downtime has come the desire to write and talk about mental health. I write about my depression online, and I also started drawing comics that talk about depression and the challenges it brings. I'm learning to face up to my inner demons and my childhood monsters that have been hidden and swallowed rather than being dealt with.

The heroes in my story are my wife, my children and my friends. They have provided for my family and me, with their time, love, care, finances and various types of support.



Comic drawn by the writer to share his experiences and thoughts.

My recovery is slow but sure, and I have promised my wife that I will not harm myself.

This doesn't mean everything is good and well. I still ask, at really bad moments, for permission to break my promise. But I know that overall my condition is getting better. Just keep remembering — we are never alone in our struggle, and it's OK to not be OK for this time.

A Place of Rest and Respite

Families of young patients can now take a break at the new Ronald McDonald Family Room in IMH set up by Ronald McDonald House of Charities (RMHC) Singapore. While the children aged 6 to 18 years undergo treatment in the ward or at the clinic, their caregivers can grab a snack, rest, watch TV or use the free WIFI provided. The Family Room is operated by staff and volunteers of RMHC.

This is not the first collaboration between IMH and RMHC. In 2016, with RMHC's generous sponsorship, IMH set up the Centre for Life and Academic Skills in the children's ward to provide a conducive learning environment for its young inpatients. A specialist teacher conducts academic sessions that cater to the children's learning needs. This allows the children to continue learning at their own pace while recuperating in the ward.



GDMH Open for Registration

The Graduate Diploma in Mental Health (GDMH) is open for registration from 26 March to 2 July 2018. Jointly offered by IMH and the Division of Graduate Medical Studies, National University of Singapore, the one year diploma provides comprehensive and structured training in community psychiatry and counselling. It equips GPs, who are often the first point of contact for those who are unwell, with the knowledge and skills required to assess, identify and manage various psychiatric conditions and provide more holistic care to their patients. To date, about 130 GPs have completed the programme. For more information on the diploma, visit <https://www.imh.com.sg/education>.

Furthering Research in Depression and Psychosis

IMH, in collaboration with the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine), organised the second Frontiers in Mental Health Symposium (FMHS) on 6 March 2018. Themed "Advancing Research in Depression and Psychosis", FMHS 2018 brought together some 200 researchers, neuroscientists, clinicians and academics to share research to help improve treatment and outcomes and quality of life for persons with these conditions and their caregivers.

Sir Philip Campbell, Editor-in-Chief of *Nature and Nature Research*, and chair of the trustees of the research-funding charity MQ: Transforming Mental Health, was the keynote speaker. He talked about the impact of mental health research and its relation to research fund-raising. Speakers from Karolinska Institute (Sweden), National Centre for Mental Health (South Korea), National Centre of Neurology and Psychiatry (Japan), as well as speakers from IMH and LKCMedicine also shared recent findings from mental health research and discussed their implications on the practice of mental healthcare.

Topics included the epidemiology of depression in Singapore, harnessing the brain's naturally-produced neuroactive steroids for the treatment of anxiety and depression, molecular imaging in psychiatric disorders, as well as treatment outcomes in schizophrenia.



Sir Philip Campbell, Editor-in-Chief of *Nature and Nature Research*, addressing the audience.

Prof Chong Siow Ann, Vice Chairman, Medical Board (Research) at IMH said, "We are honoured to have renowned mental health researchers from several countries coming together to focus on two of the most common mental conditions – depression and psychosis. This event provides an excellent platform for the delegates to network, learn and explore potential collaborations in mental health research to better understand the mechanisms of these disorders which will pave the way for better and safer treatment."



Book Launch: *Mental Health of a Nation*

A new book, *Mental Health of a Nation*, tracing recent developments in Singapore's mental healthcare scene, was launched at FMHS 2018. The book is edited by A/Prof Daniel Fung, Chairman, Medical Board, IMH, and Dr Ng Beng Yeong, a psychiatrist in private practice, with contributions from individuals in public and private hospitals and social service organisations, who have helped to develop the mental health services we have today. It is a resource for medical and nursing students, as well as local and international mental health professionals seeking to learn more about psychiatric services in Singapore. *Mental Health of a Nation* may be purchased from www.worldscientific.com.

