

JUNE-SEPTEMBER 2020

IMAGINE

A MAGAZINE ON MENTAL HEALTH

BEING AN EFFECTIVE CAREGIVER

Why it is vital to look after your own well-being while caring for your loved ones

ADJUSTMENT DISORDER

When adapting to changes causes distress — and what you can do about it



Are you living with someone who has addiction issues?

For every person who has an addiction issue, at least four others close to him or her are impacted. It is challenging to care for someone with addiction problems. Families often feel stressed and helpless. Caregivers have their own needs and may suffer from physical and emotional problems. They require support too, especially when their loved ones with addiction issues are not ready to seek treatment.

You do not have to feel alone. Our team of dedicated specialists is here to listen and support you in managing your situation better.

There is help and hope. Talk to us today. Call 6-RECOVER (6-7326837) for assistance.

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Proof that wisdom and mindfulness really do increase with age.

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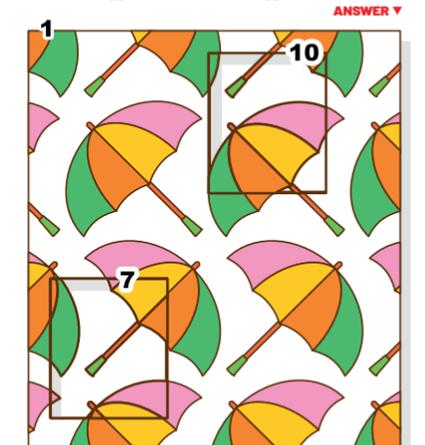
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“A holistic approach is needed to help those with an adjustment disorder, both to recover from a particular episode and to build coping skills in the hopes that future stressors do not trigger another instance of it.”

DR LEE YU WEI,
Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, IMH

Complete the picture



Turn to Live Well, page 9, for the puzzle



EDITORIAL
MESSAGE

HELP IS ALWAYS AT HAND

As we grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, much focus has been put on the mental health implications arising from the anxiety and social disruption that the virus has brought about. More than ever, we should rally together to support the vulnerable in society who need our help and understanding.

There are also those taking on caregiving duties for their loved ones, who have to shoulder this responsibility in a difficult time, which in turn puts a strain on their own mental well-being. Our cover story (pages 10-13) examines the psychological challenges that caregivers face, the self-care strategies they can employ to prevent issues such as burnout and depression, and the community resources they can tap on.

Staying on the subject of community resources, our Insight feature highlights avenues for help that are available to people with mental health concerns (pages 20-21). The message is – worries about cost and stigma should not be barriers to coming forward to get help if you need it.

In this issue, we also look at Adjustment Disorder (pages 16-17), which – in light of the ‘new normal’ characterised by safe distancing and work-from-home arrangements – is a timely topic. While it’s natural to take some time to adapt to new circumstances, it’s not okay if the stresses of doing so take an outsized toll on one’s mental state. Once more, a key message is to reach out – early intervention can make a huge difference to one’s quality of life. This is something that our profiled personality, musician Fym Summer (pages 14-15), knows only too well. Her family struggled for years with her mother’s mental health condition before turning the corner with proper diagnosis and treatment.

Remember – the quest for mental well-being doesn’t have to be a solo undertaking. It is okay to lean

on another’s shoulder at times, for only when you are open to receiving, will you be fully equipped to give. In the meantime, be safe, practise good hygiene habits, and stay positive.

Happy reading.

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KEEP CALM AND Carry On

Associate Professor Angie Chew, founder and CEO of Brahm Centre, on the importance of finding your inner calm.

Interview KOH YUEN LIN // Photo COURTESY OF BRAHM CENTRE

>> SHE IS A PICTURE OF TRANQUILITY, who speaks in a gentle manner, and often with a serene smile. Yet just a few years ago, A/Prof Angie Chew was a different person. Tumultuous life events had taken a toll on her emotionally. She was grappling with anxiety attacks that made it difficult for her to breathe. “I was trying to figure out why I wasn’t happy despite having material comforts and a successful career. I felt a void,” she recalls. Thus, she turned to practising mindfulness. “I had to train my mind to be in the present, and appreciate what I have,” she explains. “Often, the turmoil we experience – be it a sense of insecurity, perceived threats, or of being disrespected – is actually in our minds. Mindfulness allows us the clarity to recognise that.”

In 2012, A/Prof Chew founded Brahm Centre, a charity that promotes happier and healthier living through science-based mindfulness programmes.

Since then, A/Prof Chew – who left her career to work at Brahm Centre – has conducted such programmes for thousands. For her work with the elderly and people with mental health issues, she was named *The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year 2019*.

ACCEPTANCE VS RESIGNATION

Observing the frustrations many Singaporeans are experiencing, be it in life or work – and especially those impacted by COVID-19 – A/Prof Chew says that it is normal to panic or feel stressed when facing a difficult situation. “Resilience comes through being able to focus on what needs to be tackled,” she says. To her, an inner calm is necessary to achieve this. It is what enables a person to accept a situation without judgment or cynicism, look at the big picture and



EASY STEPS TO MINDFULNESS >

Taking three deep breaths makes you focus, and stops the mind from perpetuating a certain way of thinking



> Hanging out with kind and forgiving people will turn our minds into a powerhouse of positivity



A/Prof Angie Chew

Founder and CEO of Brahm Centre

“My mindfulness practice is anchored in knowing how precious time is. This allows me not to get sucked up by negative emotions.”

come up with holistic solutions. “This does not mean you are resigned to the situation, but a recognition that what has happened has happened. It liberates us from the past so that we can move forward,” she says. “Anger will just stress the body out and negatively impact the immune system. But by accepting it, the body and mind can be at ease, and can heal.”

LIVING EVERY BREATH

“My mindfulness practice is anchored in knowing how precious time is. This allows me not to get sucked up by negative emotions and instead to strive to make every moment a

good one – one that is useful to my community and family,” she says. “Another anchor is the cultivation of kindness – I want to add value and happiness to the lives that I touch.”

Mindfulness is a journey, even for A/Prof Chew, who shares easy steps to calm the mind. “Taking three deep breaths is a good start. It makes you focus on breathing, and stops the mind from perpetuating a certain way of thinking,” she says. “If you wake up in the middle of the night and find your mind crowded with thoughts, focus on your breathing, and tap your finger lightly on your bed. When the mind is focusing on one thing and not busy fabricating more thoughts, it will allow itself to go back to sleep.” She also highlights the need to surround oneself with positivity. “We are very conscious of what we eat, yet what we feed our minds is equally important. If we fill it with negativity, then it will become corrupted. If we hang out with those who are kind and forgiving, we will turn our minds into a powerhouse of positivity.”

LOVE WELL!

Hooked on SUGAR

"Uncovering this circuit helps explain how sugar directly impacts our brain to drive consumption."

- Dr Charles Zuker, lead investigator of the study

>> Those with a sweet tooth might find that artificial sweeteners just don't do the trick; new research suggests that the reason for this lies with our inherent sensory abilities. Scientists from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in the United States have found that sugar molecules trigger sensors in the gut that directly signal the brain. That's why even the slightest bit of a sweet treat can spark cravings for much more. Published in *Nature*, the study revealed a unique gut-to-brain

pathway that is kickstarted when we ingest sugar. This pathway makes the brain crave more sugar. But as the researchers put it, it appears picky, and is only activated by sugar molecules — and not artificial sweeteners. "Uncovering this circuit helps explain how sugar directly impacts our brain to drive consumption," explained lead investigator Dr Charles Zuker. "It also exposes new potential targets and opportunities for strategies to help curtail our insatiable appetite for sugar."



