

OCTOBER 2019-JANUARY 2020

# IMAGINE

A MAGAZINE ON MENTAL HEALTH

## Beating burnout

Don't let stress at work bring you down – here's how to manage, and even avoid it

### LIFE THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



### DISCUSSING DISCLOSURE

Things to note when deciding to reveal, or not reveal, a mental health condition

### PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Meet an individual who seeks to eradicate stigma at the workplace





Community Health  
Assessment Team

## PHOTO CONTEST

Contest starts 23 Sep to 1 Nov 2019

**CHAT**  
IS TURNING  
**10** THIS  
YEAR!



Are you aged 16 - 30?

What do you think mental health means to you?

Share it in a photo and stand a chance to win a

► DJI Osmo Pocket! <

5 other selected posts will stand a chance to win  
\$100 Capitaland vouchers!

### How to enter



Take a photo with a short caption of what you think mental health means to you



Upload it to Instagram and/or Facebook



Tag us @chatfans and hashtag #letsCHATsg #mentalhealth #195formentalhealth

Contest is open to young people aged 16-30 only.  
CHAT will announce the winner within two weeks after the contest closes.

Details might subject to change. Terms and Conditions apply. We will contact the winner on prize collection on the week after 23rd November. Failure to provide the required details will result in immediate disqualification.

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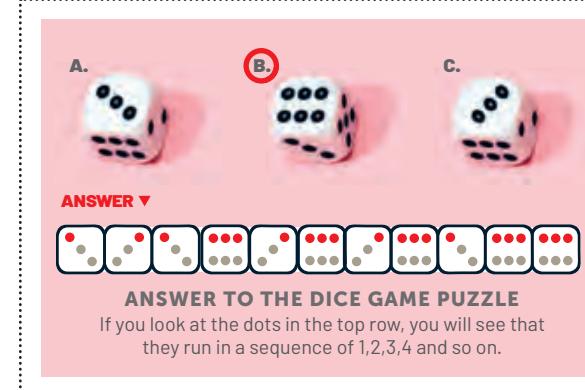
"Those with ASD are wired to see things differently. Many have more advanced sensory perception and pick up details that 'normal' kids usually don't."

**DR OON LI KEAT,**  
Associate Consultant, Department of Developmental Psychiatry, IMH

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Turn to page 9 for the puzzle

INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH • OCT - JAN / 01

**EDITORIAL  
MESSAGE**
**WORKPLACE WELLNESS:  
A GOAL FOR ALL**
**M**

ore than just occasional stress or feeling jaded at work, burnout – if left unchecked – can have serious repercussions on one's health, relationships, work performance and well-being.

In Singapore, there is a growing desire among employees to seek a balance between work and leisure to ensure healthier outcomes and a better quality of life. *The Employer Brand Research 2019: Singapore Country Report* by employment agency Ranstad, for instance, noted that, after salary, work-life balance (at 61 per cent) was the most common reason employees here gave for staying in their jobs. Fortunately, employers are taking note, and in this issue's cover story (pg 10-13), we examine the nature of burnout, how we can safeguard against it and manage its effects, and what steps companies are taking to prevent it.

Having a happy and comfortable working environment makes a huge impact on our overall wellness. This is particularly true for those who have experienced stigma owing to factors such as mental health issues or disabilities. We speak to Shell's Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Ms Lyn Lee (pg 14-15) on the need to create a safe and nurturing space for all employees. As someone with bipolar disorder herself, she has used her experience to build a culture where employees are able to bring their whole selves to work and feel supported and included.

We also catch up with Mr Uantchern Loh and Mr Chew Sutat, who will be leading a trek in April next year to the base camp of Mount Everest in support of #YOLO2020, a campaign aimed at raising awareness and funds for mental health issues. Our feature on autism spectrum disorder (pg 16-18) meanwhile sheds light on this often misunderstood condition. It also looks at what we as a society can do to help those who have autism, and their caregivers.

It is the responsibility of those who are 'well' to demonstrate our solidarity with those dealing with psychological woes. The latter need to know that they are not alone, and that they are valued members of our society. So let's make building a culture of inclusivity, empathy and support a goal for us all.



Happy reading.

the editorial team

FOR MORE INFORMATION // VISIT [WWW.IMH.COM.SG](http://WWW.IMH.COM.SG) OR WRITE TO US AT [ENQUIRY@IMH.COM.SG](mailto:ENQUIRY@IMH.COM.SG)
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Imagine clinched the Award of Excellence at APEX 2019

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Care, CAL, SGX, Deutsche Bank and Accenture have come together for this meaningful cause.

**THE EXPEDITION WILL BE A JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE.**

This, says Mr Chew, symbolises the experience of people with mental health conditions and their caregivers. "For many of them, just getting through daily life can feel like scaling a mountain," he says. Mr Loh – a trekking enthusiast who has reached EBC twice, scaled Mount Kinabalu in Sabah 10 times and summited peaks in Europe and Mongolia – knows the trek will be challenging. "It is going to be arduous and cold, with some days involving nine hours of non-stop trekking," he says. "So I urge the participants to not take the journey lightly."

The team has started training for the trek in various ways. Some members hike up the trails at Bukit Timah Hill up to nine times every Sunday, while others walk up and down the 40-storey-high HDB blocks at Toa Payoh Central at least five times on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Participants are also raising funds and awareness at their workplaces. "To me, this is just a small step we can take towards driving lasting change towards a more caring society," says Mr Loh.

Mr Chew, who admits to leading a mostly sedentary lifestyle, is up for the challenge. 'You Only Live Once', or YOLO, is ultimately his life mantra. "Life has its ups and downs, but I'd like to know I've put my best foot forward and given everything my best shot. And this certainly applies to our effort to get more people to talk about mental health issues, and debunk the many misconceptions surrounding them."

# Climb every mountain

Altitude is no barrier for the team behind the campaign **#YOLO2020**, who will be trekking to Everest Base Camp as part of their mission to raise awareness and funds for mental health issues.

INTERVIEW FAIROZA MANSOR // PHOTO MARK LEE



**MR UANTCHERN LOH (left) & MR CHEW SUTAT**  
Co-founders of #YOLO2020

>> **WHAT STARTED OUT AS A LUNCHTIME CHAT** turned into a mission to summit the Mount Everest Base Camp (EBC) for Mr Uantchern Loh, Mr Chew Sutat and Mr Yeo Siak Ling (not interviewed in this article) – and for a good cause to boot. The trio's goal for this (literally) uphill task is to raise awareness and funds for mental health issues. "It has been reported that one in seven people in Singapore has experienced mental health issues\*, but there's still a stigma attached to it," says Mr Chew, 47, executive vice president at the Singapore Exchange (SGX), and chairman of non-profit organisation Caregivers Alliance Limited (CAL), which supports caregivers of persons

with mental health issues. "We hope to shed light on this through our #YOLO2020 campaign and trek to EBC." Mr Loh, 55, chief executive for Asia Pacific at stakeholder communications firm Black Sun, agrees. "No one questions when you are physically ill, so why give people with mental health issues such a hard time? We hope the trek and #YOLO2020 can rally everyone together to eradicate that stigma."

