

MEDIA RELEASE

Sengkang General Hospital announces partnerships with the Institute of Mental Health and Punggol West Citizens' Consultative Committee to strengthen capabilities in managing and boosting mental resilience in the community

SINGAPORE, 20 December 2022 – Sengkang General Hospital (SKH) has signed Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and Punggol West Citizens' Consultative Committee (Punggol West CCC) today to enhance capabilities in managing and boosting mental resilience among youth and the elderly.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health issues in the community have been brought to the forefront. Tackling mental wellness and building mental resilience among youth and seniors require a multipronged strategy. These partnerships provide an additional pathway to help and manage individuals who might be developing or experiencing a mental health condition, and facilitate timely interventions. The collaboration between SKH and IMH as well as with Punggol West CCC is important for the sharing of skills and knowledge to raise awareness and to encourage everyone in the community to play a larger role,” said Prof Hsu Pon Poh, Chairman, Medical Board, Sengkang General Hospital.

SKH-IMH MOU

The MoU with IMH has been developed to strengthen the care management of IMH patients with co-morbidities of psychiatric and chronic medical conditions and to boost mental health efforts in the community. Four key areas for collaboration have been identified:

- (i) enhancing cross-institutional psychiatric and medical capabilities
- (ii) providing efficient medical access for IMH patients
- (iii) collaborating on population health initiatives and
- (iv) collaborating on education, innovation and research

“A transfer to an acute hospital is required if our patients require specialist medical consultation, urgent radiological investigations, or when their medical conditions turn acutely complex. Such transfers can be disruptive and stressful for them. If part of such care can be rendered within IMH, either through tele-consultation or having our family physicians and SKH specialists jointly review the patients, we will be able to limit the transfers to critical and emergency situations. This collaboration will help both hospitals better streamline care processes, optimise the use of healthcare resources, and elevate the skillsets of our clinicians to manage more challenging situations. This way, IMH patients can receive specialist or acute medical care in a familiar environment and if a trip to SKH is required, the process is smoothed to ameliorate their stress,” said Associate Professor Swapna Verma, Chairman, Medical Board, Institute of Mental Health.

Under the collaboration, SKH specialists will run clinic sessions at IMH for patients with acute complex medical needs and provide telephonic access for IMH physicians to review patient cases with the SKH specialists. It will also establish a pathway for urgent referrals from IMH to SKH Emergency Department (ED) and radiology facilities.

Cross-institutional training between SKH and IMH will also be conducted. This includes IMH's *Care & Response* training programme that helps to equip SKH's healthcare staff with additional knowledge and skills to manage patients with disturbed behaviour, as well as de-escalation and simple self-defence techniques to manage complex situations.

SKH-Punggol West CCC MOU

The MoU with Punggol West CCC, on the other hand, aims to promote mental health and wellness in the community. Creating awareness and better understanding of mental health issues among the youth and elderly will help the community leaders and volunteers to provide better support to residents. Three key areas for collaboration have been identified:

- (i) providing training and professional support to community volunteers, champions and ambassadors
- (ii) providing a tiered approach system to mental health management
- (iii) jointly conducting mental health and wellness activities and events for the promotion of mental health

A “Train-the-Trainers” programme is being developed to equip members of the community with skills to identify, manage, and help those who might be developing or experiencing a mental health condition, and referring them to the appropriate service or resource.

Ms Sun Xueling, Advisor to Punggol West Grassroots Organizations, said: “We believe that upstream measures to build resilience in individuals, strengthen mutual care and concern and ability in the identification of mental health issues in the community and facilitating early and appropriate intervention is important. Managing mental health issues and promoting well-being requires a whole of society effort and Punggol West is delighted to be part of the partnership with SKH and their collaboration with IMH.”

ANNEX:

Broad areas of collaboration between SKH and IMH

Enhancing cross-institutional capabilities

As part of this partnership, IMH and SKH will work on cross-institutional training to build up manpower capabilities on both sides to provide holistic care for patients with medical and psychiatric needs.

