



Nursing: A Journey To Greater Heights



IMH Celebrates Nurses' Day

Miles apart but close at heart. Principal Assistant Nurse Ms Ong Lay Kheng being congratulated during the virtual award presentation by her fellow nursing colleagues and (bottom-row, from left to right); IMH Chief Nurse Ms Samantha Ong, Permanent Secretary (Ministry of Health) Mr Chan Yeng Kit and IMH CEO Prof Chua Hong Choon.

Nurses' Merit Award 2020

Cheryl Goh Ai Sze

Advanced Practice Nurse
(Senior Nurse Clinician)

"Psychiatric nursing is special. Psychiatric nurses often rely on therapeutic use of self to help patients cope with their mental health issues and support them in times of sadness and joy. Nursing rewards an individual in many ways. It has given me an utmost essential – "Vitamin M", that is "Meaning". Seeing my patients recover and go back to their lives makes me strive to always do better."

Koh Chee Meng

Assistant Nurse Clinician

"Nursing gives me the opportunity to connect with people on a personal level and make a difference in their lives. Nursing also offers opportunities for professional growth. At the age of 60, I completed the Bachelor of Science in Nursing."

Ong Lay Kheng

Principal Assistant Nurse

"Being a nurse has always been my dream, especially after getting some hands-on experience as a member of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade in secondary school. To me, nursing is more than a job; it requires courage and passion to help others in times of need. Forty-two years on, the joy and challenges that my job brings keep me going."

Phu Hui Huang

Senior Nurse Clinician

"I wanted to be a nurse after witnessing how nurses cared for my grandmother who was in the hospital for cancer. Their comforting words helped us through the bleak period. Upon graduation, I was posted to IMH. I hadn't initially considered psychiatric nursing, but I had a caring mentor and friendly colleagues who eased me into my role. It has been 17 years and I've never looked back. Knowing that patients are functioning well in the community motivates me to always do my best."

All hands on deck as IMH weathers the COVID-19 storm



COVID-19 has impacted every sector of society, especially the healthcare sector, on an unprecedented scale. At IMH, all hands are on deck to keep mental health services running amidst this trying period of uncertainty and stress.



With our priorities on safety and business continuity, we continually adjust clinical operations to reduce patients' and staff's exposure to infection risks from people-to-people contact; and to free up some resources for re-deployment to pressing national front-line services when necessary (see box).



For one, non-urgent outpatient appointments are rescheduled to a later date or replaced by tele-consultations; and medications topped up via home delivery. This helps reduce the number of visitors at the outpatient clinics to accommodate safe distancing measures.

While our community teams had to scale back home visits, we make sure discharged patients remain supported by increasing the frequency of calls to check in on them. Cases that require face-to-face support visits still carry on with necessary precautions in place.



Unlike acute hospitals, IMH's inpatient setting sees patients move about and interact freely in common spaces. To mitigate infection risks, our nurses monitor patients more closely, with twice-daily temperature taking and actively look out for signs of illness, particularly fever and flu-like symptoms. Patients are also encouraged to mask up and are educated on the importance of personal hygiene and infection control. More isolation facilities have also been set aside so that unwell inpatients can be quickly isolated to prevent potential infection spread. New admissions are also swab-tested for COVID-19.

This period also sees our staff making personal sacrifices and taking inconveniences in their stride as they adjust (e.g. working in split teams or modular modes) and adapt (e.g. daily recording of temperatures) to the 'new normal'. For staff hailing from other countries, many gallantly place work before family by shelving cross-border travel, to pitch in collectively to keep IMH running.

IMH staff have stepped up to play a role in community efforts to alleviate the impact of COVID-19. Some of these include:

Community Care Facility (CCF) and Swab Isolation Facility (SIF)

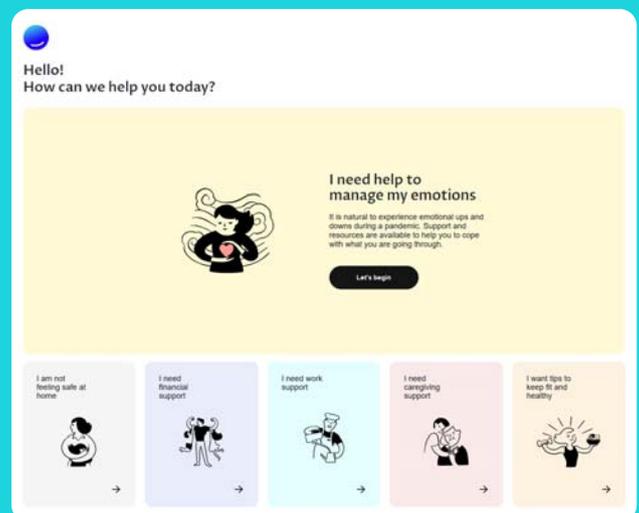
As of end July, some 64 staff, mainly doctors and nurses, were re-deployed to these community facilities for varying periods, to take care of patients recovering from COVID-19 or perform swab tests as part of proactive detection.

