

Wellbeing and Happiness at SMHC 2017

The Singapore Mental Health Conference (SMHC) 2017 was held on 8 and 9 September 2017 at Max Atria @ Singapore Expo and was graced by Mr Amrin Amin, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health. The event was organised by IMH, the Health Promotion Board, Agency for Integrated Care and the National Council of Social Service.

Themed “The Art and Science of Wellbeing and Happiness”, it brought focus to two areas that influence one’s mental health – our state of wellbeing and happiness. International and local professionals and experts from mental health, education, and related fields provided insights on how looking after one’s wellbeing can improve mental health across a person’s lifespan, and examined factors that contribute to happiness.

“This year, we turn our focus from illness management to preventive efforts, which are as important because mental health is not just the absence of mental illness,” said A/Prof Chua Hong Choon, CEO, IMH and Co-Chairperson, SMHC 2017 Advisory Committee.

About 527 professionals from the healthcare, social service, and Intermediate and Long-term Care sectors, as well as community-based workers and consumers of mental health services, participated in SMHC, which continues to be a national platform for



Guest-of-Honour, Mr Amrin Amin, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health, delivering the opening address.

networking and sharing knowledge on mental health. The various activities included keynote presentations, five plenary sessions, six track and 12 breakout sessions. The National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University also took part for the first time in the conference, with a friendly debate session on the effects of social media on mental health.

Bonding Over National Day Celebrations

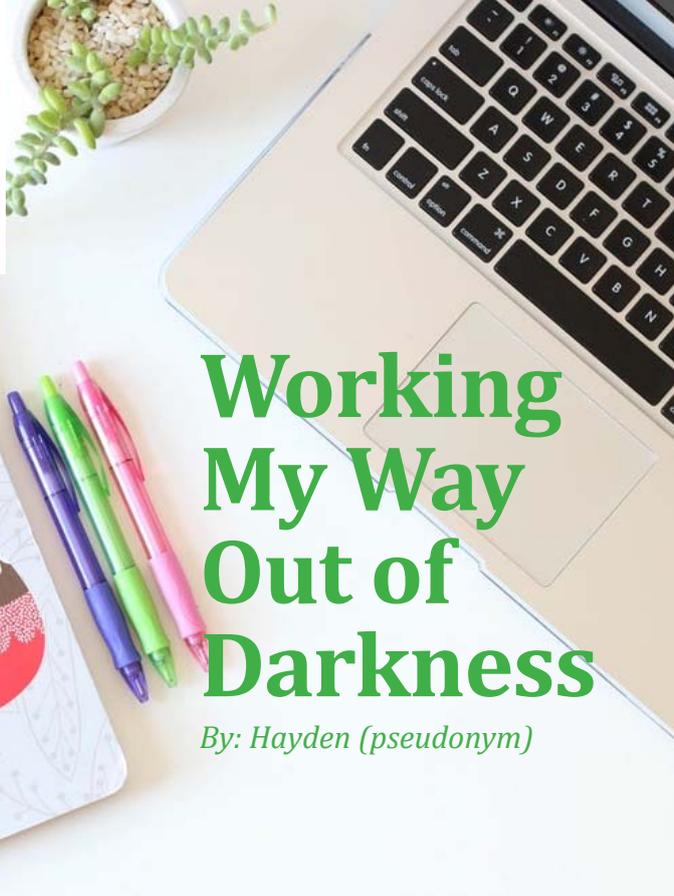
National Day came early for about 180 IMH long-stay patients. On 5 August, about 100 Matchsticks volunteers decked the multi-purpose hall with red and white balloons and set up 11 game booths, all to give the long-stay patients a fun-filled and memorable National Day celebration.

The patients were also treated to a resounding performance by IMH Drum Circle and sang along to familiar National Day songs like ‘We are Singapore’ during a sing-along session led by patient choir group ‘Hearts in Harmony’. The celebration was made more special with the presence of Ms Low Yen Ling, Mayor of South West District, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Trade and Industry.



Ms Low Yen Ling, Mayor of South West District, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Trade and Industry, serves refreshments to the patients.

The National Day celebration is part of the hospital’s programme to support volunteers to engage patients in meaningful social and recreational activities to improve their mental and physical wellbeing. Such interactions also provide an opportunity for volunteers to interact with patients, and also to dispel misconceptions about mental illness.