A/Prof Chua Hong Choon (right), CEO of IMH with the book's editors, A/Prof Daniel Fung, Chairman, Medical Board, IMH (centre) and A/Prof Ng Beng Yeong, a psychiatrist in private practice.

Working towards Rehabilitation

IMH signed a Memorandum of Understanding with social enterprise BizLink Centre Singapore Ltd on 9 February to launch the Work Rehabilitation to Community Programme (WRCP). Under this partnership, IMH and BizLink will provide training and engagement to help suitable long-stay patients improve their functioning and pick up vocational skills. About 50 patients will be selected to participate in WRCP over the next two year. They will be given training and work opportunities, such as packaging, assembling items and making crafts, and will receive an allowance. The WRCP is one of various initiatives at IMH that aim to help long-stay patients regain confidence and build skills that will enable them to eventually live independently in the community.



Long-stay patients demonstrating their skills at the MOU signing.



Autism Spectrum Disorder

Dr Sung Min

Senior Consultant, Neuro-Behavioural Clinic

Department of Developmental Psychiatry, IMH

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a range of developmental disorders characterised by difficulties in social communication and a pattern of restricted or repetitive interests and behaviours. Persons with ASD have difficulties understanding the perspectives and emotions of other people. They may not understand social norms and cues, and may appear to be inflexible and need to do things in specific ways.

According to the 3rd Enabling Masterplan (2017– 2021) report published by the National Council of Social Service in 2016, one in 150 children has ASD. Between 2014 and 2016, IMH saw a yearly average of 245 new cases of children aged 6 – 18 years old diagnosed with autism.

What are the symptoms of ASD and when do they present themselves?

Typically, symptoms are present from the early developmental years. However, in some cases, the symptoms may not be observed till the child is older – when social demands exceed the child's ability to cope. The symptoms often persist into adolescence and adulthood. Persons with ASD may experience the following challenges:

Difficulties in social communication

- Lack of social emotional reciprocity (e.g. maintaining conversations, expressing emotions and sharing of interests)
- Deficits in the use of non-verbal communication to regulate social interaction (e.g. establishing appropriate eye contact, using appropriate gestures, tone, and facial expressions)
- Difficulty establishing and sustaining relationships
- Difficulties adjusting behaviours to different social contexts

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviours, interests and activities

- Stereotyped or repetitive behaviours (e.g. repetitive speech, motor movements or use of objects)

- Constant need to keep to rigid routines and rituals (i.e. may be distressed when routines are disrupted)
- Difficulty adjusting to change
- Highly restricted and fixated interests
- Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory experiences or unusual sensory interests (e.g. being hyper-sensitive to noise or being indifferent to pain, heat and cold)

How is ASD managed?

With appropriate intervention, education and support, individuals with ASD can show marked improvement in their ability to function and manage their challenges.

The goals of management in ASD are to facilitate normal development in learning, language and social skills, reduce autism-specific behaviours such as rigidity, repetitive movements, hyperactivity, irritability and alleviate burden for the family.

For children with ASD, it is important to find an appropriate school and to use specific strategies to facilitate their learning of social and communication skills. Occupational therapy and speech therapy may also complement the child's learning needs.

Where can I seek help?

If you feel that a child has developmental delays or difficulties in the areas of communication and social interaction, and has a rigid pattern of behaviour, consult a professional for a diagnosis. For preschoolers, developmental pediatricians, such as doctors at the KKH Department of Child Development and the NUH Child Development Unit would be able to assess these concerns.

For school-going children and adolescents from 6 – 19 years old, the IMH Neuro-Behavioural Clinic offers autism diagnostic services and interventions for co-morbid mental health concerns. To make an appointment to see a doctor at the Child Guidance Clinic, please call 6389 2200 or email HPB@imh.com.sg for enquiries.

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

Fiona Foo, Corporate Communications