Results of the Well-being of the Singapore Elderly Study

Specialist Treatment Programmes for OCD

Making Friends @ Friendship Garden
Making Friends @ Friendship Garden

By Cheong Yaun Marn, Corporate Communications

“How pretty!” exclaimed a female patient, beaming with child-like joy as she sat in front of the water feature at the newly renovated Friendship Garden between Blocks 2 and 3 at IMH. She swung her legs gleefully and hummed to herself. An IMH staff volunteer later brought her over to the exercise station where the patient used the twist board, singing.

Since its official opening on 9 March, IMH’s Friendship Garden has become a favourite outdoor venue for IMH patients, staff and volunteers. About 30 long-stay patients take turns to visit the garden daily. IMH staff and volunteers join these visits to assist the nurses. In the process, they get to know the patients better, especially staff who are normally not involved in direct patient-care.

This new facility was made possible by a generous donation of $186,000 from MINDSET Care Ltd, a registered charity under the Jardine Matheson Group. In addition to greenery, the Friendship Garden includes netball poles, a planter for gardening activities, a swing, a gazebo and exercise stations, which were modified with patients’ safety and ease of use in mind.

The gym equipment was specially chosen to train major muscle groups and was designed ergonomically, using the body weight as resistance. As patients using this garden are mainly from the long-stay wards and are elderly and less ambulant, most of the exercise equipment allow the patient to be seated to perform the exercise, except for the twist board, which has a rail for the patient to hold to. The retro-looking swing brings back childhood memories for the patients, who also benefit from the outdoor exercise, Vitamin D, and the therapeutic effects of nature and social interaction. Ambulant patients can also do tai chi, water the plants, and play badminton, while wheelchair-bound patients enjoy the fresh air and nature.

Helen Ong, Senior Executive, Education Office, has volunteered her time to accompany patients in their visits to the Friendship Garden. “As backroom staff, we seldom have the opportunity to interact with our clients,” she said. “Some of the patients were very happy to see us and they confided in me. I was touched when I saw our patients assisting fellow patients who had difficulty walking. It was a very meaningful and enjoyable session.”

MINDSET Care Ltd Steering Committee members, led by Chairman Mr Alex Newbigging (third from right), were hosted by IMH management at the Friendship Garden opening ceremony.
Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is among the top three most common mental disorders in Singapore affecting one in 33 people at some point in their lifetime. To better help those with OCD in their recovery, IMH recently introduced two intervention programmes.

Each year, IMH sees an average of 50 young patients presenting with OCD. The Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (DCAP) OCD Programme was launched in December 2014 at the Child Guidance Clinic in IMH for child and adolescent outpatients up to 19 years of age diagnosed with moderate to severe OCD.

“Most adults with OCD actually start presenting with symptoms when they are in their early teens,” explained Ms Haanusia Prithivi Raj, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Child Guidance Clinic, who is leading the DCAP OCD Programme. “Many persons with OCD take a long time to seek treatment, and the longer it goes untreated, the harder it is for them to regain functioning and well-being, so early intervention is important.”

The DCAP OCD programme provides multi-disciplinary assessment and treatment that are in line with the best practice for OCD, namely cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT) and medication as required. There are options to conduct therapy either in the outpatient or community setting, with treatment tailored to the specific needs of the children. The team also uses a holistic approach to manage OCD by working with patients’ families and schools.

Analysis of early data shows that young patients who have completed the programme and returned for follow-up treatments have seen significant reduction in OCD symptoms.

The programme was expanded in April 2015 to include young inpatients with severe OCD who would benefit from an inpatient stay of three to five weeks. They will undergo a holistic and comprehensive programme, which integrates individual therapy, group therapy, and medication management. It also has community-based exposure components where the last two weeks of the inpatient stay includes home-based exposure tasks to help patients learn healthy ways to cope with distress caused by their condition. The team also engages the patients’ families to play an active role in doing these tasks with them and works with schools to address OCD symptoms and accommodations that can occur in the school environment to aid smoother integration back to the home and community.

For adults with OCD, IMH started the OCD Clinic in January this year taking in referral cases from polyclinics, general practitioners and other hospitals. The pilot service, targeted at those with moderate to severe OCD, is predominantly delivered in the outpatient setting with patients being admitted when required.

Patients undergo intensive psychological interventions with increased frequency of consultations. “Traditionally, intervention for OCD has not focused on delivering intensive input, which studies have shown can help push patients further up in the recovery process,” explained Dr Jayaraman Hariram, Consultant, Department of Community Psychiatry, who is leading the programme.