MID-YEAR, NEW ME
You've probably taken a stab at making a list of New Year's resolutions, but have you tried a mid-year resolution? >

Source: Psychology Today



Commonly thought of in July, these resolutions may be easier to adopt, since they don't come with the same pressure as those that are made at the start of the year. Since half a year has already passed, you get to look back and see where your New Year's resolutions went awry. Yet you still have time to make this the year that you finally lose those extra kilos or take up a sport you always wanted to try. Here are some useful tips to remember when crafting them:

- > **ONE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER:** Focus on one goal at a time. Achieved that one? Then go ahead and think about the next one.
- > **GO EASY:** Breaking up goals into smaller, more manageable ones can help you feel less intimidated.
- > **THE ENVIRONMENT MATTERS:** Want to stop snacking? Remove the temptation by removing unhealthy snacks from your home.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE BACK OF YOUR HAND? NOT VERY, IT SEEMS.

To know something "as well as you know the back of your hand" is often thought to be a marker of knowing something very well; but new research suggests that most of us aren't that familiar with the back of our hands in the first place.

Published in *PLOS ONE*, the study by Canada's York University examined how accurately individuals could judge the size of the back and the palm of their hands. It also observed how viewing the hand from a different perspective distorted one's perception of hand size.

Researchers were surprised to find that the study participants' perceived length of the back and the palm of their hands were different from each other. The length of the back of the hand was overestimated even though palm length was perceived accurately. "We see the backs of our hands far more than our palms; and yet it is the backs of our hands that are inaccurately represented in the brain," noted Sarah D'Amour, who contributed to the study.



#KNOW THIS
The study's results imply that perceptions of our body — even parts that are regularly seen — may not be entirely based on vision. This can be useful in helping people who have extremely distorted perceptions of their own body.

WISDOM BEGETS WELLNESS

There may be some science behind the adage "Life gets better with age". Research by Flinders University in Australia suggests that older people have the wisdom and time to use mindfulness to improve their well-being. They came to this conclusion after an online community survey of 623 participants aged between 18 and 86 years. It showed that certain characteristics of mindfulness are more common in older people

than in younger ones. This suggests that mindfulness may naturally develop with time and life experience, explained the study's co-author Associate Professor Tim Windsor.

As part of their study, researchers assessed participants' mindful qualities and found that older respondents were more likely to focus on the present moment and approach experiences in a non-judgmental way. "The ability to appreciate

the temporary nature of personal experiences may be particularly important for the way people manage their day-to-day goals across the second half of life," said study lead author Leeann Mahlo. "These characteristics are helpful in adapting to age-related challenges and in generating positive emotions."

DID YOU KNOW?
Using mindfulness techniques can reduce stress and promote well-being



> TURN OFF CYBERBULLYING

As the office becomes a virtual space, workplace bullying can also go online, with a study by researchers from the University of Loughborough in the UK showing that four in five employees experienced cyberbullying at least once in the past six months.

Another study of employees of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union found that commonly-used bullying methods involved: withholding information, spreading gossip, being subjected to allegations against them, and being exposed to unmanageable workloads.

"The idea to trash people we don't particularly like is not new, but cell phones, computers and social media make it so much easier to inflict widespread damage through the spread of rumours, outright lies or compromising photos," said Dr Teresa Daniel, Dean of the Human Resource Leadership programme at Sullivan University in the United States. Dr Daniel, who has co-authored a book on the matter, has these tips to share:

1. **If you're a victim:** Don't suffer in silence. Keep all evidence of your experience and speak to a supervisor whom you are comfortable with.
2. **If you're a people manager:** "If an employee comes to you with a complaint, listen carefully, take it seriously, and investigate the situation quickly and thoroughly."

Source: Personnel Today

STOP
CYBER
BULLYING

Don't be blind to bullying

British human resources publication *Personnel Today* illustrates seemingly harmless actions that are actually a form of cyberbullying:

> **A SOCIAL MEDIA POST** about an employee's incompetence or actions.

- > **AN EMAIL** from a colleague that carries an unpleasant undertone.
- > **FLOOD OF EMAILS** from a manager just before you go on leave on matters that could have been dealt with much earlier.

SAME TUNE, DIFFERENT BEAT

The same piece of music can cause two hearts to respond very differently, literally. That's the conclusion of a new study by the European Society of Cardiology (ESC). Explaining the results of the study, lead author Professor Elaine Chew said, "We used precise methods to record the heart's response to music and found that what is calming for one person can be arousing for another."

While previous studies used one's heart rate to measure moods, this study used the heart's recovery time, which refers to the time it takes the heart to recover after a heartbeat. Researchers found that change in the heart's recovery time was significantly different from person to person at the same junctures in the music. It reduced by as much as 5 milliseconds for some, indicating increased stress or arousal. And

recovery time lengthened by up to 5 milliseconds for others, suggesting greater relaxation.

Prof Chew said, "By understanding how an individual's heart reacts to musical changes, we plan to design tailored music interventions to elicit the desired response." This could possibly be used to reduce blood pressure or lower the risk of heart rhythm disorders without the side effects of medication.



POSTURE AFFECTS POSITIVITY

Working from home will be the norm for some time in Singapore, even as the economy gradually reopens. For many, that means hours of working off the sofa, dining chair or even bed. These surfaces may initially sound comfortable but they can inevitably cause you to slouch, since they do not support you adequately.

Poor posture doesn't just hamper productivity; it can also take a toll on your mental well-being. A study from Canada's York University found a link between one's posture and the ability to think positive and negative thoughts. Published in *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, the study revealed that it was easier to generate positive thoughts while in an upright position than it was while slumping or slouching. The study results later led researchers to conclude, "Slouched posture tends to increase access to helpless, hopeless, powerless and depressive thoughts as well as increased head, neck and shoulder pain."

Simple hacks to tackle these issues:

- > **MOVE AROUND EVERY HALF AN HOUR:** Make it a point to get up and move around every 30 minutes or so.
- > **KEEP YOUR LAPTOP AT THE RIGHT LEVEL:** Elevate your laptop by placing it on a stable support surface, such as a laptop stand or a stack of thick books. Your eyes should naturally hit the top third of your screen when you look straight ahead.
- > **FIND THE RIGHT SIZE:** Laptops are designed to be portable, so their screens are often much smaller than standard monitors. A smaller screen may cause you to strain to see text and objects. Increasing the font size is also a good workaround.

Holding out for a hero

Why are heroes so quick to brush off their own acts of heroism? A new study, published in *Social Psychology and Personality Science*, might hold the answer.

The study's author Dr Nadav Klein believes it boils down to differences in perception between those performing such acts (actors) and those observing them (observers). "Actors may judge themselves relative to what they could have done to help, whereas observers may judge actors based on what they have actually done," he shared. He added that actors may also be affected when outcomes are not uniformly positive; for instance, when a firefighter saves some people, but not all, from a fire.

He came to this conclusion from his study, which involved three groups of participants with different

tasks: The first group read news reports of an act of heroism, while the second group was tasked to write about a heroic act they had performed or witnessed. The final group watched a video of a heroic act and were asked to imagine themselves performing such an act. His team found that the participants mostly agreed that the heroes they had watched or read about had downplayed the impact of their actions. They also found that the participants' descriptions of their own heroism were more muted and modest than those describing acts they had witnessed.