Since November 2018, about 50 people have signed up for the 10-day expedition which will commence in April 2020. Mr Loh is heartened that staff from IMH, the National Council of Social Service, Agency for Integrated



**► PLEDGE YOUR SUPPORT**  
To follow the team's journey to Everest Base Camp and to pledge your commitment to make a difference in the lives of others, go to [www.yolo2020.com](http://www.yolo2020.com).

\*Source: Singapore Mental Health Study 2016

STAYING ON TOP, MENTALLY

# LIVE WELL!



» There may be a link between your memory of food and hunger for your next meal, say neuroscience researchers from the University of Southern California. They have found that a hormone responsible for sending hunger signals to the brain may also be important for memory control. The hormone, known as ghrelin, is produced in the stomach and secreted when the body anticipates a meal. But when ghrelin was blocked in laboratory rats, researchers found that the rats' memory became impaired — they performed poorly in tasks they were previously taught. Their eating behaviour also changed, which the researchers linked to the memory impairments. "Deciding to eat or not to eat may be influenced by the memory of the previous meal," concluded Dr Elizabeth Davis, who led the study.

## + A TIME FOR YOU

Many of us use our calendars to keep track of schedules and appointments



**Fun Fact** The world's oldest calendar is an arrangement of 12 pits in Scotland. Possibly over 10,000 years old, these pits mimic the phases of the moon and track lunar months.

but did you know that these tools can also be used to promote positive mental well-being? Here's how you can design your own happiness calendar.

1. **Take a blank piece of paper.** Begin by filling in the usual days and dates of the month. Get creative with colours and your designs!

2. **Use the boxes to fill in a simple**

**wellness goal for yourself.** This can be as simple as reminding yourself to switch off from your devices, giving yourself a treat, spending time with family or making an effort to exercise.

3. **Place this calendar somewhere prominent,** so you can remind yourself of the goals you have set.

## HAPPINESS MATTERS IN GOOD GOVERNANCE

Bhutan is no longer the only country driven by happiness — New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Arden is the latest world leader to adopt the Happiness Index metric when budgeting the country's finances. Local governments will no longer only have to justify programmes based on how they contribute to New Zealand's overall Gross Domestic Product. Instead, they will also be tasked to consider how such programmes increase the welfare of citizens. The country is already considerably happy; in the World Happiness Report Rankings for 2016-2018, which surveyed 156 countries, it was the 8<sup>th</sup> highest in the world.



**#KNOW MORE:**  
In the World Happiness Report rankings, Finland scored highest, at 7.76 out of a possible score of 10. Singapore came in at 34, with a score of 6.26.



I hope that the case of Leonardo shows that ADHD is not linked to low IQ or lack of creativity but rather the difficulty of capitalising on natural talents. I hope that Leonardo's legacy can help us to change some of the stigma around ADHD\*

Professor Marco Catani

## Da Vinci DECODED

The man behind the world's most famous painting, the *Mona Lisa*, and several feats of engineering might have suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). That's what a researcher from King's College London suggests, after studying the work habits of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian artist and inventor Leonardo Da Vinci. "Historical records show that he spent excessive time planning projects but actually lacked perseverance," explained Professor Marco Catani, a member of the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. "ADHD could explain aspects of Leonardo's temperament and his strange mercurial genius."

## FAMOUS STRUGGLES

Other creative people whose battles with mental health issues have been documented include:



• LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN  
The book *Diagnosing Genius: The Life and Death of Beethoven* notes that the German composer, who also grappled with alcohol abuse, displayed symptoms of bipolar disorder.

• MARK TWAIN  
The last few years of the celebrated writer's life were fraught with severe depression, triggered by the deaths of his wife and two daughters.

• ISAAC NEWTON  
Perhaps the most famous scientist/mathematician of all time, Newton often suffered from depressive spells.

but did you know that these tools can also be used to promote positive mental well-being? Here's how you can design your own happiness calendar.

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3. **Place this calendar somewhere prominent,** so you can remind yourself of the goals you have set.



### #KNOW MORE

People who spent two hours in nature during the last week had 23 per cent higher odds of reporting high well-being.

## COAST TO COAST

The new 36km Coast-to-Coast trail is a good place to start if you're looking for a nature walk. Launched by NParks in April, the trail links Jurong Lake with Coney Island, leading walkers through a variety of parks and nature areas along the way.

### THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Planning your weekend? Make sure to spend at least two hours in a green spot. British researchers have found that people who experience nature for at least 120 minutes a week are more likely to report psychological well-being.

The study, published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, was conducted by researchers from Britain's University of Exeter. "It's well known that getting outdoors in nature can be good for people's health and well-being but until now we've not been able to say how much is enough," said lead study author Dr Mathew White. To answer this question, they surveyed and studied the habits of 19,800 British respondents and found that people who spent two hours in nature during the last week had 23 per cent higher odds of reporting high well-being. This positive effect increased with additional time outdoors, they observed.



### WHY A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP MATTERS

Waking up after a night of interrupted sleep can leave you feeling groggy, grumpy and ill-rested. Now, researchers from the University of California (Berkeley) suggest that you could also be raising your risk of Alzheimer's if you have disrupted sleep when you are in your 50s and 60s. The brain

scans of those frequently having interrupted sleep showed higher levels of tau protein, a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. The new finding highlights the importance of sleep in maintaining a healthy brain into old age. The findings were published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* in June 2019.

### EXAMINING EXAMS

Exams are often thought to be an important way of measuring how well students understand a subject.

But researchers from Dartmouth College in the United States hope to challenge this by developing a machine-learning algorithm.

This tracks the students' brain activity patterns to measure how well they understand a concept. The algorithm was devised using the results of a previous study that tracked how brain activity differed between people who were familiar with a concept and those who were unfamiliar with it.

Does this mean that we can finally do away with exams? Not quite – researchers stress that studies into the field are in their infancy, although they are encouraged by the development of the algorithm.



### THE HEALING power of music

TUNES THAT SOOTHE

Taiwanese researchers might have found a novel way of managing pain: music. Researchers from Taipei Medical University provided a group of breast cancer patients with an MP3 player filled with a selection of classical, parlour, popular, Taiwanese and religious music. Another group was given a player containing environmental sounds. Study participants were then asked about their pain and fatigue levels six, 12 and 24 weeks after surgery.



Those who listened to music reported less pain and fatigue, while those listening to environmental sounds reported higher levels of pain and fatigue. Similarly, another study published in the *Pain Management Nursing* journal on patients with fibromyalgia (a chronic pain syndrome) found that those who listened to music for just one hour a day experienced a significant reduction in pain compared to those who didn't.