Another key difference in the service is that patients will see both a psychiatrist and psychologist, who will provide a comprehensive joint assessment of the patients’ condition and work together to create the best treatment plan for them. The team is also looking into setting up group interventions and support groups for patients’ family and caregivers.

“The programme aims to not only minimise symptoms but help patients reach recovery and regain their functionality as best as they could,” said Dr Hariram. “Some of our patients are well into their recovery journey and one patient, who had a fear of contamination, has almost complete control of her symptoms and is now looking forward to finding a job and establishing her life.”
On the Other End of the Helpline

By Vera Soo, Corporate Communications

“Hello, how may I help you today?” The IMH Contact Centre caters to the needs of patients, caregivers and the general public in terms of enquiries and appointment-making, feedback management, and counselling for addictions and related psychosocial issues.

**IMH Link** takes a behind-the-scenes look at two of the helplines manned by the IMH Contact Centre – the National Problem Gambling Helpline and the All Addictions Helpline. While the National Problem Gambling Helpline is specifically for issues related to problem gambling, the All Addictions Helpline addresses all other addictions like drug and alcohol, and other behavioural addictions. We put a face to the friendly voice and chat with Mr Syawal Hussain, Helpline Para-counsellor, about his work.

1. **What’s a typical day at work for you?**

The National Problem Gambling Helpline and the All Addictions Helpline operate 24/7, and our team of 12 trained para-counsellors works three shifts. On a typical day, we get phone calls and webchats from about 10am. We provide counselling to our callers on their addiction-related problems. We also refer them to relevant community resources and where necessary, to the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) and help them make an appointment. Sometimes, we do receive calls that are unrelated to addictions. Nonetheless, we listen to the callers and try our best to assist them.

2. **What are some challenges associated with being a helpline para-counsellor?**

Managing suicide or crisis cases is challenging as this could take a few hours or even a day. Understanding the different types of addictions can also be tough, but we manage to do so well under the guidance of our clinical supervisor.

3. **How does the team maintain a high standard of service to callers?**

We have weekly group sessions with our clinical supervisor, who has many years of experience with addictions counselling. We present and discuss cases internally, and learn best approaches from one another.

Our team also receives ongoing training from in-house experts and peers, as well as through external courses. Lastly, like many other helpline services, we conduct regular call and webchat audits to identify the areas in which we have done well, and also flag out areas for improvement.

4. **Please share a memorable case you handled.**

I once received a call from a client who was standing outside the casino in tears. He had lost all his savings and did not know how he was going to face his family. His question, “Should I die or leave the country?” stunned me initially, but I composed myself quickly and advised him to sit down to continue our phone conversation. He poured out his heart and as I listened, I managed to build rapport with him and persuaded him to seek help at the NAMS Clinic.

Some days later, I was surprised by a call from the NAMS Clinic requesting my presence. It turned out that this same client was there for an appointment, and he had requested to see me so that he could thank me personally. The client shook my hand and thanked me for spending time with him on the Helpline when he really needed a listening ear.

That incident made a deep impression on me – a helpline para-counsellor can make a significant difference to someone in a critical moment. It is moments like this that give me a great sense of purpose in my work, and motivate me to continue serving callers as best as I can.
Central CDC Brings the Community to IMH

By Cheong Yaun Marn, Corporate Communications

Love moves you out of your comfort zone. On 8 May, 45 volunteers from the Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) and their community partners — Maybank Singapore, James Cook University and Nanyang Polytechnic — left their preconceptions about the mentally ill behind to bring art and cheer to 62 IMH patients.

The volunteers appeared at dawn, armed with paint brushes and unflagging smiles, to paint a cheerful mural of a duck pond and garden scene on the day space wall at Ward 62A as part of their Painting Smiles initiative. The volunteers then hosted a birthday party and sing-a-long session for the patients, an initiative called Singing Telegram, to celebrate the birthday of 15 IMH long-stay patients born in the month of May. The celebrations came complete with a delicious birthday cake and afternoon tea buffet spread.

These activities make up the inaugural CLAP! On the Move arts outreach programme, comprising Singing Telegram and Painting Smiles, organised by the Central Singapore CDC. Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar, Vice-Chairman of Central Singapore CDC and Adviser to Ang Mo Kio GRC Grassroots Organisations, and Mr Lim Hock Leng, COO, IMH, were present to launch this community initiative in IMH.

Mr Koh, a 37-year-old patient who attended the event, said that he especially enjoyed the interaction with the volunteers and patients from other wards. A volunteer from Maybank shared that it was her first time stepping into IMH. While she was initially a little apprehensive, she soon realised how loveable the patients were and felt a great sense of satisfaction in the mural and the happy memories she and the volunteers left behind.