#KNOW THIS
Despite their benefits, video conferencing tools can also have serious drawbacks. "Zoom fatigue" is one.

Zoom gloom

Socialising seems like a tall order in the current climate, but technology, through video conferencing software, has made it easier than ever to stay connected, both socially and professionally.

Despite their benefits, video conferencing tools can also have serious drawbacks. "Zoom fatigue" is one. It is an emerging term that describes tiredness resulting from overusing the ubiquitous app and its contemporaries like Google Meet, Skype Meet Now or FaceTime. That's because video conferencing hides many non-verbal cues we depend on in our interactions. During an in-person conversation, the brain focuses partly on the words being spoken, while also attaching meaning to non-verbal cues, such as whether someone is fidgeting while talking, or if someone inhales quickly in preparation to interrupt.

These cues disappear when we go online: a framed shot can hide hand gestures and other expressions, while poor video quality can dash any hopes of gleaning non-verbal facial cues. Multi-person screens only multiply this problem. While it would be challenging to stop video conferencing altogether, what you can do is implement these simple tips shared by mental health experts that were published in the *South China Morning Post*:

> **TAKE A BREAK:** Allow employees to have short breaks during long virtual meetings. A dedicated bathroom break in meetings would be widely appreciated.

> **LAUGH IT OFF:** So you're playing around with the settings and accidentally turned yourself into a potato during an important meeting, just like one famous netizen earlier

this year. Instead of stressing out, just laugh off the moment; if you're in a position of power, understand that such situations can be extremely stressful.

> **ENCOURAGE NOTES:** Boost concentration by taking notes with a pen and paper; this can keep feelings of being overwhelmed at bay.

Look good when you're on camera

The key to feeling good is looking good; so the next time you're on a conference call for work, follow these tips from style guru Tom Ford to look your absolute best:

- > **PLACE A PIECE OF WHITE PAPER** on the table where you are sitting; this will reflect the light and create a warm glow.
- > **POINT THE CAMERA** downwards towards your eyes.
- > **USE A LAMP** next to your computer; keep it in line with or slightly behind your screen, so that the light falls nicely on your face.



Source: The New York Times

Why #NOFILTER is BETTER

Do you often take a selfie and spend a few minutes "perfecting it" by removing dark eye circles and blemishes from your photo?

This may seem like a way of boosting self-esteem, but in reality, it may negatively influence how you feel about your looks. That's according to a study from Flinders University in Australia, where researchers analysed the selfie habits of 130 women aged 18 to 30.

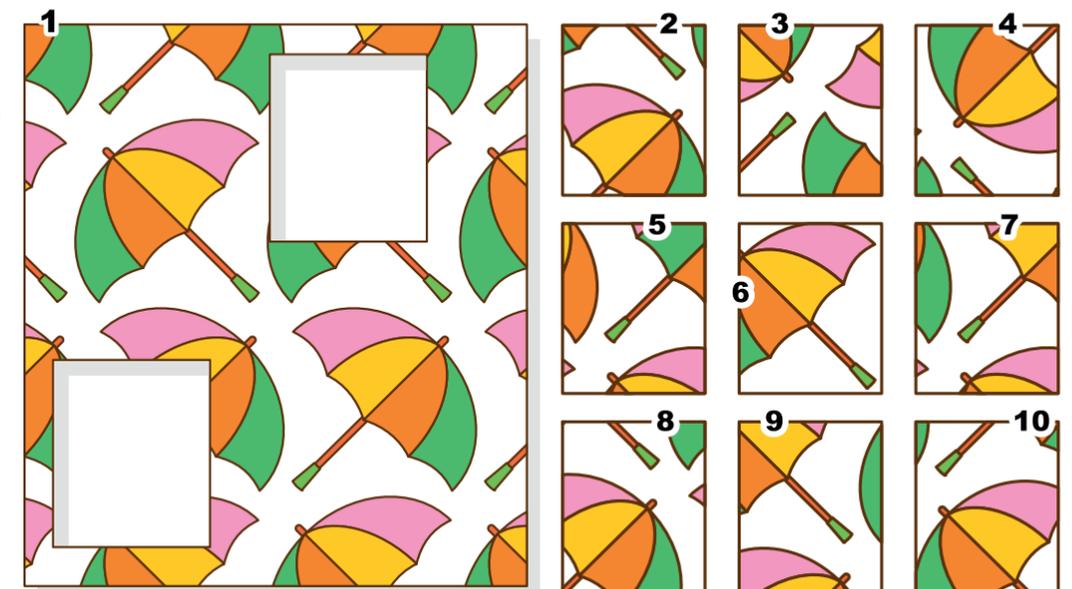
On average, the participants spent about four and a half minutes editing their selfies to smoothen and change skin tone, remove dark eye circles, shape their faces and remove flaws. Researchers found that the longer it took for them to edit their photo, the poorer their mood and the greater their feelings of dissatisfaction after. "This demonstrates that the editing of selfies is not a benign process but has negative consequences, even though participants reported being much happier with their edited selfie than their original photo," said Professor Marika Tiggemann. So the next time you decide to capture a moment, why not go *au naturale* and ditch the filters and editing software? You might just be happier because of it.



Complete the picture

Which of the two options marked 2 – 10 fit the missing spaces in image 1?

REFER TO THE CONTENTS PAGE FOR PUZZLE ANSWER



Self-care for better Caregiving

As the adage goes, “it is impossible to pour from an empty cup”. Thus, it is vital for caregivers of individuals with mental health issues to pay attention to their own well-being, too.

Text **THERESE TAY** in consultation with **MS CHAN LAY LIN**, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department, IMH



“Many caregivers cope by keeping the condition of their loved ones a secret. In doing so, they withdraw from extended families or social support, which contributes to more caregiving challenges and tension in the home.”

MS CHAN LAY LIN, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department, IMH

Torn, stretched and sometimes, trapped. That’s how Mr Jared Goh felt when he became a caregiver about 15 years ago to his sister who has major depression, anxiety and panic disorders. As the only breadwinner in his family, he felt immense stress and frustration juggling the demands of his job, looking after his family’s day-to-day needs and learning to provide better care for his sister. “I was at a loss,” he says. When his sister’s psychiatrist suggested that he seek out Caregiver Alliance Limited (CAL), a non-profit organisation providing support to caregivers of persons with mental health issues, Mr Goh decided to give it a shot. “With nothing to lose, I joined CAL’s training programme for caregivers. Everyone in the class was a caregiver and the trainers were also caregivers. I immediately felt that I was not alone.”

Like Mr Goh, who subsequently joined CAL and presently serves as its Head of Operations and Partnerships, there are many in Singapore who are caring for loved ones with mental health issues. While it is a rewarding experience for many, caregiving can also be emotionally and physically demanding. Getting the required

support and looking after one’s own well-being can make a big difference in a caregiver’s journey.

THE STRESS OF CAREGIVING

Looking after a person with mental health issues can be challenging. “It’s very common for new caregivers to feel overwhelmed, unconfident and uncertain about their role as a caregiver. These feelings are a common cause of caregiver stress,” says a spokesperson from the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

Many caregivers also belong to the “sandwich generation”, says Ms Chan Lay Lin, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department, Institute of Mental Health (IMH). These are typically middle-aged people who have to balance taking care of their children and extended family members such as elderly parents or adult siblings

with mental health issues. “The burden of caregiving can take a toll on them both physically and psychologically – and also affect their whole family,” she adds.