What is the connection between music and pain relief? Studies have found that music modulates the brain's limbic system, which controls both physical pain and emotional anguish. It triggers several neurochemical effects that help to distract listeners from negative feelings and view pain differently. Music also reduces the release of stress hormones and seems to affect the brain's opioid system.

**The study showed links between poor performance in physical tests and an increased likelihood of depressive or anxiety symptoms. A weak handgrip indicated a 68 per cent greater likelihood of displaying these symptoms.**



THE STRENGTH GUIDE

## > GAIN THE UPPER HAND

Here's another reason to get moving: middle-aged women with weak upper and lower body fitness may be more prone to depression and anxiety. That's what a report by the National University of Singapore suggests, after researchers there studied more than 1,100 women aged 45 to 69.

### PARTICIPANTS WERE MADE TO PERFORM A SERIES

of exercises. This included a handgrip strength test and a repeated chair stand test, which records the time it takes to stand up from a seated position without using the arms. Researchers also assessed the frequency at which participants experienced symptoms associated with anxiety and depression during the past week. These include sadness, uncontrollable worrying, loss of interest, fatigue, sleep problems and poor appetite.

**THE STUDY REVEALED LINKS BETWEEN A POOR** performance in the physical tests and an increased likelihood of depressive or anxiety symptoms. A weak handgrip strength was associated with a 68 per cent increased likelihood of displaying these symptoms. Taking longer on the sit-to-stand test was associated with 33 per cent increased odds of symptoms. According to researchers, the study shows an interesting correlation between the mind and body. The team's results were published in the *Menopause* journal.

## Strength matters

**Here are three ways to boost your upper body strength:**



1 Your upper body consists of more than just triceps and biceps – be sure to also put in time to develop your shoulders, chest and back.



2 Muscle strengthening requires plenty of protein – according to the Health Promotion Board, the daily Recommended Dietary Allowance of protein for a healthy female is about 58g. That's the equivalent of about 9–10 eggs!



3 Don't neglect flexibility. Stretching your upper body for about one minute before and after your workout can improve your performance.

## LEARN MORE TO LEARN BETTER

Seniors, if learning a new task proves challenging, here's a trick. Researchers from the University of California (Riverside) believe they have figured out the best way to learn as an older adult: learning multiple things at once. This is a good way of staving off cognitive decline, says Dr Rachel Wu, the lead author of the study, which was published in *The Journals of Gerontology*.

For the study, researchers divided participants, aged between 58 and 86, into two groups. The first took 15 hours of classes every week, learning everything from Spanish to how to use an iPad, while the second group did not take any classes. Participants completed a series of assessments before, during and after the study to gauge their memory skills and cognitive control, which measures one's ability to switch between tasks.

After one and a half months, participants who took classes showed an increase in their cognitive abilities to levels similar to those of adults nearly 30 years younger than them. The control group members showed no change in their performance. "The take-home message is that older adults can learn multiple new skills at the same time, and doing so may improve their cognitive functioning," concluded Dr Wu.



Your phone may carry increasing levels of distraction that make it difficult to return focused attention to work tasks

While those who used their cellphones performed better than those who had no break, they still performed worse than the other two groups. "The act of reaching for your phone between tasks, or mid-task, is becoming more commonplace. It is important to know the costs associated with reaching for this device during every spare minute. We assume it's no different from any other break — but the phone may carry increasing levels of distraction that make it difficult to return focused attention to work tasks," said Dr Terri Kurtzberg, co-author and associate professor of management and global business at Rutgers Business School. "Cellphones may have this affect because even just seeing your phone activates thoughts of checking messages, connecting with people, access to ever-refilling information and more, in ways that are different than how we use other screens like computers and laptops."



## Have a break, ditch the phone

Researchers from the Rutgers Business School have found that using a cellphone to take a break during mentally-challenging tasks does not actually recharge you. Instead, it may actually result in poorer performance. As part of the study, college undergraduates were tasked to complete a series of word puzzles. Halfway through the task, participants were divided into four groups. One group was given a break with a cellphone, another with a computer, another with a piece of paper and a final group was not given a break at all. They were then asked to return to the puzzle.

**START ▼**

**The Dice Game!**

**DIRECTIONS:** Which die completes the sequence?

**Hint:** Note the dots in the top row

**A.**

**B.**

**C.**

REFER TO THE CONTENTS PAGE FOR PUZZLE ANSWER



# A Working Solution

**Burnout is a growing problem globally. Fortunately, people, companies — and even the World Health Organization — are sitting up and taking notice.**

Interview Wanda Tan

**F**eeling burnt out from work? Well, you're not alone. Increasing numbers of people worldwide are complaining about being overworked and exhausted. Just think of the outcry sparked by Jack Ma, co-founder of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, after he endorsed the '996' work culture — 9am to 9pm, six days a week — earlier this year.

This hot-button topic is getting more notice now that the World Health Organization (WHO) has included burnout in its latest International Classification of Diseases. While not classified as a medical condition per se, burnout is defined by WHO as an "occupational phenomenon", or "a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed".

**“If an individual is stressed too much, to the point that it starts to affect functioning in more and more aspects of his life, it likely warrants more attention.”**

MS SARA-ANN LEE, Clinical Psychologist, IMH

## WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Strictly speaking, not all stress is bad. Some level of stress is needed to boost our work performance and to bring out the best in us, say, to meet a project deadline. When the body perceives stress, it releases the hormone cortisol into the bloodstream, which increases the heart rate and blood pressure and thus motivates us to take action.

It is a problem when stress continues at high levels over a prolonged period, causing fatigue, headaches, irritability, pessimism, difficulty sleeping and other symptoms. This lowers our productivity at work and may increase conflicts with others. Over time, potentially life-threatening physical and mental illnesses may develop, including hypertension, heart attack, anxiety and depression. "If an individual is stressed to the point that it starts to affect functioning in more and more aspects of his life, such as social, occupational and personal, it likely warrants more attention," says Ms Sara-Ann Lee, Clinical Psychologist, Institute of Mental Health (IMH). "WHO's shift towards recognising burnout as a 'phenomenon' may well be the inroad we need to educate the general population about it and to effectively tackle this before it becomes a 'disease'."

## WHO IS AT RISK?

Each individual has varying levels of tolerance to stress. For instance, someone with a low stress threshold may experience burnout in a matter of weeks rather than months. Personality traits also matter. Workaholics and

those with perfectionist tendencies are likely to push themselves beyond their breaking point.

**That said, those in certain professions, demographic groups and situations are more susceptible than others to burnout:**

> **People-oriented jobs.** It's no coincidence that job search website Monster.com has articles on burnout for the likes of social workers, accountants and retailers. These jobs usually involve demanding clients and heavy workloads. For the same reason, lawyers and teachers tend to fall victim to burnout.

> **Volatile industries.** Burnout is rife in media, advertising and marketing agencies, where people are constantly under pressure to brainstorm creative ideas for new campaigns and meet tight deadlines. Many in the tech sector, of which Alibaba is a part, also struggle to keep up with the fast pace of change within the industry.