CLAP! On the Move will take place every month in IMH and targets to celebrate 630 patients’ birthdays over the next 12 months. Interested parties who would like to volunteer may write to the CDC at pa_centralsingapore@pa.gov.sg.

One-stop Eye and Foot Screening for Diabetic Patients

By Chloe Ang, Patient Operations, General Psychiatry

Diabetic patients in IMH can now benefit from convenient and regular eye and foot screening for their condition. The Mobile Community Health Centre (CHC), a mobile service that provides Diabetic Retinal Photography (DRP), Diabetic Foot Screening (DFS) and chronic disease counselling for patients in the community, was extended to IMH in November 2014. The service, which is supported by the NHG Central Regional Health Office, provides DRP and DFS screening to IMH inpatients and outpatients who are diabetic. A 24-seat bus specially converted for this purpose operates at the IMH Multi-Purpose Hall Driveway at least once a month.

Some 78 patients have undergone screening from the start of the service to April this year. Having this service at IMH’s doorstep has not only made screening more accessible for patients, but has also saved the hospital transport and manpower cost.
A study, the Well-being of the Singapore Elderly (WiSE), led by IMH to estimate the current prevalence of dementia among older adults and to investigate its impact on family caregivers, has found that 10 per cent of older adults aged 60 years and above in Singapore have dementia.

This comprehensive national epidemiological study among older adults in Singapore was conducted in 2013. It involved 2565 randomly selected older adults and 2421 caregivers. The project was led by Prof Chong Siow Ann, Vice Chairman Medical Board (Research) and Adj Asst Prof Mythily Subramaniam, Director, Research Division, IMH. It was a collaborative study between IMH, Ministry of Health (MOH), Changi General Hospital, National University Health System, Raffles Institute and King’s College, London.

The findings have provided insight into a number of health and social matters related to older adults. The study showed that 55.7 per cent of those with dementia needed care “much of the time” compared to just 2.4 per cent of those without dementia. The study also showed that caring for an older adult with dementia is a demanding and challenging job. Significantly high caregivers’ burden and psychological morbidity were found among the caregivers of those with dementia. Among these caregivers:

• 20 per cent had given up or cut down on work
• 46 per cent reported being distressed by the older adults’ behavioural and psychiatric symptoms
• 26 per cent experienced high care burden
• 11 per cent met criteria for some psychological morbidity such as depression or anxiety.

Availability of respite care can provide short-term relief to the caregivers from their stress. Improving caregivers’ health through respite care and support is important for their own wellbeing and can also lead to better care and outcomes for those with dementia.

The number of people with dementia is rising rapidly worldwide with the increase in life expectancy and this is emerging as a public health as well as a social and economic problem for many countries. The challenge is even more acute for countries like Singapore, which has a rapidly ageing population. The establishment of accurate data on the number of people with dementia is essential for the formulation of polices and planning of services. The three-year WISE project that provided current data on dementia and its impact, was funded by MOH and the Singapore Millennium Foundation of the Temasek Trust.

Various factors associated with dementia:

• Age - Dementia was significantly associated with older age. The likelihood of dementia for those aged 75–84 years was 4.3 times and for those aged 85 years and over, it was 18.4 times higher compared to that of older adults aged 60–74 years.

• Association with stroke - Those who had been diagnosed with stroke in their lifetime had a higher risk of dementia compared to those who had never had the diagnoses.

• Association with education and employment - The findings also showed that people who were educated up to primary level were 3.6 times more likely to have dementia than those with a tertiary education, while housewives and retirees were 25 times more likely to have dementia as compared to those in paid employment.
More Stressful Caring for Children with Autism

By Penny Chua, Corporate Communications

A study conducted by IMH’s Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (DCAP) has found that parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experienced significantly more parenting stress symptoms.

The study involved 73 parents of children with ASD and 63 parents of typically developing children. Parents of children with ASD reported significantly more parenting stress symptoms such as negative parental self-views and lower satisfaction with parent-child bond.

They also experienced more depression symptoms and engaged more frequently in avoidance coping. Parents of children with ASD may also have to deal with far greater behavioural, emotional and other health-related problems commonly associated with ASD and that is further exacerbated by the chronicity of the disorder.

A review of the literature suggests that parents of children with ASD used both adaptive strategies such as cognitive reframing and seeking social support, as well as maladaptive strategies such as avoidance and disengagement, although there are inconsistent findings between stress and coping in parents of children with ASD. Few studies have examined cultural differences, the level of stress and coping ability in parents of children with ASD in Asian population.