- **Cross-institutional training between SKH and IMH:** For some IMH patients transferred to SKH, a sudden change of environment may cause distress and trigger their psychiatric symptoms. With the cross-training provided, the healthcare team at SKH will be able to better identify the warning signs and triggering factors of any mental distress, thus, providing holistic care for patients with medical and psychiatric needs.
- **IMH's Care & Response training programme:** The training will equip SKH's healthcare staff with knowledge and skills necessary to manage patients who exhibit disturbed behaviour, to use de-escalation and simple self-defence techniques in complex situations without compromising staff and patient safety.
- **SKH specialists' clinic sessions at IMH:** To strengthen IMH's capability to provide on-site care for patients with acute complex medical needs and shorten access time to some of SKH's services, SKH specialists will set up clinic sessions at IMH and work alongside IMH doctors to review cases and determine if further specialised treatment is warranted.

Optimising operational processes for accessibility of care services

It is not uncommon for IMH patients to have co-morbidities of psychiatric and chronic medical conditions e.g. diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia, that require specialised care at an acute hospital. With SKH being the nearest hospital of call, the MOU will pave the way for closer joint management of care for IMH patients. This includes supporting the imaging needs e.g. computerised tomography (CT) or ultrasound scans, necessary to establish early diagnosis and treatment plans when patients develop medical complications.

- **Urgent referrals from IMH to SKH Emergency Department (ED) and radiology facilities:** IMH patients with mild acute conditions e.g. chest, urine infection, uncontrolled diabetes, are mostly treated in IMH. But when they do not respond to treatment, specialist consultation at a general hospital will be necessary. In other cases, urgent radiological and laboratory services are sometimes required to help IMH doctors ascertain the progression of their patient's condition e.g. suspected heart conditions or head injuries, or rule out the likelihood of a physical cause behind their altered mental status. Such patients are similarly transferred to the SKH ED.
- **Clear channel of communication for IMH patient transfers:** To optimise care and prevent unnecessary transfers of patients between the hospitals, dedicated hotlines will be established to facilitate case discussions prior to patient transfer, and discharge guidelines will be regularly reviewed for the safe continuum of care. It also provides insights and opportunities to further improve care processes and protocols, communications, and training and exchange programmes.
- **Outpatient consultation for existing IMH inpatients:** SKH will review IMH patients residing in the north-eastern region who require outpatient follow-up for their medical conditions. These patients will be offered teleconsultations where possible. It improves their access to healthcare, reduces travel and wait time, and translates to better utilisation of the hospitals' resources.

Collaborating on population health initiatives

To better address the mental health needs of the population in the north-East region, both hospitals will collaborate on outreach efforts targeted at various communities to raise awareness and understanding of mental health issues, and ways to seek help.

Collaborating on education, innovation and research initiatives

On the education front, apart from cross-institutional training, SKH and IMH will collaborate on initiatives such as organising continuing medical education (CME) events for healthcare professionals and sharing best practices. In the areas of innovation and research, both institutions will collaborate to co-develop and co-publish insights, innovation and research.

Broad areas of collaboration between SKH and Punggol West CCC

Providing training and professional support to community volunteers, champions and ambassadors

- Community volunteers, champions and ambassadors nominated by the People's Association (PA) will undergo the "Train-the-Trainers" programme, focused on identifying and managing health issues at different levels of needs. They will be equipped with the necessary skills to identify, manage, and help someone who might be developing a mental health condition or experiencing a crisis and guide them to appropriate care and resources.

Providing a tiered approach system of mental health management

- Punggol West CCC would be one of the partners in the integrated community mental health ecosystem, along with SKH in providing a tiered approach system of mental health management which aims to enhance accessibility, clinical assessment, diagnosis and treatment for a person with mental health conditions at different levels.

Conducting joint mental health and wellness activities and events for the promotion of mental health

- SKH and Punggol West CCC would jointly conduct mental health and wellness activities/exercise/talks/programmes/roadshows/other initiatives in the hospital campus or in the community, for the promotion of mental health.
- Building Resilience in Geriatric Health Today (BRIGHT) Programme is a mental wellness coaching programme for seniors at risk of developing depression or anxiety. The programme aims to build resilience, improve mental health literacy and address common challenges associated with ageing. Geriatric psychiatrists, psychologists and medical social workers work with the community to equip seniors with practical skills to maintain mental well-being and knowledge of ways to access help.

####