## FEELING THE BURN

**According to global health service company Cigna, Singaporeans are among the most stressed at work.**

The 2019 Cigna 360 Well-Being survey found that 92 per cent of Singaporean respondents were stressed from work — higher than the global average of 84 per cent. Of this group, 13 per cent considered their stress unmanageable, causing lack of sleep.

Burnout may be hitting the millennial cohort the hardest, due to the long hours they spend at work. A 2016 report by global

> **Emergency service workers.** Doctors, nurses and police officers put in long (sometimes round-the-clock) shifts, where they regularly face high-stress and life-and-death situations.

> **An unsupportive corporate culture.** If the company values performance above all else, employees may feel compelled to work all the time. Feeling underappreciated at work also adds to the stress.

> **Working mothers.** The double burden of working full-time and taking on the bulk of household responsibilities can lead to burnout.

> **Young adults.** "Millennials and Gen Z-ers, who are just starting out in their careers, often take on more than they can handle at work. This is partly because they are unsure about how to manage their own and their bosses' expectations, and partly because they want to make a good first impression," says Mr Daryl Boey, 32, a millennial himself and Senior Talent Acquisition Manager (Asia Pacific) at media agency Essence.

recruitment agency ManpowerGroup found that millennials in Singapore had, at 48 hours a week, the second-longest working hours in the world. This was on par with their peers in China and Mexico, and behind only India (52 hours a week).

**92%**  
of Singaporean  
respondents are  
stressed from  
work higher than  
the global average  
of 84 per cent.





## FOR EMPLOYERS: A USEFUL RESOURCE

To help organisations create a supportive work environment for mental health, HPB runs initiatives targeted at companies and people managers. One is a skills-equipping workshop for managers, who are taught to recognise signs and symptoms of common mental health conditions (including burnout), as well as how to approach such staff and encourage them to seek help early. HPB also organises corporate roadshows, where employees can assess their individual stress levels and learn practical stress management tips.

► More information on these and other HPB workplace health programmes is available at [www.hpb.gov.sg/workplace/workplace-programmes](http://www.hpb.gov.sg/workplace/workplace-programmes).



### HOW TO AVOID BURNOUT

Tackling burnout requires cooperation between different parties. "Both employers and employees have a shared responsibility to eliminate burnout," says Mr Daniel Chia, Head of Human Resources at Samsung Asia. "Organisations should institute policies and programmes to support their staff and promote workplace health. At the same time, it's up to the individual to make use of these initiatives and manage his own expectations."

#### On the Employers' Side

Workplace health and employee well-being should be a top priority for all organisations. After all, healthy employees result in lower absenteeism and higher productivity. "Working adults may find that they have fewer opportunities to keep healthy, given the time they spend at work. Workplace health programmes can therefore help our

working population stay active, healthy and productive at work," says Mr Simon Lim, Director of Workplace Health & Outreach Division, Health Promotion Board (HPB).

Companies are encouraged to establish employee wellness programmes which may include activities such as fitness classes, stress-management workshops, lunchtime health awareness talks and comprehensive health screening, and introduce health-promoting policies (for example, healthier catering). Providing dedicated spaces where co-workers can take short breaks during the day or relax after a day's work may also promote a healthier work culture and buffer against burnout.

In today's 'gig' economy, more companies are offering temporary positions such as freelancers, independent contractors and project-based workers, instead

of hiring full-time staff. Flexible work arrangements like telecommuting, staggered hours, hot-desking and four-day workweeks are also becoming more commonplace. These give individuals the flexibility to integrate their work and personal lives, including spending time with family.



#### On the Employees' Side

Burnout doesn't happen overnight; rather, it is the consequence of built-up stress over time that is left unchecked. If your job is starting to make you feel run down, here's what you can do to nip burnout in the bud:

#### Acknowledge warning signs.

Individuals may take it as a sign of personal failure if they are unable to meet the demands of work, says Ms Lee. But it is important to take heed of signs that it may be time to slow down – and stop burnout early.

- Get adequate sleep and nutrition.**

"Having passion and motivation for your job, while important, does not mean that basic needs should be neglected. We all need to eat, hydrate and rest," says Ms Lee.

- Pick up a hobby.** Do something that takes your mind off work and re-energises you. This, for example, could be mindfulness meditation, playing a musical instrument or jogging.
- Prioritise tasks.** Manage your time well. If you have a long to-do list at work, pick out and finish the important or urgent tasks first.
- Set boundaries.** "Tell your line managers and supervisors if you don't plan on checking your emails after hours, or if you feel you have too much on your plate," says Mr Boey.
- Find joy in work.** Make a list of reasons why you like your job. Simple steps like

## DID YOU KNOW?



**53%**

OF COMPANIES  
IN SINGAPORE  
OFFERED

at least one formal flexible work arrangement in 2018, up from 50% in 2017



**84%**

OF COMPANIES  
IN SINGAPORE  
offered at least one ad hoc flexible work arrangement in 2018, up from 75% in 2017

Source: Ministry of Manpower

taking five-minute breaks to restore focus, going out for lunch instead of eating at your desk, and building relationships with colleagues can make work more enjoyable.

- Don't isolate yourself.** If you are having trouble coping at work, talk to a family member, a close friend or a trusted colleague.

"Effective communication and social relationships have been shown to be protective and helpful in dealing with burnout," says Ms Lee. For those who lend a listening ear, try not to downplay what that person is feeling (e.g. "Everyone works hard") or give unwanted advice (e.g. "Think positive"). Oftentimes, says Ms Lee, just hearing them out is enough: "What that individual may need is just for someone to recognise that they are having a difficult time, without the need to provide concrete solutions."

- Get help.** Seek assistance if the situation becomes unbearable.

It may also be a good idea to look for a new job, request a transfer to a different department, or take a sabbatical from work.

**Do something that takes your mind off work and re-energises you. This, for example, could be mindfulness meditation, playing a musical instrument or jogging.**

## "DON'T LET WORK DEFINE YOU"

**Then in his early 40s, Eric\* was several months into his job as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of a consortium for a major infrastructural project when he started experiencing symptoms of burnout in 2013. He subsequently fell into depression. Eric tells *Imagine* how "the combination of professional help and a strong support network" got him through it.**



"As COO, what pushed me over the edge was not so much the long working hours — I was used to that — but rather the complexity of tasks to be done. I didn't have the full skillset or support resources at my disposal. I was also worried about missing the deadline, as delays would have cost the company double-digit millions of dollars each month. This developed into insomnia. I was so tired, but I could only get two or three hours of sleep nightly because my mind

kept spinning around work issues. Four months later, and having tried a range of sleeping pills without success, I was given two months' medical leave.

The aim here was to remove myself from the source of stress (i.e. work) and get back to a normal sleeping pattern. However, I started having negative thoughts about my job and financial security, despite the company's assurances that I would not be fired. This anxiety gave way to depression. Through

regular visits to a psychologist, and with support from my wife and church friends, I got better and was able to return to work — part-time at first, then full-time.