DCAP’s study results reinforce the importance of addressing the well-being and coping needs of parents of children with ASD. The team at DCAP is seeking to develop a parent support programme for parents and caregivers of children with ASD to alleviate stress and improve their well-being. Parents and caregivers who were involved in the study will be invited to help evaluate the efficacy of the programme.

“Caring for children with ASD can be overwhelming, so it is important for the parent or caregiver to take care of themselves,” said Ms Goh Tze Jui, Senior Psychologist, DCAP, and the study’s Principal-Investigator. They need the support and understanding from their families and friends. Kind gestures such as offering to take care of the child so they can take a short respite or even an appreciative pat or hug can sometimes go a long way to help these caregivers. For most of us, perhaps all it needs is a smile or to be more understanding and tolerant when seeing a parent tending to a special needs child during a challenging moment in public.”
On 27 and 28 April, the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (DCAP), together with the Education Office, hosted 10 delegates from the Prof. Dr. Soerojo Magelang Mental Hospital in Indonesia. The multi-disciplinary team of psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, led by Dr Ratna Pangestuti, learnt about IMH’s role in the provision of child and adolescent mental healthcare services.

Dr Ratna Pangestuti’s team from Prof. Dr. Soerojo Magelang Mental Hospital had earlier trained with the Temasek Foundation-Institute of Mental Health’s (TF-IMH) “Disaster Mental Health Programme for Communities in Asia” under a training-of-trainers (ToT) programme implemented by Rumah Sakit Dr. Cipto Mangankusumo (RSCM) and supported by IMH.

“The TF-IMH programme has been useful in skilling up our multi-disciplinary team to better manage early detection of mental health problems amongst school children in Magelang, Java,” shared Dr Pangestuti.

Under the TF-IMH ToT programme for master trainers, Dr Pangestuti’s team was trained in the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that assesses the general mental wellbeing of school-going children and adolescents. The team has since introduced the SDQ to almost 50 school teachers in Magelang through workshops in 2014, with another 300 teachers targeted to be trained in the next two years. “Our main aim is to provide teachers with the knowledge and tools to detect mental health issues early so that intervention can take place,” added Dr Pangestuti.

“As an initial step in establishing our local model of care, we would like to learn from IMH and its partners about the challenges encountered in setting up an integrated referral network to manage school-going children needing intervention,” said Dr Pangestuti.

As part of learning, the visitors were introduced to tertiary level services and IMH’s Response, Early Intervention and Assessment in Community Mental Health team (REACH), which works closely with schools and community partners to help students with emotional, social and behavioural issues, and dialogue with Adj Asst Professor Ong Say How, Senior Consultant and Chief, DCAP and his multi-disciplinary team. Visits to the Singapore Children’s Society and Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary School were also arranged for the delegates to better understand the roles played by both community and school partners in the early detection and intervention of mental health problems.
Mentoring the Next Generation of Nurses

By Lalitha Naidu, Corporate Communications

Every year, about 2000 nursing students, aged 17 to 20, from Nanyang Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, National University of Singapore, Institute of Technical Education and Parkway College, undergo their clinical attachment in IMH, which plays a national role in providing clinical training to develop and nurture the next generation of mental healthcare professionals.

In their two weeks at IMH, the students are given opportunities to develop hands-on clinical skills and professional competency in mental health nursing through a structured programme. They put to practice what they have learnt in school by participating in the care of patients with cognitive, emotional, perceptual and adaptive challenges. They learn to establish therapeutic nurse-patient relationship with patients assigned to them and develop nursing plan of care for them. They learn about medication compliance, how to assess patients’ mental state, and to organise and conduct activities for them.

The students are guided every step of the way by IMH’s Clinical Nurse Educators, Nurse Educators, and Clinical Instructors, who work with the tertiary institutions to set clinical learning objectives, facilitate clinical learning and serve as mentors and friends to the student nurses. Through close supervision, students receive feedback on their learning progress, and guidance on improving their core mental health related clinical skills and patient-centric care provision.

Mr Singaravelan, who joined IMH as a Senior Staff Nurse in 1993 and is currently a Clinical Nurse Educator, says he enjoys taking the students under his wing and sharing with them knowledge he has gleaned over the years. “I usually have about 20 students under my care each time,” he said. “Some students are excited about their attachment in IMH, while a few may be anxious or fearful due to misconceptions about working with persons with mental illness. I provide them reassurance and support and get great satisfaction when students, who were initially worried, gain confidence in their interaction with patients and tell me that their perception has changed after the training. It is even better when we see the students join us as nurses after they graduate.”