Studies also suggest that there is considerable affiliate stigma – internalised negative perceptions of being a close associate or family member of someone who is ill – among caregivers of those with mental health conditions. A 2018 study by researchers from IMH, which interviewed 350 caregivers of individuals with mental health conditions, found that a high proportion – over 90% – of caregivers experience affiliate stigma in Singapore when a relative develops mental illness. Affected individuals are more likely to experience negative emotions, such as shame, low self-esteem and anger. This in turn can adversely affect their own mental well-being and quality of life.

“Caregivers of persons with conditions commonly associated with strong social stigma, like mental illness, carry the additional burden of shame and guilt,” agrees Ms Chan. “Many cope by keeping the condition of their loved ones a secret. In doing so, they withdraw or isolate themselves from extended families or social support, which contributes to more caregiving challenges and tension in the home.”

BEATING THE BURNOUT

If left unattended, stress can have

IS CAREGIVING TAKING A TOLL ON YOU?

Learn to recognise the signs



- I **avoid** pleasurable or meaningful activities because I feel guilty about taking time off from caregiving
- I **have trouble** sleeping and eating
- I experience feelings of **exhaustion** or **severe tiredness**
- I am **unable to enjoy** activities I once found pleasurable
- I am **constantly fearful, worried** or **irritable**
- I believe that others **do not care**, or appreciate my struggles as a caregiver
- I believe that **only I** can provide adequate care for my loved one
- I **feel hopeless** and trapped in my caregiving role
- I grapple with **thoughts of suicide** because I feel overwhelmed, worthless or inadequate



serious implications on the caregivers' psychological well-being. They may face caregiver burnout or develop mental health issues as well. "When the demands of caregiving are perceived as overwhelming and exceed the perceived resources of the caregiver, burnout occurs," says Ms Chan. "It contributes to lethargy, and mixed feelings of anger and guilt. The burnt-out caregiver experiences a sense of being unappreciated. The caregiver may also feel that the role they play is hopeless and meaningless."

While there are many ways to prevent or manage caregiver burnout, a crucial point to understand is "no man is an island" and that there are avenues for caregivers to seek help, says Mr Goh. CAL, for instance, runs the Caregivers-to-Caregivers Training Programme (C2C), a 12-week course designed to equip caregivers with knowledge and skills. "The length of the C2C programme allows caregivers to bond and learn from other caregivers in the class. Many of the participants become good friends and support each other thereafter," he says.

For Mr Goh, the C2C programme

helped him with his emotional healing and well-being. In fact, the training inspired him to eventually become an active volunteer, helping to facilitate subsequent classes. "Helping other caregivers assisted me in coming to terms with my own situation. Some of them, like me, have even joined CAL as full-time staff. Today, almost half of CAL staff are caregivers," says Mr Goh.

CAL has, over the past eight years, trained more than 5,000 caregivers. Besides the 12-week C2C programme, participants can attend single-session workshops or modular workshops on various topics. Similarly, IMH's medical social workers hold a monthly Caregivers' Roadshow for members of the public supporting loved ones with mental illness to help them in their caregiving journey. AIC, together with the Ministry of Health, has also worked with community partners to establish 43 community outreach teams to engage caregivers. The teams provide information about the conditions, offer basic emotional support, and link caregivers up with social and healthcare services that provide training. In general,

these teams aim to empower caregivers to better care for themselves and thus, take better care of those in their charge. The community outreach teams are supported by community intervention teams, which provide assessment, counselling and

psychoeducation for clients with mental health issues and their caregivers.

Beyond these, caregivers sometimes just need time off – to rest and recharge. "Self-care is essential for caregivers' well-being. However, this often requires a change in mindset for caregivers. They should be prioritising their own well-being alongside that of their loved ones," says the AIC spokesperson. "Caregiving can be a long journey, and always putting others' needs first can lead to burnout. Who will care for their loved ones then?"

“Helping other caregivers assisted me in coming to terms with my own situation. Some of them, like me, have even joined CAL as full-time staff.”



MR JARED GOH, Caregiver and Head of Operations and Partnerships, CAL



Helping Yourself, To Help Others

Ms Chan Lay Lin, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department, IMH, shares some self-care strategies that caregivers can take to safeguard their own well-being.



- 1 **Understand your loved ones' condition** and learn the skills required to give them the care they need. Read up, be curious and pose your questions to your healthcare team and develop a collaborative relationship with them.
- 2 The caregiver's journey need not be a lonely one. **Ask for regular support** to take on different caregiving duties, for example, bringing the care recipient to the doctor or for outings, and help with home chores. This support can come from the family or external agencies.
- 3 **Make time for yourself** to do what is meaningful to you, like spiritual activities, hobbies or regular short walks, on a daily basis.
- 4 **Join groups, and connect** with other caregivers for peer support. Together, you can advocate for gaps in services for yourself and your loved ones.
- 5 **Know your limits.** Seek support and be brave to ask for help. Asking for help does not mean that you are weak.
- 6 **Set up a schedule** that not only focuses on the care routine, but your self-care too. Try to keep to these routines.

COUNTING HIS BLESSINGS

MR RAJ (NOT HIS REAL NAME), 53, IS A SECURITY OFFICER TAKING CARE OF HIS CHILDREN WHO HAVE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. HE SHARES HIS EXPERIENCE.

"My daughter, who is 26, and my son, 18, are both living with intellectual disability. My daughter also hears voices in her head. I am the sole breadwinner and also the main caregiver for my family. I take care of my children's needs such as bringing them for regular medical appointments and ensuring that they attend school and vocational programmes.

I do find myself physically and mentally stretched. This was especially so in the earlier days, when my children were very young. I was working in a more demanding job with shift timings. I was also younger then, and didn't have the right mindset and



caregiving knowledge. Out of frustration, I would sometimes get really angry with my family.

After talking to counsellors and attending workshops, I feel more empowered. For instance, I attended a weekly caregiving course for nine weeks, which not only allowed me to learn the necessary skills but gave me a chance to meet and interact with other caregivers too.

I also discovered religion and am now an active member of my church. When I'm stressed or need help, I rely on the friendship and kinship of my fellow churchgoers. I also find relief in my prayers. I have learnt to take care of myself; to accept help when I need it and to be physically healthier — I quit smoking eight years ago. At the end of the day, I feel that counting my blessings is key to a happy and peaceful life."



A Family healed

Having seen the effects of untreated mental illness up close in her youth as a result of her mother's struggle with schizophrenia, singer-songwriter **Ms Foo Yumin (Fym Summer)** can attest that proper diagnosis and treatment offer a way forward.

Interview **MIN EE MAO** Photos Courtesy of **FYM SUMMER**

MS FOO YUMIN (FYM SUMMER)

29, singer-songwriter

Our issues started when I was about 15. My mother, then 42, became highly temperamental and aggressive. She also acted in unreasonable ways – accusing my younger sister and me, often in the middle of the night, of stealing her jewellery and other belongings. It was impossible to have a proper conversation with her, much less expect her to listen to logic. Our coping mechanism then was to lock ourselves in our bedroom so she could not attack us verbally or physically.

We suspected that my mom's paranoia stemmed from work.

Prior to the flare-ups, she had been a loving and doting mother. She worked as a salesperson in a mall, and strived to be the best at her job. However, when a colleague started to achieve better sales numbers, she began getting jealous and competitive. Over time she also grew paranoid, and claimed that a voice had warned her that she was being watched by CCTVs. I wouldn't be surprised if work-related pressures had a hand in triggering her symptoms.