Working My Way Out of Darkness

By: Hayden (pseudonym)

Imagine a dark shadow hovering over you throughout adolescence. A darkness that swallows you whole such that you cannot function properly. Imagine not knowing why you slow down while others dash ahead of you. I was 11 when I first had persistent feelings of despair. It was only in my late teens that I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Recovery was a struggle. I isolated myself initially, and avoided participation in recovery-oriented activities. It took five years before I opened up and joined rehabilitation programmes, where I learned to achieve short-term goals, and also increased my social interaction. I began to care about my future and myself.

I went on to complete vocational training as a trainee receptionist. Following that, with the help of my vocational specialist, I found a part-time administrative job. The first few days were daunting, as I had not worked for a few years. However, I overcame my difficulties by learning to reach out to others when I faced problems, instead of suffering in silence.

I have since converted to full-time employment, and have been with the same company for one year. I was even promoted to Team Leader, as my supervisor recognised my potential and my willingness to teach others.

Work has given me a sense of purpose. Because it gave me a routine, my sleep pattern and eating habits improved. I learned to socialise with others. I felt accomplished, like I had headed out of darkness into something great, and that my path had been paved and was now lit up. I started to plan for my future, and dreamed of furthering my education.

I have come a long way since those years when I often found it difficult to climb out of the hole I kept falling into. We should remember the saying: "This Too Shall Pass". Through suffering, people find compassion and empathy. Having climbed out of the darkness I faced, I hope my story will bring light to others and give them the courage to persevere.

Caregiver Roadshows for Community Partners and Public

Providing care for persons with mental illness may be challenging for families and friends. Caregivers are concerned about their loved ones, but often find themselves frustrated, helpless or fearful due to their lack of knowledge and skills to manage their loved ones' symptoms.

To better support them in their caregiving journey, IMH's Medical Social Work department started running monthly caregiver roadshows in IMH in August for members of the public and community partners caring for persons with mental illness. The roadshows, run by mental healthcare professionals, cover topics such as understanding mental illness, medication management, treatment and therapies available and the role of occupational therapy in recovery. They also provide links to community resources and tips on self-care for caregivers. The roadshows are conducted in either English or Mandarin.

Please visit www.imh.com.sg/events for the schedule and registration, or contact the IMH Medical Social Work department at 6389 2057/2059 or MSW_Caregiver@imh.com.sg for more information.

Excelling in Nursing Education

IMH was one of the two recipients of the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Accreditation Premier Program Award in June this year. The award recognises accredited organisations that excel in the provision of continuing nursing education (CNE) and are role models in innovation, leadership, and best practice models for CNE. IMH's Nursing Education department provides nursing education programmes that not only meet the training needs of psychiatric nurses, but also support professional development and new knowledge development to improve care delivery.

Developing Talent

Each year, over 2000 medical, nursing and allied health students undergo clinical training in IMH. Among them are aspiring clinical psychologists from the NUS Master of Psychology (Clinical) programme. The post graduates spend four or six months working with the multi-disciplinary team and patients under their supervisors' guidance to develop theoretical knowledge, practical experience and core competencies for clinical practice in a mental healthcare setting. They attend ward rounds to get greater insight into the team-based approach to providing care and also learn to conduct intervention and psychometric assessments. Here's what two interns – Ms Henny Tan and Mr Adrian Toh – have to say about their time here.



Ms Henny Tan (middle) and Mr Adrian Toh (right) with Ms Clare Yeo, Senior Principal Clinical Psychologist, IMH.

Adrian: My clinical placement in the Psychology Department was enriching. I gained clinical experience working with adults with various mental health issues and a better understanding of my role in the multi-disciplinary team.

What have you learnt that you'll take with you going forward?

Henny: In addition to various clinical skills including assessment and therapy techniques, I gained experience working with children and communicating more effectively with them and their caregivers. This has made me more confident in providing care for a younger population.

Adrian: A key lesson for me is the importance of having the right attitude to strive towards providing the best quality care to every patient.

How did you find your attachment?

Henny: I was attached to the Child Guidance Clinic in HPB and given the opportunity to work with school-aged children with various clinical presentations. A highlight for me was the play therapy supervision sessions, where I was introduced to a very different therapy approach that was not covered in my previous training.