I now work in a freelance capacity, helping to run faith-based education courses and also provide corporate consulting services. Although being a part of the 'gig' economy entails a degree of income instability, my faith has helped me to feel more comfortable with this. It's vital to have a balanced perspective on life. Don't let your work define you; find meaning in areas, such as your spiritual life or social sphere. This will build up your resilience to workplace stress."

\*Not his real name.

# Making it personal

**“Do I look like a failure to you?”** That was the question I asked a group of youth leaders

at a recent event where I was invited to speak about my experience with bipolar disorder. They said no. I asked them this to show them that having a mental illness need not stop one from being successful and achieving set goals. Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder, which when unmanaged, can lead to extreme mood swings of emotional highs (mania) and lows (depression). I have bipolar disorder type 2 where I mainly experience low emotions with some episodes of mania. But these emotions don't define me. They are products of the condition, which I have since learnt to manage.

**Life stressors can bring about mental health issues.** I had lost my father to cancer, and was also going through a divorce after being married for 18 years. This added tremendous pressure on me. When the symptoms started to emerge, it was gradual – like a car engine that first slows down, creaks more, malfunctions and eventually breaks down. I was a Global HR manager at Shell at that point. I didn't miss a day of work because I love my job, but I was struggling. Eventually, it came to a point where I just could not get out of bed.

**My sister urged me to see a psychiatrist** and I am glad she did. She didn't judge; she simply acknowledged that I wasn't okay, and told me I would be okay again with some help. That's what all persons with mental health issues need – a

Ms Lyn Lee was diagnosed with bipolar II disorder 10 years ago. The experience provided the long-time champion for the under-represented with a more intimate perspective on mental health issues.

Interview FAIROZA MANSOR  
Main photo MARK LEE

**MS LYN LEE**  
52, Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer at Shell



solid support system and empathy, as opposed to sympathy. I would not have known I have a mental health issue had I not sought medical attention. Most of us tend to dismiss the symptoms or attribute it to stress or even hormones when it's a woman. We think we can just shake it off, but we can't just snap out of depression – it's a medical condition.

**With the diagnosis, I felt a veil was lifted.** I can't quite describe it, but I felt instant clarity. Seeing a psychiatrist and taking medication helped but I do want to caution that recovery takes time. If you think popping a pill will immediately cure you, you will be disappointed. Sometimes, you may even feel worse at first. But it will get better, so stick to the programme.

**I did not hesitate to inform my bosses** of my condition, but I am one of the lucky ones. Being brought up in a supportive family enabled me to "come out" to my line manager. It also helped that there is a culture of respect and inclusion at Shell. My bosses told me to take the time I needed to recover, and they meant what they said. I did not have the barrier many persons with mental health issues have to face. Many worry they will be penalised, or that they will not have a job to come back to after taking a timeout. These issues are real in our society.

**A company that wants to be inclusive,** whether towards persons with disabilities or mental health issues, must do it for the right reason. It's not just about ticking the relevant boxes or having a wellness room in the office. For me, success in this area means making a positive impact on the lives of often-marginalised people. Have things changed positively for them? Has their quality of life really

improved with the initiatives? Approach with heart and kindness, and implement policies with their well-being in mind. Their experience is the true measure of how far we've come.

**We have to make empathy the norm.**

In Singapore, there have been many steps taken in the right direction of late, but more has to be done to destigmatise mental illness. Organisations should come on board to address mental health issues and be a force that promotes change. When we talk about making the workplace inclusive, the discussion should also involve making it safe – both physically and psychologically. Employees should be able to bring their whole selves to work. To stress this, we rolled out a campaign at Shell called 'I'm not OK' to destigmatise mental illness and create a workplace where it is okay to reach out and say "I'm not OK". We want to be there for our staff who need support and help, because ultimately we can only perform at our best when we are well.

**I still see my psychiatrist once every six months.** These reviews are important, just as how we see the doctor for our blood pressure, or sugar level if we are diabetic. These sessions give me a full-picture awareness of my condition and help me to manage it effectively. So when I'm at my low and don't feel like doing anything, I make sure I keep active. Physical exercise has become an important part of my routine. And at my high, I remind myself to slow down, breathe, pause and be calm. Over the years, practising mindfulness has also helped me to manage myself. This comes with an appreciation of what the illness is.

**“When we talk about making the workplace inclusive, the discussion should also involve making it safe – both physically and psychologically.”**

**I advocate being physically active** whether or not you have a mental health condition. But especially for people with mental health issues, exercising is a great way to release positive hormones and manage stress. I go to the gym three to five times a week, and also practise gyrotonic, a training method based on the principles of yoga and dance. It builds core strength, balance, coordination and agility, thus benefiting both my physical and mental well-being.

**Find your bigger purpose.** Most of us want to lead a meaningful life. I feel called to do work, in my professional role, which impacts under-represented communities. For someone in recovery, that is the silver lining – you can actually do good by spreading this awareness. But you cannot do this effectively unless you take care of yourself first. Seek help, and then make sure that you surround yourself with people who can provide support and make you feel safe, physically and psychologically.



Lyn will talk about her recovery journey in a plenary session at the 9th International Conference – Together Against Stigma – in October this year.



# LIFE THROUGH A Different Lens

**Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) presents in a range of ways in people. Typically, it results in difficulty maintaining what society defines as a "normal" life. But with the right treatment and support, people with ASD can thrive.**

Interview Esther Au Yong, in consultation with Dr Oon Li Keat, Associate Consultant, Department of Developmental Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health

We may be familiar with autism through films like *Rain Man*, or may have seen the works of the savant UK artist Stephen Wiltshire (who famously drew a detailed sketch of the Singapore skyline just from memory in 2014). But how much do we really know about this condition?

## A MULTI-FACETED MYSTERY

ASD is a developmental disorder that is evident from early childhood with varying degrees of severity and levels of

functioning. It often affects an individual's ability to interact and communicate with others. People with ASD may also have a restricted or repetitive pattern of behaviours and interests. Autism is considered a spectrum because the impairments affect different people in different ways. For instance, some may have normal linguistic abilities, while others may have little verbal language. Their intellectual abilities can also vary.

The causes of ASD are not specifically known and research on the condition is

## ASD

is a developmental disorder that is evident from early childhood with varying degrees of severity and levels of functioning.

ongoing. Says Dr Oon Li Keat, Associate Consultant, Department of Developmental Psychiatry, IMH, "ASD can be seen as a defect of development or part of a spectrum of neuro-developmental variant. There are studies that show links to certain genes as well, and there's a higher chance of a child having ASD if his or her siblings or parents have it."