I often found myself asking what I had done to deserve such a family situation. As the elder sibling, I had to, however, be strong and protect my sister, who is two years my junior. I also felt a lot of resentment towards my father, who kept urging us to just tolerate our mother's volatility. Life at home became intolerable – this lasted a good 10 years – so my sister and I often stayed out to study in cafes till late. Thankfully, we both did well in school. I managed to obtain honours degrees in Business and Psychology, and my sister is now pursuing a career as a graphic designer.

Eventually, about four years ago, I reported my mother's actions to the police. In trying to protect my sister and me, my father, who is now 63, took a blow from my mom and hit a wall. I was fearful and did not know what else to do. The police arrived and my mom was later sent to a hospital for psychiatric help. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia, a mental disorder characterised by fragmented mental processes and symptoms including hallucinations and delusions.

My mom resisted treatment at first and took some time to accept her condition. She eventually came to terms with it and started her recovery process. For us, it was the beginning of a more hopeful journey forward. We all visited her and since her discharge, we have been taking turns to accompany her to her follow-up appointments. We have a roster for that, as well as for her medication regimen at home. I also started to learn more about schizophrenia by doing my own research online and speaking to her

“As a society, we should cultivate empathy and compassion, and be open to learning about mental health issues. They can affect any one of us and should not be taken lightly.”

care team. Understanding the condition better has helped to improve my relationship with my mom.

There's finally peace in our family. My relationship with my mom, now 56, is pleasant, and reminiscent of our relationship when I was a child, before the tumultuous decade between 2006 and 2016. Do I bear a grudge towards her for those years? It has taken me a long time to finally be able to say that I no longer do. That being said, we don't really speak of the past. She seems to have little memory of the episodes, and I would rather not trigger her symptoms by bringing up those dark days.

I didn't realise the experience had affected how I relate to people as well. I tended to be short-tempered and controlling especially towards those near and dear to me. One day, a close friend suggested that I seek therapy. Initially, I was vehemently opposed to the idea, but decided to give it a try. In the six months that I was in therapy, I discovered that I had experienced childhood trauma, and the helplessness had driven me to be obsessive in various areas of my

life. Just knowing that helped me move forward in a more positive way.

Many of us lack mental health awareness. Perhaps we would rather not talk about or address it due to the stigma attached to mental health conditions. Mental illnesses are also often dismissed as ridiculous, unreasonable or sometimes even, hilarious. As a society, we should cultivate empathy and compassion, and be open to learning about mental health issues. They can affect any one of us and should not be taken lightly because if not dealt with correctly, the consequences can be harmful and brutal.

To raise awareness and acceptance of mental health issues, I've written and performed songs as part of the 3am Music Collective. It is an initiative by a group of local musicians who aim to remove the stigma so that those suffering can get help without fear or shame. I've contributed two songs so far and hope that these enable a deeper understanding of the issues. After all, music speaks louder than words.



Listen to Fym Summer's latest single **'Spark'**, initiated by the 3am Music Collective, on iTunes, Spotify and other major music streaming platforms. The song describes the glimmer of hope that the singer felt having emerged on the other side after struggling with the symptoms of her mother's mental illness. To check out her full discography, go to iamfymsummer.bandcamp.com.



Fym and her mother now look forward to a more positive and hopeful journey together

When adapting leads to stress

Just as every individual is unique, stressors impact us differently and coping with them may prove tough for some. What does it mean to have an **adjustment disorder** and how might it be overcome?

Interview **THERESE TAY** in consultation with **DR LEE YU WEI**, Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, IMH // Photos **GETTYIMAGES**



>> LILY (NOT HER REAL NAME)

started having suicidal thoughts when she found out that her husband was having an extra-marital affair. She also had trouble sleeping and was unable to shift her thoughts or distract herself from this. Unable to cope with the new reality of her situation, she became withdrawn from friends and couldn't function at work. Lily sought help and was eventually diagnosed with an adjustment disorder.

An adjustment disorder is a short-term response to significant changes or stressors in one's life, with emotional or physical symptoms that begin to show within three months of the stressful trigger. The response to stress may be marked and out of keeping with the person's usual reactions, says Dr Lee Yu Wei, Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, Institute of Mental Health (IMH). "Besides the excessive, marked distress, people with an adjustment



“Though some stressors can be universally seen as traumatic, others may be apparently minor — such as going to a new school, the loss of a relationship or starting National Service.”

DR LEE YU WEI,

Consultant, Department of Mood and Anxiety, IMH

disorder will experience significant impairment in functioning in daily life," says Dr Lee. "For example, they may be unable to work, go to school or do the things they used to enjoy."

There are, however, differences between such a disorder and everyday adjustment or adaptation issues. It is normal for anyone to have some challenges coping with changes and stress, Dr Lee says. Citing the example of someone who migrates to another country, Dr Lee explains, "The individual may be worried about adapting to a new environment and how people would view

him. These are natural reactions that are in keeping with starting afresh in a new place." Another example would be someone who has landed a new job and is initially worried about performing well. What these individuals experience are normal reactions one would expect to have when faced with changes. Such adjustment or adaptation issues do not have lasting impact and are comparatively more common. However, "if he were to become extremely preoccupied with the move and start being overly anxious or have panic

attacks and is unable to cope, this might eventually be diagnosed as an adjustment disorder," Dr Lee adds.

It is key to note that what is considered stressful depends on individual circumstances. "Though some stressors can be universally seen as traumatic, others may be apparently minor — such as going to a new school, the loss of a relationship or starting National Service," Dr Lee says. Stressors that aren't personal, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, can contribute to an adjustment disorder as well. And despite the seemingly trivial nature of some events, the discomfort, distress, turmoil and anguish felt by someone dealing with an adjustment disorder are very real, says Dr Lee.

COMPREHENSIVE INVESTIGATION NEEDED

Symptoms, which include anxiety attacks, suicidal thoughts, trouble sleeping and feeling overwhelmed or sad, may persist for up to three months after a stressor is triggered. They also vary considerably and may manifest as depressive or anxiety symptoms. Thus, an adjustment disorder is diagnosed after clinical interviews with a psychiatrist who may order medical tests and assessments based on the symptoms presented. Generally, it would be good practice to include medical tests to rule out other issues as well, Dr Lee says.

As for any predisposition to an adjustment disorder, Dr Lee says life experiences can impact how individuals cope with stress. For instance, the risk of developing this disorder may be higher for those who have experienced significant stress in childhood, are facing a number of difficult life circumstances at the same time, or have other mental health issues. Dr Lee says that it has been observed that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds — for instance, children from abusive households — are at an increased risk. Such individuals may experience a higher rate of stressors in life and could also be less able to cope with changes.

If left unresolved, the condition could eventually lead to more serious

mental health problems such as anxiety disorders, depression or substance abuse.

FIRST, STOP THE STRESSOR

With appropriate help and treatment, individuals with an adjustment disorder can expect to recover completely. Because an adjustment disorder is caused by a stressor, naturally the most effective treatment is to put a stop to what is causing stress to the individual in the first place. Once the stressor has been identified and removed, the symptoms should not persist for more than an additional six months, Dr Lee says.