Two nurses who recently joined IMH – Ms Tan Chen Xi and Mr Dickson Lai – found their two-week attachment in IMH to be fruitful and memorable. “I was so excited to come to IMH for my attachment that I kept asking my seniors about their experience,” said the 22-year-old Ms Tan, who is from Ngee Ann Polytechnic, and currently works in Ward 36B. “I have always been interested in mental health and my attachment here solidified my decision to pursue mental health nursing. I find working here to be fulfilling,” she said. Mr Lai, who graduated from Nanyang Polytechnic and is now with Ward 22A, shares the sentiment. “I like interacting with patients. My colleagues are very supportive and patient, and they have helped me settle in easily,” he said.
Power of Artistic Expression

By Tan Ying Zhen, Department of Early Psychosis Intervention

It was a novel idea: an art exhibition to get people thinking about mental health and illness as a journey. The bright spark came from three arts business management students: Natalie Sim, Tanya Lee and Jenson Gabriel Tan, who were in their final year at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. They approached the Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT), a community outreach and assessment initiative under IMH’s Early Psychosis Intervention Programme (EPIP), to collaborate on an exhibition titled The Days That We Wander/Wonder.

Seven locally-based artists were commissioned to showcase artworks echoing the theme of personal journeys. To help the artists understand the recovery journeys of people with mental illness, CHAT gathered the artists, EPIP’s Peer Support Specialists and some mental health advocates for a sharing session.

One of the mental health advocates present was Nicole K, founder of the Tapestry Project Singapore, a website for sharing stories and resources on mental illness. She said, “I’m all for art as a means of outreach for mental health. Though I’m a ‘words person’, I know that images and forms convey different depths and meanings.”

After more than a year of planning, the exhibition was held at DECK, an independent art space, in March this year. The exhibition showcased a variety of artworks including photography, illustrations and installations. Exhibition-goer Nadera Abdul Aziz said, “The exhibition opened my mind to different perspectives and reminded me of the power of art in expression and therapy. I never saw obsessive compulsive disorder as being similar to waves until the exhibition.”

Following its successful run at DECK, The Days That We Wander/Wonder moved to Jurong Regional Library in May. Three public talks were held in conjunction with the exhibition as well as sharing sessions by the students and the artists, one of whom is Zen Teh.

Zen’s photographic installation, Dual/Duel, was inspired by mental health advocate Chan Lishan and her journey through schizophrenia. To communicate the fluidity of the human mind and how the mind changes our behaviour and perception of reality, Zen designed her work to create different visual effects that vary with the audience’s perspective.

Zen said, “Art draws people’s attention and curiosity and anyone can appreciate art at their own pace and relate to them in their own way. In mental health advocacy, art is especially useful and effective because it can reduce the stigma of mental illness. With art, mental health information can reach a wider audience, bring the messages closer to people, and in a more acceptable way as well.”

Lishan shared similar sentiments. She said, “Through the arts, opinions can be challenged and hard questions can be raised. The arts do not take the patronising attitude that any particular individual or group is correct. Neither do they prescribe what we should think about mental health issues or persons with mental health issues. What the arts can give us are insights and perspectives that we may not have previously considered.”

Many visitors could identify with Malvina Tan-Dhanaraj’s mixed media installation on grief. She staged scenes to explore her loss of her late husband, and documented them in this artwork.

Artist Zen Teh discussing her installation, Dual/Duel, which explores the fragmented mental processes and state of mind of a person with schizophrenia. Her work was inspired by mental health advocate Chan Lishan and her book, A Philosopher’s Madness.

The team: Jenson Gabriel Tan, Natalie Sim and Tanya Lee, arts business management graduates from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.
Drawing from Experience

By Ng Si Jia, Corporate Communications

When he was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, 23-year-old Mr Chia Xun An, who is currently studying at a local polytechnic, was at a loss as to what he was experiencing. With a keen interest in drawing since young, he turned to his craft to help him cope and make sense of the situation.

It was during this time that The Black Box, a book with Mr Chia’s sketches featuring a pudgy penguin named Penn, was born. Penn goes around bearing a black box, later revealed to be a case of “sad flu”, which alludes to depression. On 10 May, Mr Chia had an official book launch and a public talk on his book and journey with his illness at the National Library.

Mr Chia feels that drawing helps him to express his thoughts and emotions and is especially useful when he is ill and unable to put his experiences into words. With his drawings, he has also helped others understand mental illness. His family is aware of his talent and is extremely supportive of his endeavour.