Whatever the case, early diagnosis and intervention are important to improve the child's skills and quality of life. But how does one tell that a child may have ASD? "Early in life, many children with ASD may have problems maintaining eye contact and may have speech delay," explains Dr Oon. "A classic sign would also be repetitive behaviour. When they are upset or even when

**"It's a two-way street. While people who are 'different' try their best to fit in, people who fall under the category of what's considered the 'norm' should try their best to create more space for others to express themselves in their own ways too."**

they are excited, they may do things like flap their hands, rock themselves or turn around in circles, or even hit or bite themselves." Medical professionals are trained to spot signs at check-ups and refer any suspected cases for further tests. "These tests, which are available in paediatric clinics, and psychological departments in schools, as well as IMH's Child Guidance Clinic, include observation and examination of the child by a trained clinician and an extensive interview with the parents," says Dr Oon.

What then, in cases of ASD in adults? "Diagnosing ASD in patients who first present to us in adulthood is often more difficult, as their developmental history is harder to trace. Some ASD symptoms can also overlap with that of other disorders, such as anxiety or depression," Dr Oon shares. "Often too, such adults may have learnt to cope through the years and have modified their behaviours to accommodate societal norms." Still, a correct diagnosis can help an adult understand past difficulties, identify strengths and weaknesses, and obtain further help where needed.

## MYTHS VS FACTS

ASD is not an easy topic to understand and there are many misconceptions associated with it. For instance, many assume that those with ASD pose a threat to others. Dr Oon refutes this, saying that, "aggression is actually rare and

most of them are not dangerous or violent. However, in their social relationships, people with ASD will struggle a bit more throughout their lives."

At the same time there is the notion that those with ASD have 'genius-level' abilities in some area or other, like math, artistic or musical skills – but is this necessarily true of all who have the condition? "While it is not true that all children with ASD are geniuses, we know that those with ASD are wired to see things differently. Many have more advanced sensory perception and pick up details that 'normal' kids usually don't," says Dr Oon.

Then there's the infamous myth that vaccines can cause autism. This was largely perpetuated by a study published

## UPS AND DOWNS OF ASD:

### Ms Iris Chow, 45, shares her journey as the caregiver of her son Phinnaeus, 13, who has ASD.

"When he was one and a half, I began to notice that Phinn was different from other kids. He could be very, very hyper; yet, when something caught his interest, for example a toy, he would play with it for hours, and in exactly the same ways. He also had trouble socialising, and would have bad meltdowns if things didn't go his way – or sometimes, for no reason at all.

He then entered a regular school and it got very bad. I was constantly called in by his teacher because he was disruptive in class. When he was about seven and a half, I got him tested, and it proved a turning point. When he was diagnosed with ASD, I was actually relieved. His behaviour finally made 'sense', and I then knew how to help him and who to approach for help.

Phinn started regular treatment – which includes psychotherapy and occupational therapy – and at age 11, transferred to Pathlight School. The therapy regime has been effective. For example, he has learnt to control his anger and his blow-ups are less intense, and I do see him trying to calm himself using techniques taught to him.

### PHINNAEUS AND IRIS, coping with ASD



in 1998 that suggested that the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine might cause autism. The research was later found to be false and the doctor who wrote it lost his medical licence. Several other studies since then have found no link between vaccines and ASD. Yet another misconception is one that says certain diets can reverse the condition. "Scientifically, there is no evidence for this," Dr Oon reiterates.

What is true is that those with ASD tend to have a higher chance of developing co-morbid mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety. The main reason for this is an unfavourable social environment.

As his caregiver, a big challenge is in managing my expectations. I've started teaching him simple tasks – like taking a shower, brushing his teeth and taking public transport – that he can do by himself. But sometimes, he makes mistakes and I need to remind myself that he is trying his best.

While I don't expect everyone to understand what we are going through, I hope that the public can have more empathy. When Phinn has a meltdown in public, hurtful comments are not helpful; don't stand around and film the incident either. As much as we think Phinn is clueless, he does understand and feels embarrassed. Instead, it would help if bystanders offer an encouraging word. I do get very tired and demoralised at times, but I hang on to my faith, and the community around me – they give me strength to go on."



"Children with ASD may be treated differently by others. They may become anxious about the way they behave, and wonder if what they are doing is socially acceptable," says Dr Oon. "They also have to put in more effort in learning implicit skills such as social skills that others take for granted. Overall, they tend to be more stressed."

#### A TWO-WAY STREET

While there is no cure for ASD, there are therapies that can help a child with autism,

such as behavioural therapy – which changes what people do by teaching them to respond to things in a different way – and occupational therapy, to help children achieve their greatest level of independence in their daily activities. Medication is only used in extreme cases. For instance, when behavioural problems are so disruptive that they prevent learning, medication can be used to dampen these behaviours. As with the condition itself, treatment ranges within a spectrum and should be

**“ Early in life, many children with ASD may have problems maintaining eye contact and may have speech delay. A classic sign would also be repetitive behaviour.”**

**DR OON LI KEAT,**  
Associate Consultant, Department of Developmental Psychiatry, IMH

customised to the needs of the person with ASD.

Society at large also has a big part to play in helping those with ASD cope and thrive. "The community should learn to be more accepting of people who are different," says Dr Oon. "It's a two-way street. While people who are 'different' try their best to fit in, people who fall under the category of what's considered the 'norm' should try their best to create more space for others to express themselves in their own ways too."

#### HELP IS HERE

Here are some places where those with ASD or their caregivers can turn to for help and support:

**1. AUTISM RESOURCE CENTRE (ARC)**  
ARC is a not-for-profit charity started by professional and parent volunteers. It offers myriad support and services such as early intervention programmes, an employability and employment centre, and a library and information services.

**2. PATHLIGHT SCHOOL** The first autism-focused school in Singapore, it offers a mainstream academic curriculum together with life readiness skills. It caters to students with ASD aged between seven and 18. Additional support arrangements

include smaller class sizes, special accommodations and staff trained in autism.

**3. NEURO-BEHAVIOURAL CLINIC, INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH**  
Comprising a team of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists, the clinic provides autism assessment services and evidence-based interventions for children and adolescents.

**4. THE ENABLING VILLAGE** This tranquil space houses retail, lifestyle and training outlets. It offers a shared space for people of different abilities to interact – via workshops and activities – and bond.



 Early in life, many children with ASD may have problems maintaining eye contact and may have speech delay. A classic sign would also be repetitive behaviour."

**DR OON LI KEAT,**  
Associate Consultant, Department of Developmental Psychiatry, IMH

**MR TANG WEI KIAT**  
32, Senior Occupational Therapist

## AN EMPATHETIC Approach

Being a father has helped this occupational therapist develop a deeper passion for his work with children.

Interview DENNIS YIN // Photo IMH

 enior Occupational Therapist Mr Tang Wei Kiat helps youngsters aged six to 18 with neurodevelopmental disorders, like autism spectrum disorder, and intellectual disability coupled with mental health conditions improve their social and motor skills. As a father of two children, aged one and four, he empathises with the struggles of parents of children with special needs. "The ways I help parents plan caregiving strategies have changed since I became a dad – I'm now more realistic in the suggestions I offer," he says.