"This is not, however, always feasible or possible; for instance, it could be someone who had recently declared bankruptcy or lost a limb," Dr Lee acknowledges. "So, we will help the person learn how to cope with the situation and adjust to a new lifestyle." This can be done through psychotherapy, such as family and group therapies, and cognitive behavioural therapy, which aims to identify stressors, and teach coping skills — such as relaxation techniques or learning how to process or think about the stressor differently — and

TREATMENT
A holistic approach — combining medication and the use of social coping skills — is needed to help those with an adjustment disorder.

behavioural change. "For example, if an avid runner lost his or her leg in an accident and develops an adjustment disorder, helping the person find new meaning via therapy can help to realign the person's perspectives." Depending on the issues the individual is facing, other care providers, such as a medical social worker, may be roped in to organise financial assistance or other forms of support. "Even though it doesn't quite remove the root cause of the disorder, it can help to take a little bit off a person's plate. Hopefully, this allows the coping mechanism within the individual to protect him from further trauma, and to allow healing."

Medication is sometimes given as it may help alleviate the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Antidepressants and short-term sedatives are most often used. Ultimately, Dr Lee says, "A holistic approach is needed to help someone with an adjustment disorder, both to recover from a particular episode and to build social coping skills in the hopes that future stressors do not trigger another instance of an adjustment disorder."

COPING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Having trouble adjusting when bad news hits? Try these tips:

- **Keep Healthy** Adopting a healthy lifestyle that includes good sleep, a healthy diet and regular exercise will put you in the best position — physically and mentally — to deal with any stressful event that may come your way.
- **Build resilience** Resilience is the ability to adapt well to stress and adversity. If you are resilient, you tend to "bounce back" faster from an undesirable event. There are various ways to build resilience. Here are some to consider: recognise and develop personal strengths; learn from past experiences on how to react to, and cope with, difficult times; try

to face your fears and take up challenges.

- **Prioritise self-care** Take time to do the things you love and which help you relax.
- **Rally social support** Spend more time with family and friends who form your support network. If meeting face-to-face is difficult, organise virtual get-togethers through apps like Zoom or Skype. Some of these have quizzes and games that help to facilitate interaction.



The father figure

With over two decades in the field of child psychiatry, Associate Professor Daniel Fung stresses the importance of empathy and the need to ‘swim upstream’ to address mental health issues among the young early.

Interview **THERESA TAN** Main photo **COURTESY OF IMH**

When A/Prof Daniel Fung was in his fourth year of medical school, a university schoolmate of his committed suicide. “I was affected by that,” he admits. “Being a medical professional-in-training, I felt I should have recognised the warning signs. His death made me think about pursuing psychiatry.”

Today, at 54, he is the Chairman of the Medical Board at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). He is also the President of the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions (IACAPAP), an international non-governmental association that advocates for the mental health and development of children and adolescents through policy, practice and research.

A/Prof Fung initially intended to be a general practitioner. “I wanted to be a people-oriented doctor,” he explains. Psychiatry entered his radar not just because of his classmate — but also two other doctors who inspired him. One was the late Dr John White, a psychiatrist who was also an evangelist, and the other was the man who would become his father-in-law, the late Dr Goh Choo Woon, who was a child psychiatrist.

Rescuing ‘Cinderella’

A/Prof Fung joined Woodbridge Hospital



A/PROF DANIEL FUNG

Chairman, Medical Board, IMH

(now known as IMH) in 1993, but it was no smooth journey pursuing this speciality. He found himself answering to incredulous peers who wanted to know why he would do such a thing. “I went into psychiatry knowing about the stigma. People were proud of their cardiologist, for example, but they probably wouldn’t introduce their psychiatrist to their friends,” he says with a smile. “But that stigma attracted me. I felt that I could maybe make people think differently about psychiatry.”

He decided to specialise in child psychiatry. “I wanted to work with kids,

maybe because I am one myself,” he laughs. “I do like children; they are simple, honest, frank and easier to read.” A/Prof Fung describes child psychiatry as “the Cinderella of psychiatry” because it was a neglected area at the time. When he joined IMH as a medical officer trainee, there were just four consultants in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (now known as Department of Developmental Psychiatry). “It was a small sub-specialty,” he says.

Things are quite different today. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Child Guidance Clinic (CGC),



50 GOOD YEARS
This year marks the 50th anniversary of the **Child Guidance Clinic (CGC)**, which started in 1970 as a separate unit outside Woodbridge Hospital to avoid stigma.

which started in 1970 as a separate unit outside Woodbridge Hospital to avoid stigma. “The CGC also marked the beginning of child psychiatry in Singapore,” A/Prof Fung explains. “We now have sub-specialties within child psychiatry, and a department of over 100, including psychiatrists, nurses, allied health professionals and administrative staff. It takes a village to raise a child, as they say.”

In his work, he sees two types of issues among children seeking help: developmental issues and stress-related issues. “A lot of what we do today is on the side of stress-related issues.”

Swimming Upstream

Child psychiatrists are a special breed of doctors who have a unique combination of abilities, says Dr Fung. “He needs to be a good doctor; he needs to be able to evaluate and have a medical approach. Yet at the same time, he must be able to relate well to the child and his family — he must find ways to support the parents and the child.” He adds that this field is unlike traditional medicine, because working with children requires a different skillset: “You need to be able to work with everyone — you’re like a coach. Colleagues will find you a bit different. You innovate and create a lot, and people may find that disconcerting.” He is unapologetic about that. “Children are the future. What we do now is so critical,” he says.

Reflecting on the last 50 years of child psychiatry, A/Prof Fung concludes that there is a need for greater adaptation towards upstream efforts in the coming years. “We must deal with childhood mental health early,” he points out. “As Bishop Desmond Tutu (*the South African civil rights activist*) once said, ‘There comes a point where we should stop just pulling people out of rivers. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.’ There are long-term consequences to not dealing with

childhood mental health — you see the manifestations in adulthood.”

As President of IACAPAP, he has two roles: one, to fight the battle on the forefront by being a practising child psychiatrist, and two, to consider the big picture. “My role in helping children involves finding ways to motivate interest and to advocate for their mental health; to get political leaders and social leaders involved in taking care of our

them to fail?” He cites sports as such an environment. “In sports, you will lose sometimes. When you fail, learn from it and recover, then you build resilience.”

It’s a philosophy he has put into practice with his own children. Passionate as he is about his patients, A/Prof Fung’s love for children emanates from his own five: four girls and a boy aged between 20 and 27. His children did not have

“We must deal with childhood mental health early. There are long-term consequences to not dealing with childhood mental health — you see the manifestations in adulthood.”

mental resource,” he says. “Physical health is taken care of, but do we do enough to protect children emotionally and help them develop well?”

A Parenting Philosophy in Practice

“How do we help children to manage stress? How do we help them create a balance? We teach them that you can’t avoid the breakdown, but aim for the breakthrough,” A/Prof Fung says. “There are many young people who are unhappy because they can’t deal with stress, or they have low self-esteem, and a lot of the time it is linked to failure,” he notes. “So how do we protect them, how do we create a safe environment for

mobile phones until they were in secondary school. They grew up in the 2000s, watching *Toy Story* ad nauseum, and his wife would take them to playgrounds outdoors. The family would also go bowling together, as A/Prof Fung likes the sport, and his daughters eventually became members of the National Junior League.

If there is one piece of advice A/Prof Fung will give, it is to be grateful. “There is not enough gratitude in people, on a personal level and as a country. We complain too much, we’re cynical,” he says. “My philosophy is to be thankful for what I have and help others as much as I can.”

REACHING OUT

A/Prof Fung considers spearheading the **Response, Early Intervention and Assessment in Community mental Health (REACH)** programme as one of his greatest achievements. REACH uses school-based interventions to improve the mental health of children aged six to 18, and identify any emotional, behavioural and developmental disorders early.



