



## Celebrating IMH's Journey with a Mental Health Festival



1. From left: Ms Tina Hung, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, National Council of Social Service, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, campaign ambassadors Ms Deborah Seah, Mr Nicholas Patrick, Mr Desmond Ng, Ms Nicole Kay and Ms Sumaiyah Mohamed, Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, Ministry of Health, Mdm Kay Kuok, Chairman, National Healthcare Group, and Prof Chua Hong Choon, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, National Healthcare Group and Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Mental Health.
2. Mdm Junainah Eusope, a peer from Club HEAL, talking to DPM Tharman about her works of art at IMH's Mental Health Festival.
3. DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam (left, nearest to board) removing the last "label" to reveal the faces of four campaign ambassadors at the launch of the national anti-stigma mental health campaign – Beyond the Label.

This year, the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) celebrates its 90th anniversary as the nation's only tertiary psychiatric care institution. As part of the year-long celebrations, IMH organised a Mental Health Festival on its campus on 8 September 2018 to promote the awareness of mental health and wellbeing and to celebrate its anniversary with staff, community partners, service users, and members of the public.

The National Council of Social Service also launched a five-year public education campaign – Beyond the Label - to reduce mental health stigma during the Festival. The campaign aims to advocate for the acceptance and inclusion of persons with mental health conditions in society.

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam graced the Festival and launched the campaign. More than 1,000 visitors took part in a host of activities, ranging from forums on bipolar disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder to mindfulness workshops, sharing sessions by mental health advocates, creative activities, and many more.

IMH's partners from various agencies and social service organisations, including the Agency for Integrated Care, Brahm Centre, Caregivers Alliance Limited, Clarity Singapore Limited, Club HEAL, The Heart Enterprise, Silver Ribbon Singapore, Singapore Anglican Community Services and Singapore Association for Mental Health took part in the Festival to showcase their services. Persons in recovery from mental health conditions also set up booths offering activities and crafts, lending a carnival atmosphere to the event.

# Unspeakable Love

Ms Janet Wong  
Caregiver



A mother's unconditional love: The writer, Janet with her son Nigel.

My son, Nigel, 24, was diagnosed with selective mutism when he was nine years old. While he could speak, he was not able to do so in specific situations or to specific people. As a young boy, he would become anxious whenever he felt threatened, and shut himself in the room and not speak for an indefinite period of time.

Bringing up a child with special needs has not been easy for us. We felt powerless when the disorder struck Nigel. However, we never gave up on him.

Managing his meltdowns wore me out as I felt so lost and helpless each time. The toughest situations were when he totally shut down his mind and body, whenever he was bullied in school. He was unable to defend himself in most instances, and I was not able to be present to help my child either. It hurt me so badly to see Nigel struggle in school during

his growing up years, constantly trying but just unable to follow social norms. Yet, no matter how crushed I felt, I found myself putting up a brave front only for my son to know that I was there for him, always.

The early years were tough. I had to be with him for 24 hours. When the time came for him to be independent, I trained him to take public transport. I remember he would go on the bus and I would follow behind him. He never noticed me because he would always tense up, and not look around. Once, the bus got crowded and he needed to move in to make way for other passengers. A passenger shouted at him for moving at a perceived snail's pace. My heart sank when I witnessed this incident. On a positive note however, he knew he would return home to a family full of love at the end of the bus ride. Till today, I always remind him to have positive thoughts and not forget to love himself.

After so many years, I have learnt to manage my own expectations and stop dreaming that Nigel will live according to the standards set in my world. Instead, I have decided to walk into his world. The moment I chose to do that, I started seeing things through his lens and that has given me a whole new perspective on life.

*Selective Mutism is a rare, extreme form of anxiety disorder that is often misunderstood. The book "Silence is not Golden", written by Nigel Ng, chronicles the highs and lows of his journey from childhood to adulthood as someone with selective mutism. To find out more about this book, please please visit [silenceisnotgolden.me](http://silenceisnotgolden.me) or contact Janet at [janetwongss@gmail.com](mailto:janetwongss@gmail.com). The book retails at S\$21.90 a copy, and is available at all major bookstores in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei.*

## Nurturing the Next Generation of Occupational Therapists

In July 2018, the Occupational Therapy Department at IMH received its first batch of occupational therapy students from the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) for their clinical practice education (CPE). This 7-week mental health clinical placement is part of the requirement for the students' Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree in Occupational Therapy.

During their placement, the six students gained opportunities to translate theory into practice, where they attended multi-disciplinary meetings and worked with both patients and family members under the guidance of their clinical educators, who are IMH occupational therapists (OTs). To help support both the students and the clinical educators, the Clinical Education Workgroup (comprising four IMH OTs) provided weekly group tutorials to help complement the students' learning journey.



From one generation of OTs to the next: The IMH clinical educators-cum-senior OTs (in dark blue; standing) with the SIT Occupational Therapy students (in white; seated).

SIT Occupational Therapy Year 2 Students Nurulizyan Binte Zulkiflee and Ong Xin Ying concurred, "Planning different interventions during this placement gave us a platform to exercise and expand our creativity. We were also privileged to conduct individual and group sessions, and experience working in inpatient and outpatient settings. This enabled us to connect the dots between the

theories we learned in school and reality."

Commenting on her role as one of the eight IMH clinical educators appointed by SIT, Desiree Ng, Senior OT said, "Teaching has in fact contributed much to my current skills, as I believe that education does not only involve merely in the gaining of knowledge, but also in the giving."

As IMH is one of the few sites that provide mental health clinical placements, more occupational therapists in IMH are due to be appointed as clinical educators, to support the growing cohort of occupational therapy students. Besides supporting CPE, a few IMH occupational therapists also hold appointments as Associate Faculty and Guest Lecturers, and conduct teachings at the SIT @ Dover campus.