Besides drawing, Mr Chia enjoys taking photographs and playing the saxophone. Although he has stopped pursuing these hobbies temporarily due to his illness, he is working towards picking them up again when he is ready.

Mr Chia is confident about his future. He aspires to be an architect with a focus on designing for people with disabilities as he has some ideas on ways to improve accessibility through designs, having had experience using them when he was ill. Mr Chia also has ideas for a new book, which he plans to undertake in time.

He has some encouraging words for his peers, “Take heart and don’t get discouraged! You may be slightly different from most of your peers and hence may not get to experience some of the things that they do but everybody’s set of cards in life is different, including yours. So focus on the things that you can do, find a strong support network of friends that will accept you for who you are, and things will work out just fine.”

The Black Box can be purchased online at www.blackboxprojects.net.

Veteran IMH Doctor Conferred Distinguished Psychiatrist Award

By Ng Si Jia, Corporate Communications

This year, the Distinguished Psychiatrist Award (DPA) by the Singapore Psychiatric Association (SPA) was awarded to four senior psychiatrists for their clinical, academic and research work as well as efforts in mentoring young psychiatrists. One of the winners is Dr Leong Oil Ken, Senior Consultant from the Department of Community Psychiatry in IMH.

Dr Leong has been working at IMH for more than 35 years since he was first posted to the then Woodbridge Hospital as a medical officer in 1976. At Woodbridge Hospital, he developed an interest in psychiatry from his interactions with his patients and superiors. He then applied for a fellowship in psychiatry sponsored by the World Health Organization and went to the Maudsley Hospital, the largest mental health training institution in the United Kingdom in South London, to study psychiatry. After passing the examinations for the Diploma in Psychological Medicine and the Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, he returned to Singapore and continued his work as a psychiatrist at Woodbridge Hospital.

“...the camaraderie among staff as they work together to help patients recover is what motivates me,” said Dr Leong. He feels that “one should be dedicated to his work, get along with all staff and pass on knowledge to the juniors who may one day become seniors”.

Dr Leong Oil Ken (left) and Dr Lee Cheng, President of the Singapore Psychiatric Association.
Healthcare Humanity Awards – Honouring Healthcare Heroes

By Fiona Foo, Corporate Communications

On 27 April, 62 healthcare heroes were presented the Healthcare Humanity Awards, with six recipients receiving the Honourable Mention Award. These awards recognise outstanding individuals who go beyond the call of duty to help others and their contributions in humanitarian efforts to uplift the lives of others. Meet the IMH staff who are this year’s winners:

Mdm Wong Kuan Ying, Senior Healthcare Assistant Honourable Mention Award

A decade ago, Mdm Wong witnessed the inspiring work by the healthcare team looking after her loved one in intensive care. She saw how the doctors and nurses worked non-stop to try to save lives. It led her to her current vocation at IMH. With only primary school education and Mandarin as her main spoken language, Mdm Wong put herself through intensive skills-based training to improve her work competencies. Today, besides Mandarin and Cantonese, she is also able to hold basic conversations in English, Malay, Hokkien, and Japanese and goes the extra mile to understand the needs of her patients who have an intellectual disability. Despite her personal and work commitments, Mdm Wong also actively volunteers in her community.

Ms Haanusia Prithivi Raj, Senior Clinical Psychologist

Ms Haanusia enjoys working with the young and has developed several programmes targeted to help them cope with behavioural and emotional issues. She spearheaded the Obsessive Compulsive Disorder programme at the Child Guidance Clinic, which teaches patients coping strategies and allows them to manage their symptoms under the guidance of professionals. For the benefit of her young inpatients, she started multiple unique programmes and facilities, such as ‘The Iceberg’ which is a cool-down room where young patients can go to calm themselves when they are in distress or feel frustrated. She also created ‘The Green Space’ in the child ward, Sunrise Wing, to help children cultivate their nurturing skills and as a means to keep the ward green and fun.

Ms Ho Soo Fung, Principal Occupational Therapist and Art Therapist

Ms Ho considers herself to be an accidental occupational therapist. When she entered the profession in the 1980s, it was fairly unpopular and there was only one available book on occupational therapy at The National Library. She has since developed rehabilitative treatment programmes targeted at different groups of patients. She uses art as therapy for her patients, including those struggling with addictions. Her job satisfaction comes from seeing patients progress in their recovery as they start to express themselves through art and discover more about themselves. Ms Ho seeks to inspire her patients to do their best. She often goes beyond the call of duty to ensure patients reintegrate well in the community.