MANY PATHS TO Peace of Mind

Unsure about where to turn to for **mental health help**? Here are some pointers for navigating the resources and services that are available.

Interview **ASHOK SOMAN** in consultation with **MS TEO GINNYUEH**, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department, IMH



Getting help early can make a difference in your recovery journey.

>> **OUR MENTAL WELL-BEING** cannot be ignored, especially in tough times. In Singapore, the second *Singapore Mental Health Study* (SMHS), initiated in 2016, showed that one in seven people here had experienced a mood, anxiety or alcohol use disorder in their lives, which was up from one in eight from the last such survey in 2010. In addition, the proportion of people living with mental health conditions who were not seeking any professional help remained high.

The SMHS also found that there are several reasons why people don't seek treatment – from concerns associated with stigma to not knowing where and how to get help, and worries about cost of treatment.

Getting help early can make a difference in your recovery journey. In Singapore, there are many avenues available for people with mental health conditions. Here are some facts on how and where you can seek help, when needed.

Wellness Continuum

As Ms Teo Ginnyueh, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), explains, one's mental health lies on a continuum, between wellness and having a serious mental illness. Mental health problems may range from feeling mildly stressed to being overwhelmed with debilitating symptoms of mental

illness, and unable to cope with daily life tasks. She recommends that individuals with severe and acute mental health symptoms – who may cause harm to themselves and others – seek immediate attention from Emergency Services at IMH.

For non-urgent situations, she says that individuals could seek help from their General Practitioners (GPs) or a polyclinic. If necessary, the doctor can provide a referral for an outpatient consultation at IMH, or any restructured hospitals near their homes.

First Contact

Like any other illness, help for mental health issues can be found right in one's neighbourhood. "General practitioners are often the first touch point for most of us when we are unwell. The same can apply to mental health conditions. Untreated symptoms may worsen and require hospitalisation," says Ms Teo.

Through initiatives such as the Mental Health – GP Partnership Programme, there is a growing number of GPs who are equipped to detect and provide services to people with mild to moderate mental health issues. From the patients' perspective, being treated at a GP clinic near their homes may also be more convenient than going to a hospital. If necessary, GPs are able to refer the individual and coordinate access to specialist care.



NEED A GP PROFICIENT IN MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT?

Refer to the Agency for Integrated Care's **Mind Matters Resource Directory**, which provides a listing of available mental health services including GPs providing mental health treatment.

Scan the QR code below for more information:



“General practitioners are often the first touch point for most of us when we are unwell. The same can apply to mental health conditions. Untreated symptoms may worsen and require hospitalisation.”



MS TEO GINNYUEH, Principal Medical Social Worker, Medical Social Work Department, IMH

HEALTHCARE SCHEMES AND SUBSIDIES

The following options are available for those in need of financial assistance.

All Singaporeans and Permanent Residents can take advantage of **MediSave** and **MediShield Life** if admitted to acute wards for mental health treatment. This is in addition to the standard subsidies that apply to services and drugs from the A&E.

For outpatient care, **MediSave** can be used for the following:

- Up to \$500 per account per year for specific conditions under Chronic Disease Management programme such as schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, dementia and anxiety.
- Up to \$200 per year additionally for elderly patients aged 60 and above.
- At IMH, government subsidies cover the following for those who qualify: consultation, medication, hospitalisation, therapy and counselling.

Overall, **MediSave** may be used – up to \$150 per day subject to \$5,000 a year – while **MediShield Life** may cover you for up to \$100 per day, subject to deductibles, co-insurance and limit requirements.

You may also qualify for financial assistance if you meet the criteria based on household means.

In the event that an individual still needs financial help – even after utilising MediSave and MediShield Life – he or she still has recourse to the **Medication Assistance Fund (MAF)**. MAF is a fund that seeks to help patients pay for costlier drugs that are not on the standard drug list.

Any polyclinic can provide a referral for a subsidised consultation at IMH



KEY HELPLINES:

The following helplines are free of charge. They provide emotional support for persons going through life or psycho-emotional crises.

- > **AIC: 1800 650 6060**
The Agency for Integrated Care provides support for ageing, caregiving and mental health-related issues
- > **IMH Mental Health Helpline: 6389 2222**
Manned by trained counsellors for people who need advice on mental health issues
- > **SOS: 1800 221 4444**
For anybody in crisis and persons thinking of suicide or affected by suicide

- > **National CARE Hotline: 1800 202 6868**
Provides psychological first aid and emotional support to those who need it during the current COVID-19 pandemic
- > **Singapore Association for Mental Health: 1800 283 7019**
Provides information and assistance on mental health matters and psychosocial issues

For more support and counselling helplines, refer to the 'Resources and Useful Info' page of this magazine. A comprehensive list of resources can also be found at Mental Health Awareness Singapore's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MentalHealthAwarenessSG/>



Q&A

ASK THE

Experts

IMH clinicians answer your questions.

01: MY HUSBAND, WHO IS 50, RECENTLY GOT LAID OFF FROM HIS JOB. WHILE OUR FAMILY DOES NOT HAVE FINANCIAL WORRIES, HE SEEMS ILL AT EASE, AND IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY IRRITABLE AND BAD-TEMPERED. What kind of psychological burden might he be experiencing and how can we as a family help him?



GIVE SUPPORT

Validate his feelings and be supportive so that he doesn't feel alone.

A: Unemployment impacts everyone differently, but it generally results in lowered self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, shame, regret and guilt. This can lead to depression and anxiety.

Your husband may be thinking about his loss of job, identity and life purpose. He could also be worried about his future job prospects. Moving from a busy work schedule and routine, he might feel lost with the abundance of free time he has now. Your family could support him by:

- > Validating his feelings and communicating that you are there to support him, so he doesn't feel alone.
- > Getting him involved in family activities e.g. cooking a meal together.
- > Encouraging him to set up a new routine with hobbies, exercising, housework, etc, while dedicating time for job-hunting.
- > Cheering him on with encouragement and

compliments when he makes progress in setting up his new routine, attending job interviews, etc.

If his emotional distress persists for more than two weeks, encourage him to seek help. Seek help immediately if self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts arise.

MS LEAH TAN,
Clinical Psychologist,
Department of Psychology



EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment results in lowered self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, shame, regret and guilt.

02: I HAVE A CRIPPLING FEAR OF NEEDLES. DUE TO THIS, I'VE BEEN PUTTING OFF GETTING MY FLU JABS.

I've tried to counter my fears on my own – as I feel that therapy is too extreme an option – but I failed. I am worried as my fear is putting my physical health at risk. How can I overcome my fear?

A: Anxiety about, or aversion to, needles is common in children and even adults. If, however, a person's fear is so strong that it causes functional impairments — like not receiving needed medical care, for example — he or she may have a condition known as needle phobia. You would need to be assessed by a mental health professional for such a diagnosis to be confirmed.

The causes of needle phobia remain unclear. The fear develops from factors such as an extreme sensitivity to pain, and a past negative experience involving a needle; or perhaps genetic causes. It is good that you want to overcome your fears; and with proper treatment, you are likely to achieve this. While many people can manage their fear through adaptive coping strategies learned from self-help books, others with a strong needle aversion may require input from

a mental health professional. If you find it difficult to confront your fear on your own, I would strongly encourage you to seek professional help.