**How different is your work compared to that of occupational therapists (OTs) in other healthcare settings?** Like all OTs, my goal is to help patients optimise their functional abilities so they can return to perform their roles, for instance as a parent, an employee at work or student in school, and to participate in activities of daily living

(ADLs). Mental health and physical health are intertwined – one can impact the other. For example, some children we see have motor coordination difficulties so playing at the playground and participating in physical education lessons in school becomes challenging (the physical aspect) for them. This may impact their self-esteem (the mental aspect) as they struggle to catch up with their peers.

My work also involves training community partners who run day activity centres (DAC) and adult disability homes for people who have neurodevelopmental disorders with mental health issues. I also teach a lab module at the Singapore Institute of Technology and mentor OT students during their clinical placements at IMH.

**Having worked at IMH for eight years now, has your perspective on your work changed?** When I first started, I thought I could "save" patients. But I now realise that my job is more about guiding them and being a facilitator in their journey towards recovery. What I do clinically

## occupational therapist • I SERVE

is important, but it needs to be a partnership with the patient so we can take the steps together.

### What's the longest journey that you've embarked on with a patient?

Three years, with a patient who has moderate autism. His speech is limited so he is unable to communicate his needs. He also often hurt himself. I worked with him and his mother to understand why he was doing this and taught them strategies to help manage his behaviours and enable him to participate in his ADLs. I also supported his mum in her caregiving journey. She was so involved in caring for her son that she neglected her own needs. It took our team about two years to help her understand that sending her son to a DAC would not only help him but also give her some respite.

### What should the public be more aware of in the area of mental healthcare?

I hope the public can be more compassionate. I experienced an incident recently at the MRT station, when a girl in a wheelchair grabbed hold of my daughter's pram. The girl was non-verbal and seemed to have a neurodevelopmental disorder. Before we knew it, the girl grabbed my child's shirt, which made her cry. The mother started scolding her child. I told the mother that it was okay and that I understand that her daughter didn't do it on purpose. As a parent, I can empathise that she was trying her best to manage her child. It made me think about the challenges many of my patients and their caregivers face as they go about their daily lives. I sincerely hope that as a community, we can do our part by being a little more tolerant towards these differently-abled individuals and their families.



# The Disclosure Discussion

**The Who, What, When, How and Why to sharing — or not sharing — one's mental health issues with others and the ways we can respond appropriately as a listener.**

Interview Koh Yuen Lin, in consultation with Ms Leow Lilyn, Principal Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, Institute of Mental Health

**>> SECRETS ARE HARD TO KEEP.** But when it comes to disclosing your mental health condition to those around you, it is not just a matter of secrecy, but also of privacy — just like it is with any other health condition or personal matter. Being open about one's mental illness has positive effects, as this opens the door for others to offer support. There are also reasons why an individual might choose to keep this information to himself, such as fear of being judged, or simply because he would prefer to keep it private.

Here, Ms Leow Lilyn, Principal Clinical Psychologist, Department of

Psychology in IMH, highlights what to consider when deciding to tell, or not to tell, others of one's mental health condition. She also shares pointers on how to react and lend support to someone who has disclosed his mental health condition.

**Recognise that it is not your fault** In Singapore, people are often pushed to excel from young. This puts a lot of pressure on individuals. "The ability to see that everybody has strengths and vulnerabilities isn't that well-accepted. So when somebody has a vulnerability in terms of a mental health challenge, they often struggle to tell others about it," observes Ms Leow.

"There is stigma surrounding mental illness in society that trickles down and translates into the individual's self-stigma. They start to think that they are choosing to be ill or that they are mentally weak. And it can start from a young age. For example, students may not go to the school counsellor because they don't want to be seen as the kid with 'something wrong'."

Ms Leow highlights however, that mental illnesses are no different from physical ailments: "It's crucial to remember that there is a biological component to mental disorders, and the illness is simply the body's response to certain factors. Just like a physical illness, you then need to take certain measures to manage your symptoms. That can include medication, lifestyle changes and therapy." When given the right perspective, those with mental health issues can work on their self-stigma and be aware that they are not to blame for having the illness.

"It will be difficult to share your mental health concerns if you think that you are to blame for them. When you change that mindset, you can then

be clearer about whether or not to disclose your condition," says Ms Leow.

## Different degrees of disclosure

Some might choose not to tell anyone, while others might choose to selectively tell an intimate group of people. One may also be open about it to advocate awareness and to lend support to those with a similar condition.

Ms Leow highlights that each person's circumstances are different and it is for individuals to ascertain the impact that disclosure will have on their lives. "Disclosure can be self-empowering for some because through it, they can feel like they 'own' the condition, and even help reduce the stigma around mental illness by raising awareness," she says.

Also, disclosure doesn't have to be an 'all-or-nothing' proposition. Just as one would choose who to tell, one should also think about what to tell. US-based advocacy group National Alliance on Mental Illness advises one to carefully consider which parts of his experience to share, and which to keep private. The group also recommends sharing positive information, such as lessons one has learnt through coping with the condition, or experience one has managed to gather.

## Know who to tell to get the support you want

Ms Leow suggests being clear about one's objective — be it to seek support, to get work arrangements sorted, to let a significant other deeper into one's life, or for the individual to be a role model for others. And depending on the individual's objective, who he discloses to may be different. For example, a person seeking flexible work arrangements would speak to his direct supervisor or human resource manager; whereas somebody seeking emotional support might meet his goal better through opening up to close friends and family.

**“[People with mental health issues] don’t necessarily want pity. They want people to understand them and know how they are doing as a person.”**

**MS LEOW LILYN,** Principal Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

## Make sure there's two-way communication

Just as it is difficult for a person to talk about his condition, processing the information might be similarly challenging for the recipient of the information. "Start by saying that it is a hard thing for you to do, and that you hope that the listener can respect your struggles. That way, you are guiding them on how to react," advises Ms Leow. For the listener, Ms Leow recommends a stance of genuine curiosity: "People would appreciate a non-judgmental response and a sense of curiosity from the listener, which means you as the confidant suspend what you think things should be, and instead try to understand how it is, and how you are in a position to help." The recipient also needs to keep in mind that this is private medical information, which needs to be treated respectfully.

## Avoid extreme reactions

Ms Leow highlights that those whom the person has chosen to reveal such sensitive details to should not trivialise the information shared or pretend that the conversation never happened. However, she also cautions against over-accommodation, such as by giving unnecessary concessions at work or tip-toeing around certain topics. "People want to be given equal opportunities. Don't immediately assume that the person cannot

cope because he cannot take the stress — ask and clarify instead. Mental health issues are the same as any challenging life event, such as a miscarriage, divorce or major illness. So, react as you would to those issues: sensitively and respectfully. Those with such issues don't necessarily want pity. They want people to understand them and know how they are doing as a person."