Ms Margaret Rajeswary d/o Manickam, Nurse Clinician

As a mental health advocate, Ms Margaret led a team in developing the Psychological Outreach Programme (POP) in 2006, the first-of-its-kind mental health community project. POP offers psychological support to people who have mental illness in the community. Under this programme, the team reaches out to needy, lonely and depressed elderly who are living alone in one-room HDB rental flats to befriend them and take them on regular outings. Ms Margaret has built such good rapport with the residents over the years that they have started to regularly confide in her.
Gems of IMH Receive Recognition

By Fiona Foo, Corporate Communications

Sayang Award
Twenty six exemplary staff across various departments were recognised for their stellar performance and for demonstrating the five IMH core values in their daily work lives, namely:
- Service to the Public
- Professionalism
- Collegiate Practice
- Partnership
- Responsible Stewardship

Long Service Award
A total of 270 staff who have served the National Healthcare Group/IMH between five and 50 years received their long-service award on 18 May. Find out what our three pioneers have to say about their experience working in a psychiatric hospital.

I have served in IMH for more than two decades and I love my colleagues and patients. Although it can be challenging to work with a group of long-stay psychiatric patients with intellectual disability, it also gives me immense satisfaction when they show progress during their stay. Under the care and guidance of our team, some patients are able to perform simple chores like wiping the furniture, making their beds and sweeping the floor.

Ms Lee Siew Hiang,
Nurse Manager and recipient of Long Service Award (50 years)

I was only 24 years old when I started my job as a health attendant at the old Woodbridge Hospital. Back then, technology was not so advanced and our patients had to make do with the radio as their only source of entertainment. It was rather sad and I felt sorry for them. Over time, I grew attached to our patients as I became their friend and caregiver. I am now in my 70s and I hope I can continue to care for them in the years to come.

Mr Tan Hock Lai,
Health Attendant and recipient of Long Service Award (50 years)

I made the switch from bedside nursing to psychiatric nursing 23 years ago and it has been very fulfilling working with people with mental illness. I enjoy fostering and maintaining therapeutic alliance with my patients. Communication is a key factor in this process and the best outcome is for sufferers to gain insight into their illness and learn to manage it. When I see that they turn up for clinic appointments of their own accord, I am happy and assured that they are on the road to recovery. It warms my heart when they tell me that they are getting on well.

Ms Poo Kuei Poi Reena,
Senior Case Manager and recipient of Long Service Award (50 years)

Nurse Clinician Mr Ong Seng Hong, 67, who began his nursing career in the 1960s, was conferred the NTUC May Day Model Partnership Award on 23 May this year. This Award puts the spotlight on individuals and institutions, whose partnership strategies have enabled workers to take charge of their progression and development, leading to the transformation of Singapore’s economy.

Having served in inpatient wards for almost three decades, Mr Ong became concerned about the lack of support in the community when he witnessed that patients often relapsed after discharge and were re-admitted to the hospital. Over the next 18 years, he focused on building up psychosocial rehabilitation services to better support patients living in the community. “Institutionalising patients is no longer the way to go,” said Mr Ong on his vision for community integration. “Our aim today is really to work hand in hand with the community to rehabilitate patients, reintegrate them back into society and continue to keep them away from the hospital for as long as possible. This will give people with mental illness a better quality of life.”
Singaporeans are generally obsessed with their smartphones – do they suffer from smartphone addiction?

With the convenience and multiple functions that smartphones offer, they have become an essential accessory for the modern lifestyle not just in Singapore but globally.

Smartphone addiction can be said to fall under the umbrella of technology addiction. An addiction is present when there is compulsive use of the technology, leading to significant impairment in various domains of life such as relationships, in school or at work, and within the family.

At the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS), we have not seen cases that present purely with smartphone addiction. We do however see cases of excessive Internet use. Smartphones are among the gadgets that enable this excessive use.

What are some of the characteristics of Internet addiction, and persons who suffer from Internet addiction?

At present, there is insufficient research on the nature and cause of the problem for a formal classification of Internet addiction to be made. However, we have observed many similarities between Internet addiction and other addiction disorders, like gambling addiction. Despite the lack of formal diagnostic criteria, excessive Internet use is a dysfunctional behaviour that needs attention.

An addiction can be characterised by:
- Preoccupation
- Tolerance (need for an increasing amount of time on the device)
- Unsuccessful efforts to control or stop using
- Withdrawals (restlessness, irritability)
- Loss of control
- Significant impairment or neglect in any domain of life
- Lying to family members about the extent of involvement with the device; and
- Using the device as an escape or to relieve low mood

Some of the common traits of Internet addicts are:
- Impulsivity
- Low tolerance to boredom – need to be engaged in multiple activities at any one time;
- Lack of healthy activities
- Difficulties in social life
- Strained familial relationships
- Poor emotion regulation

How can we guard against smartphone or technology addiction?