By working with a trained psychologist, and through deliberate and gradual exposure to a variety of anxiety-provoking situations involving needles, the fear can be extinguished. This evidence-based treatment is known as Exposure Therapy, which is a form of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) used for specific phobias.

You can contact your General Practitioner who may refer you for CBT. If your condition is deemed to be moderate to severe in nature, he or she will refer you to a mental health specialist for further assessment and treatment.

DR JACKKI YIM,
Senior Clinical Psychologist,
Department of Mood and Anxiety



News

A round-up of news and events centred on mental healthcare.



A one-stop portal providing information on mental health

PROTECTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

With working from home, safe distancing and other measures during COVID-19, some of us may feel stress and anxiety in our daily lives. To help the community manage the impact of the pandemic, Temasek Foundation, in partnership with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), National CARE Management System and National CARE Hotline, have launched MyMentalHealth.

The website is a one-stop mental wellness portal that provides information on identifying stressors and signs of mental health issues, tips on managing your mental health, as well as a directory of resources and services for those seeking help.

<https://stayprepared.sg/mymentalhealth>

CHAT WITH BELLE

The National Council of Social Service has turned to technology to reduce the barriers for the public to seek help. Belle, the Beyond the Label helpbot interacts with users via a chat interface using Facebook Messenger. It will help them to locate helplines, and provide mental health services and resources as well as share tips on how to interact and support persons with mental health conditions.

For information on helplines and mental health services, scan this QR code:



A LONG-DISTANCE LEG-UP

Volunteers continue to bring cheer to long-stay patients at IMH during the COVID-19 period.

Volunteers play an important role in the lives of long-stay patients at IMH, as many do not have friends or relatives who visit them. They befriend these patients and help to bridge the gap between home and the hospital.

With the enhanced infection control and circuit breaker measures in place to curb the spread of COVID-19, all activities and programmes conducted by volunteers for patients have been suspended. However, the resourceful volunteers continue to keep in touch with patients by sending care packages comprising hand-written notes, snacks, and DIY craft packs.

Thanks to technology, Zoom engagement sessions are also held between volunteers and patients. The first session, which took place on 11 April, has since spawned several more every weekend, with volunteers celebrating Mother's Day and Hari Raya with patients virtually.



Craft packs, comprising jigsaw and word puzzles, origami and colouring books, sent by volunteers bring smiles to patients.

His and hers

Struggling to make sense of the **opposite gender's thought** processes? It is harder than you think — because men's and women's brains are wired differently.

THE TALE OF two minds



Women are better at recalling faces, while men remember objects better.



In finding their way, men rely more on dead reckoning — that is, they determine their position from the direction and distance travelled. Women tend to rely more on landmarks.

SIZE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The male brain is about 10 per cent larger, but this in itself does not impact intelligence. However, differences in size in certain brain regions could explain differences in ability. The inferior parietal lobule — linked with high-level mathematical thinking, estimating time and judging speed — tends to be overall larger in men, whereas the subregions of the cortex — critical to learning, memory and making choices — are larger in women.

UNIQUE CONNECTIONS

Studies like the one conducted by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania in 2014 found stronger connections between the left and right sides of the female brain, while in men it's stronger between the front and back regions. This is why women tend to be better at intuitive thinking and analysis, while men usually have stronger sensorimotor and spatial processing skills.

ON THE JOB

Having more grey matter seems to explain why men are better able to focus on a specific task. Grey matter serves as information-processing centres and is responsible for attention, memory and thought. But women have more white matter, which acts as wires connecting grey matter tissues. This could explain why women are better at multitasking.



RESOURCES AND USEFUL INFO

HELP IS A PHONE CALL AWAY



Mental Health Helpline

Manned by trained counsellors from IMH for those requiring advice on mental health issues.

Tel: 6389 2222 (24 hours)

Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) Helpline

Provides information and assistance on mental health matters and psychosocial issues.

Tel: 1800-283 7019 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 6pm)

Dementia Helpline by Alzheimer's Disease Association

Provides information and assistance on caring for a person with dementia.

Tel: 6377 0700 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 6pm)

Dementia InfoLine by Health Promotion Board

For advice and information on dementia-related queries (available in all 4 languages — English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil).

Tel: 1800-223 1123 (Monday to Friday; 8.30am to 5pm and Saturday; 8.30am to 1pm)

Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)

Provides confidential emotional support for those in crisis, thinking of suicide or affected by suicide.

Tel: 1800-221 4444 (24 hours)

National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) All Addictions Helpline

Provides a range of services to assist people who are dealing with addiction problems.

Tel: 6732 6837 (Monday to Friday; 8.30am to 6pm)

National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) Helpline

Provides information and help for problem gamblers and their families.

Tel: 1800-666 8668 (8am to 11pm daily)

Touchline by Touch Youth Services

Renders emotional support and practical advice to youth.

Tel: 1800-377 2252 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 6pm)

Tinkle Friend Helpline by Singapore Children's Society

Provides support, advice and

information to primary school children in distress, especially in situations when their parents or main caregivers are unavailable.

Tel: 1800-274 4788 (Monday to Friday; 2.30pm to 5pm)

Club HEAL

Helps persons with mental health issues to reintegrate back into the community.

Tel: 6899 3463 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 5pm)

Silver Ribbon

Supports persons with mental health issues and their families.

Tel: 6386 1928 (main line); 6385 3714 (Crisis Resolution Team) (Monday to Friday; 9am to 5pm)

Caregivers Alliance Limited

Supports caregivers of persons with mental health issues.

Tel: 6460 4400 (main line); 6388 2686 (Caregivers Support Centre)

IMH SERVICE DIRECTORY

INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Buangkok Green Medical Park
10 Buangkok View
Singapore 539747
General Enquiries 6389 2000 (24-hour hotline)
Appointment Line 6389 2200 (Monday to Friday; 8am – 6pm)
Email: imh_appt@imh.com.sg

CHILD GUIDANCE CLINIC SUNRISE WING

IMH, Block 3, Basement
Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

CHILD GUIDANCE CLINIC HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD BUILDING
3 Second Hospital Avenue #03-01
Singapore 168937

Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

CLINIC B

IMH, Level 1
Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

SAYANG WELLNESS CENTRE CLINIC (for non-subsidised patients)

IMH, Level 2
Monday to Thursday 8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

COMMUNITY WELLNESS CLINIC, QUEENSTOWN

580 Stirling Road, Level 4,
Singapore 148958
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
8am to 5.30pm

Wednesday 8am to 12.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

COMMUNITY WELLNESS CLINIC, GEYLANG

21 Geylang East Central, Level 4
Singapore 389707
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday,
Friday 8am to 5pm
Wednesday 8am to 12.30pm

NATIONAL ADDICTIONS MANAGEMENT SERVICE (NAMS) CLINIC

IMH, Block 9 Basement
Monday to Thursday
8am to 5.30pm
Friday 8am to 5pm

I don't feel
like myself
lately.
What can I do?

She doesn't
tell me her
problems.
How can I help?

something's
not quite right.
Should I ask
him to seek help?

The Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT) can help.

We offer confidential mental health checks for individuals aged between 16 and 30. Through the health checks, our friendly team of mental healthcare professionals can help youths in distress understand what they are experiencing, and how they can make things better.

Make an appointment at www.chat.mentalhealth.sg, or contact us to find out more.

Email: CHAT@mentalhealth.sg | Phone: 6493 6500 / 01 (Tue – Sat, 12nn – 9pm)



Community Health
Assessment Team