# Celebrating 90 Years of Psychiatric Nursing

In conjunction with IMH's 90th anniversary this year, nurses in IMH celebrated Nurses' Day by looking at how psychiatric nursing had transformed over the years. Themed "90 Years of Psychiatric Nursing: Nostalgia and Beyond", the event was graced by Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Health.

"As we progressed from a custodial care model in the days of the former Woodbridge Hospital to the current community-based, recovery-focused care model, the role of psychiatric nurses has also evolved," said Ms Samantha Ong, Chief Nurse, IMH. "Today, nurses go beyond looking after patients' basic needs. They help them to better understand and manage their conditions, and also prepare them for discharge."

There is a growing focus on rehabilitation and recovery. An initiative geared towards this end is the hydroponic garden spearheaded by Senior Nurse Clinician Aziz Bin Ab Hamed, who received the Nightingale Award at this year's celebrations.

Hydroponic farming was introduced in 2017 as part of efforts to help long-stay patients undergoing the slow-stream rehabilitation programme to improve their functioning, learn independent living and vocational skills, and eventually reintegrate into the community.

"Our aim was to introduce modern farming to our patients. In addition to learning a skill, working with plants has therapeutic benefits and can improve the well-being of our patients," said SNC Aziz. "It is easy for our patients to manage, fun for them and they get to reap the results of their hard work within a short time."

The patients grow a variety of vegetables including baby spinach, *xiao bai cai*, *chye sim* and different types of lettuce in the 320m<sup>2</sup> plot. The harvest is sold to IMH staff and visitors. The revenue raised is used to buy seedlings and nutrients for the farm and to fund other slow-stream rehabilitation initiatives. Patients also receive a token sum to motivate them. At present, 30 patients from the slow-stream rehabilitation programme are involved in hydroponic farming, and there are plans to include patients from the other long-stay wards.



Minister for Health, Mr Gan Kim Yong (second from left) handles some hydroponic plants, accompanied by SNC Aziz Bin Ab Hamed (third from left).

## A Culture of Research

Research is at the heart of IMH's efforts to provide findings and make breakthroughs that translate to better care, treatment and outcomes for patients. IMH recently received grants from the National Medical Research Council (NMRC) for three research proposals.

Dr Jimmy Lee, Senior Consultant and Chief of North Region clinched the Clinician Scientist Award for his study titled "*Evaluating the clinical utility of immune phenotypes in schizophrenia*", while Dr Edimansyah Abdin, Principal Biostatistician was awarded the NMRC Health Services Research Grant for his study titled "*Validation of the World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule 2.0 among those with mental and physical illness in Singapore*".

The NMRC Health Services Research New Investigator Grant was awarded to Dr Daniel Poremski, Research Fellow for his study titled "*An evaluation of the introduction of peer support services in a large mental health hospital*". "Peer support specialists introduced in overseas settings have been shown to help service users recover and build better relationships with service providers, but we do not yet know if we will see the same effect in Singapore," said Dr Poremski. The study will find out if the introduction of Peer Support Specialists is benefiting service users and improving staff attitudes towards people with mental illness in Singapore. It will also examine how people who receive services from peers differ from those who do not. The findings will help improve peer support services as well as peer support training.



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# Mental Wellness in Old Age

*Dr Chris Tan Ze Jia  
Associate Consultant,  
Department of Geriatric Psychiatry, IMH*



## How would you describe the aging process?

Aging is a natural and ongoing process that all of us go through. It brings with it changes and new challenges which may be difficult to deal with. Erik Erikson, a renowned developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst described that elderly people are in a phase of life when they look back at their past and reflect on what they have done. It is also a time when unachieved goals and past disappointments take centre stage in their minds and they have to try to come to terms with these.

## What are some issues a person will face in old age?

As elderly people enter this phase of life, inevitable functional and aesthetic changes will also take place in their bodies. Many of them will also be confronted with a growing list of medical illnesses which often further limits their functioning.

At the same time, grief becomes familiar and some may struggle with guilt as they find themselves outliving people around them – spouses, siblings, friends, ex-colleagues and even children. Loss of a loved one translates to loss of a role. For those who had worked for most part of their life, retirement reinforces the losses.

## How might aging affect a person's mental wellness? What are the signs?

The inability to cope with the numerous challenges can affect an elderly person's mental wellness and quality of life. A negative outlook in life, persistent unhappiness about bodily changes,

excessive worries about one's health, social withdrawal, disturbed sleep, disturbed appetite and poor concentration are some of the possible signs of poor coping.

## How can we cope with aging and not let it affect our quality of life?

Aging gracefully is an important concept that has various interpretations by society. The fundamental principle relates to coping positively with the aging process. It is about transiting well into this new phase of life, letting go of certain things, finding a new identity, taking on new roles and new meaning in life. One needs to redefine one's notion of the physical body and adapt to, respect and accept associated bodily changes. One also needs to make peace with life, treasure the simplicity and gifts of the everyday and not agonise over past failures and unhappiness. In a nutshell, it is to accept and even celebrate aging as a part of life that is natural.

## Can one age well and gracefully?

Having a healthy and active lifestyle and staying connected with people are paramount to aging well. A healthy body contributes to a healthy mind. Maintaining physical wellness and attending to one's physical needs promptly is therefore vital. Elderly people can also focus on developing themselves further and learning new ways of perceiving and doing things. Engaging in open conversations with family and friends about the problems they face during aging allows them to process these struggles and emotions, and feel supported at the same time. This will help the elderly redefine who they are, and thereby go through the aging process gracefully.

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