- By recognising your pattern and frequency of use. The normalcy of smartphone use may cause us to overlook the frequency with which we use it.

- Set clear boundaries on your smartphone use, and keep to these. For instance, you may decide to avoid using your smartphone during a meeting or a dinner with your loved ones if you find it inappropriate.

- Listen to your family or friend. Very often, family or friends are able to recognise warning signs of smartphone addiction as they may have suffered negligence by the individual.

- Engage in healthier activities to cope with stress or relax. If you are using the smartphone excessively to grapple with your underlying problems such as anxiety or depression, please consult a mental healthcare professional to seek treatment for these issues instead.

- Maintain a balanced lifestyle. Dedicate time to eat, sleep and exercise.

- Avoid using the smartphone as your preferred choice of communication with your social networks. Make the effort to initiate face-to-face interaction instead.

If you have any questions related to addictions, you may call the All Addictions Helpline at 6-RECOVER (6-7326837) for advice and information on a confidential basis. You can also visit the NAMS website at www.nams.sg.
Getting Well = Letting Go

By Mr Jay (pseudonym)

A three-generation family living together in harmony – that was my dream. But, sadly, it was not to be. When my dream shattered, I fell into depression.

In 2010, my wife, daughter, son-in-law, two grandchildren, son, daughter-in-law and I bought a three-storey house in Sembawang. We thought that it would bring us closer but cracks started appearing after the first year. Misunderstandings over who paid for the utilities and maintenance expenses led to my son and his wife moving out.

At the same time, we discovered that my son-in-law was having an extramarital affair. My daughter was distraught but she wanted to save the marriage, as they had two young children. My wife hit the roof! She insisted that I confront him and our daughter divorce him. I, however, felt that we should not interfere in their marriage. My wife and my daughter soon stopped talking to each other.

I was working as an estates manager overseeing six or seven properties. Stress at work and home became so overwhelming that I resigned. I tried to make myself useful at home, driving my grandchildren to school, but the worsening relationship between my wife and my daughter made me fall into depression.

Those dark days in 2012 are largely a blur to me now. I could not breathe and my family called for an ambulance. I was sent to a public hospital and diagnosed with depression.

Regular check-up didn’t seem to work. I experienced insomnia and weight loss. My son-in-law moved in with his mistress. My wife stopped work to take care of me.

My condition continued to deteriorate and I was admitted to a hospital and was in and out a few times.

“The turning point came after two sessions of electroconvulsive treatment and ten sessions of family counselling. My son came to visit me in hospital and his words struck a chord in me: “Dad, you just have to accept that Mummy is not going to forgive Sis. You just have to let it go.”

And let it go I did. I travelled to Japan and Europe. By the time I returned in 2013, things had started looking up. My wife had found a new job, my daughter got pregnant again and my son-in-law moved back in with her. My wife and my daughter were reconciled and then I got a job too! Suddenly the world was a happier place!

This journey with depression has made me realise the importance of being able to let things go, the value of giving everyone their space, and not insisting on one’s own way. It was tough but I triumphed as a result of my faith and the support of my wife, my psychiatrist, hospital staff and fellow patients, and my church friends. My advice to you: “Get help if you need it and learn to let your worries go!”

Mr Jay
Presented by
THE INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (IMH)

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Following the successful staging of the production in 2013, the Institute of Mental Health presents “8 - 5” again as a fundraiser for the Woodbridge Hospital Charity Fund. In this restaging with a new cast, our staff, volunteers, and patients invite you to be challenged to see mental illness in a new light and to discover that persons with mental illness are not so different from anyone else!

Dawn is a ‘superwoman’ granddaughter, who cares on her grandfather with dementia and is guilt-stricken when she contemplates nursing homes care for him. Steph is an attractive lady struggling to shut out voices in her head. Naz is a girl-next-door whose life is disrupted by Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Their lives cross paths through Arif, a kind-hearted ‘expert’ in mental health who saves the day and even finds love where he least expects it.

CAST

[List of cast members' names and images]

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!
For any enquiries on IMH Link, please write to: The Editor
Corporate Communications Department
Institute of Mental Health
Buangkok Green Medical Park
10 Buangkok View
Singapore 539747
or email us: enquiry@imh.com.sg

EDITORIAL TEAM
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