NHG Teaching Excellence Award

In conjunction with Teacher's Day, a total of 61 medical, nursing and allied health staff from IMH received the NHG Teaching Excellence Award this year on 15 September. The staff were recognised for their efforts in teaching and mentoring the next generation of mental healthcare professionals as well as contributing towards the professional development of staff.

Building Capability to Better Support Youths in the Community



The Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT), in collaboration with National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), has developed a curriculum to build capability within the social service sector to identify and support young adults aged 16 to 30 with mental health issues.

Through interactive workshops and inter-agency case discussions, over 70 youth workers and social service professionals will learn to conduct basic mental health assessments for youths in distress, and also how to make referrals for further intervention.

In addition, up to 12 community-based mental health workers identified by AIC will undergo an eight-week internship with CHAT to better engage and support young adults with mental illness in the community. They will learn the basics of developing a youth-friendly mental health service, how to use recovery language in day-to-day assessment, and the techniques of carrying out individual and group supportive work for youths. It is envisioned that this capability-building will not just empower community agencies, but also enable them to collaborate more effectively with mental healthcare professionals to better assist youths in distress. This pilot programme will run till 31 March 2018. The first session was held from 31 July to 1 August 2017.



New e-Mental Health Check Service for Youths

As part of continuing efforts to reach out to youths, CHAT introduced a new e-mental health check service, webCHAT, in June 2017 for young people aged 16 to 30. This serves as a first touch point for youths who may hesitate to seek help face-to-face. Through this service, CHAT's friendly team of mental healthcare professionals will seek to understand the young person's distress and share appropriate support services available. webCHAT will operate Tuesdays to Fridays from 1pm – 8pm.

Cyber Bullying Alert!

*Dr Ong Say How,
Senior Consultant and Chief,
Department of Child &
Adolescent Psychiatry, IMH*



Bullying occurs when someone is being hurt either by words or actions on purpose. Victims who fall prey to bullies are often harmed repeatedly, physically or psychologically. In today's social media age, cyber bullying is the latest form of bullying among youths. A survey among 3,000 students aged between 12 and 17 years conducted by IMH and the Singapore Children's Society in 2014 found that one in nine adolescents had been victims of cyber bullying, and about 40 per cent of victims had in turn cyber bullied others.

How does cyber bullying differ from traditional forms of bullying?

Unlike traditional forms of bullying – which includes physical provocations and verbal remarks – cyber bullying is carried out online using devices like computers, smartphones and related platforms like social media, websites, and text messages. The perpetrators tend to go after the victim's online reputation, calling him or her names and spreading rumours on social media sites. It can occur any time or anywhere. It is also more complex than traditional forms of bullying because unlike physical bullying whereby victims are aware of who the perpetrators are, cyber bullies have the option of hiding their identity while carrying out their acts in subtle and toxic ways.

While victims of cyber bullying may not suffer physical injuries as a direct result from the bullying, the adverse effects may be just as distressing. In fact, victims often suffer in silence for longer periods of time since cyber bullying tends to be less visible to parents and teachers.

What are the tell-tale signs to look out for in young victims?

A young person who may have been cyber bullied is likely to:

- appear nervous when using his devices to access chat messages and the Internet
- be afraid to go to school with continuous school absences and declining grades

- go through emotional changes like being more irritable, easily upset or overly worried
- have sleep problems
- withdraw from family or friends and wanting to be left alone
- experience appetite changes
- lose interest in the things that he or she previously enjoyed
- avoid discussions and become unusually secretive about his online activities

What are the consequences of cyber bullying?

Severe, long-term cyber bullying can have adverse effects. When a young person is unable to cope with the situation, he or she may develop a sense of helplessness, which can result in depression and anxiety disorders. Some may also experience physical discomfort, such as headache, abdominal pain and sleep problems. He or she may also withdraw from others and this will affect his or her relationship with peers.

What should teenagers do if they are a victim of cyber bullying?

Talk to a trusted adult, either to parents, teacher or school counsellor. Restrict or block communications with the bully and save all online communication (e.g. screenshots or chat logs) with the cyber bully. This can be used as evidence in a legal case if necessary. If the cyber bullying incident had been traumatic for the teenager and he or she is unable to cope with the aftermath, seek professional help.

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

Ng Si Jia, Corporate Communications

Sum Foong Yee, Corporate Communications

Fiona Foo, Corporate Communications