National CARE Hotline: 1800 202 6868

This 24/7 hotline provides psychological first aid and emotional support to callers who need it during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 100 IMH staff volunteered to help man the hotline since it started on 10 April.

Mindline: www.mindline.sg

With an emphasis on stress and coping, this online compendium of help resources also includes a self-administered emotional assessment tool. IMH senior consultant Dr Jimmy Lee played a leading role in designing this tool and developing the triage process to match users to appropriate resources for follow-up, based on online assessment results.



Journaling: A Project from the Heart

Yong Si Han Bernice, Matchsticks of IMH

Volunteering at IMH has been a huge part of my life since late-2017. I cannot imagine what life would be like without it – it has been a meaningful journey of befriending the residents, and self-discovery.

Due to the COVID-19 situation in Singapore, I was unable to physically volunteer in the wards. However, I wanted to do more for the patients during this period. Hence, I leapt at the opportunity to be part of a project to develop Journaling Kits to support the patients in IMH's acute wards.

When I first heard about the project from Jonathan, the founder of our volunteer group, it led me to remember how much of an impact this activity had on my life. Journaling was an activity I started doing when I was about 7 years old. It started off simply as writing about interesting day-to-day happenings and memorable events, before evolving into more reflective pieces which helped me process my thoughts and emotions as I grew older. Journaling also allowed me to gain clarity

as to why I was feeling a certain way, and this self-awareness allowed me to identify a way through whatever trying times I faced.

Together with the team, we conceptualised, designed, and sourced for the materials to be included in each Journaling Kit over several weekly Zoom meetings during the Circuit Breaker period.



As Phase 2 approached, we then split ourselves into two teams, and took turns to do the packing and sorting of materials into the final journal kit. It was a tedious process, but we motivated and supported each other along the way and this made the whole journey a lot more fun and memorable. With our efforts combined, we managed to create 750 kits for the patients!

Through this project, we hope that the beneficiaries of these kits would be able to use journaling to articulate and express themselves, be inspired to continue pushing forward in their recovery journey, and enjoy the process of journaling as much as we enjoyed putting these kits together.

24th World Congress of the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions

*Starting from the Beginning
- Laying the Foundation for Lifelong Mental Health*
2 - 4 December 2020



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Occupational Burnout In Healthcare Workers (HCWs) During the Pandemic

Sara-Ann Lee, Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

What is occupational burnout?

According to the International Classification of Diseases for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics Eleventh Revision (ICD-11), burnout is recognised as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

What are the signs and symptoms of occupational burnout?

Besides the three key dimensions of burnout - exhaustion, cynicism and reduced efficacy - that were identified by Professor Christine Maslach in her research from the early-1970s, feelings of exhaustion, anxiety, insomnia and difficulty relaxing are some of the physical and psychological reactions that may be experienced.

Why do HCWs experience higher risks of occupational burnout during this period?

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the limits of healthcare systems around the world, necessitating rapid, and sometimes, total changes to the way HCWs are used to carrying out their duties while simultaneously increasing their workloads and mental burden. With many HCWs redeployed to meet increased caseloads, many also have to rapidly adapt to remote ways of providing services through the use of telemedicine. At the same time, HCWs may also worry about catching COVID-19 and bringing it home to their loved ones.

How can employers manage occupational burnout in staff?

It is critical that HCWs are adequately supported now and in the future, by ensuring ready access to resources and services

supporting their mental health and wellbeing. A study published in JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association) in April 2020 highlighted sources of anxiety that could be categorised into 5 requests from HCWs to their organisation: Hear me, Protect me, Prepare me, Support me and Care for me.

It is heartening to see that many hospitals locally have made efforts to promote better mental health with the help of technology. Open Zoom support groups, distribution of care packs, department check-in sessions, and e-sensing surveys to identify areas where intervention may be necessary, are just some examples of what has been done to help HCWs cope.

Organisations may also tap on existing technology being used for work to promote social contact e.g. lunch dates with co-workers via videocalls, dropping fellow team members short messages of encouragement or even team bonding via Zoom.

What are some self-care methods that HCWs can adopt to improve their mental wellness during this period?

As HCWs, we need to remain capable to do our jobs effectively as the COVID-19 fight moves into the medium- to long-term – and to do so, we need to take care of ourselves and lean on each other for mutual support in order to continue helping our patients.

As such, taking care of our own health and well-being is important to sustain our fight against COVID-19; these include getting adequate nutrition and rest, setting aside time for self-care activities and maintaining appropriate boundaries between work and rest.

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