## WHY I'VE ALWAYS BEEN OPEN

"Allowing oneself to be vulnerable is never easy. But if you can live with the implications, then it is the right decision. I decided to be honest to potential employers if asked about my diagnosis. For while I was aware that employers were likely to favour a person without a mental health condition over a person with a mental health condition, all other things being equal, I felt that the situation would be worse, if I did not disclose and my employer were to find out later. As an employee with a past diagnosis of mental illness, it was very important for me to evidence competency and determination to succeed in the workplace. Thankfully, supportive employers and colleagues who believed in my abilities gave me the confidence to achieve work targets, lead a team with enthusiasm, and effectively manage projects and people."

- MS CHAN LI SHAN, who has fully recovered from schizophrenia, on her decision to disclose her condition



## WHY I'VE STARTED TO TALK ABOUT IT

"The stigma, shame and fear about how people would judge me held me back from telling anyone about my condition. I was always afraid that people would take the news badly. It took me many years but I decided that I had to get out from my shell and live life. Many were taken aback and surprised when I told them. Some were even unsure if I was telling them the truth because, to them, I did not seem to exhibit symptoms of mental illness. Some were encouraging and supportive. But I took all these reactions in my stride. I told myself that people can say whatever they want because it is their right. But I too have a right to tell the world to help others who have similar experiences. And after disclosing my challenges to others, I didn't feel trapped anymore."

- MR MOHAMED ISMAIL, who opted to selectively disclose his anxiety and panic disorder to his children and siblings more than a decade after diagnosis



# Q&A

ASK THE  
Experts

IMH clinicians answer your questions.

## 01: I AM A MALE IN MY 50s, AND THOUGH I AM FINANCIALLY SUCCESSFUL AND HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY, I AM WEIGHED DOWN BY FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY.

*I can't help thinking that I am not 'good enough'. I feel that I don't match up to my old friends, many of whom are quite accomplished, in terms of talent, charisma and intelligence. And the one time I brought it up to my wife, she just said I was being 'silly'. What can I do to get out of this state?*

**A:** Feelings of inferiority can be influenced by negative beliefs such as "I am not good enough". These beliefs may be formed through early life experiences, such as being criticised or excluded. Societal pressures to achieve can also lead one to derive self-worth through accomplishments.

Our beliefs can take on a life of their own and cause us to interpret or act in situations that

confirm them. For example, if you believe that you are inferior, you may tend to interpret your successes as due to external factors and setbacks as a sign of your weaknesses. You may compensate for your feelings of inferiority by working even harder to be 'perfect'. However, no matter how perfect you try to be, it is inevitable that you will encounter failures. Changing these deep beliefs requires an awareness

of your negative thoughts, feelings and actions, and learning to transform your thinking and biases. Lastly, it is important not to interpret setbacks as a sign of failure and redefine your self-worth to ensure that it is not solely based on your achievements.

**DR SHARON LU,**  
Senior Clinical Psychologist,  
Department of Psychology

### FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY

These beliefs may be formed through early life experiences, such as being criticised or excluded.



## 02: MY DAUGHTER'S PRIMARY 1 TEACHER INFORMED US THAT SHE HAS NOT BEEN SPEAKING IN CLASS OR WITH HER CLASSMATES AT ALL FOR THE WHOLE FIRST SEMESTER.

*Her preschool teachers had said that she was very quiet in kindergarten but we thought it was just normal shyness because she is very chatty and cheerful at home. Could this be selective mutism? How can we help her?*



**A:** Individuals with selective mutism fail to speak in at least one social situation where speaking is expected, despite speaking normally in other situations. This failure to speak should be observed for at least one month.

Typically, children with selective mutism have a shy or anxious temperament from young, and they don't speak due to a high level of social anxiety. Outward signs of anxiety such as the avoidance of eye contact or a tense posture are often observed when the child has to speak. Sometimes individuals with selective mutism communicate nonverbally, with gestures or writing,

while others may whisper. It is possible that your child may have selective mutism, which could be assessed by a child mental health professional. In school, you could ask her teacher to assign her a buddy whom she is comfortable with. Be encouraging, do not pressure your child to speak or criticise her failure to speak.

Enlist the help of the school counsellor, who (sometimes in collaboration with a child psychologist) can work out a step-by-step plan to help your child.

**MS ONG LIMIN,**  
Principal Clinical Psychologist,  
Department of Psychology



UP AND COMING

## EVERYONE DESERVES A SHOT AT WORK

**PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB CONTINUES TO SHOW HER SUPPORT FOR JOB CLUB, WHICH HELPS PERSONS IN RECOVERY INTEGRATE BACK TO THE WORKFORCE.**

Being employed boosts the self-worth and confidence of persons with mental health conditions, which can help in their recovery journey. It was with this mindset that the Job Club was set up by IMH and officially opened by President Mdm Halimah Yacob (then MP for Jurong GRC and Deputy Secretary-General of the NTUC) 10 years ago.

In July 2019, Mdm Halimah returned to the Job Club to learn more about its progress, as well as hold a dialogue with a group of Job Club clients, employers, caregivers and peer support specialists.

### MORE CAN BE DONE

One issue raised during the dialogue was the continued lack of understanding of mental health conditions, which can affect how employers and co-workers view persons with mental health conditions and their ability to engage in gainful employment. This may explain why – despite placing about 2,800 clients in the open job market over the past decade – many of the positions were from sectors such as F&B, retail and cleaning. There are many people suffering from mental health issues who are very well-qualified and they need better jobs. Mdm Halimah also



urged more employers to step up and offer "quality jobs" to those with mental health issues.

Mr Jeffery Tan, Group General Counsel for Jardine Cycle & Carriage and Chief Executive Officer of Mindset Care, a charity organisation that sources for job opportunities for recovering mental health patients, agreed that better support will go a long way to help those in need of it. "Many of us have struggled with mental health at some point in our lives, even if we were not being diagnosed," he said. "We hope the whole ecosystem of the workforce can be more compassionate towards those with mental health issues and provide opportunities for them to attain meaningful employment and assistance."

**The Job Club welcomes employers keen to learn more or explore collaborations. Call 6389 2678, email [enquiries@jobclub.sg](mailto:enquiries@jobclub.sg), or visit [www.jobclub.sg](http://www.jobclub.sg)**



## 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CHAT CARNIVAL

**WHEN:** 23 November, 1pm to 7pm  
**WHERE:** \*SCAPE, 2 Orchard Link

The Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT) celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a carnival themed "Journeying Beyond the Decade". Besides enjoying the festive atmosphere, visitors can check out the various booths and activities to learn about mental health.

Visit [www.chat.mentalhealth.sg](http://www.chat.mentalhealth.sg) for more details.



## DEDICATED TO SERVE

IMH Chief Nurse Samantha Ong received the President's Award for Nurses at the Istana on 24 July 2019. The award is the highest honour in Singapore's nursing profession, recognising outstanding nurses who have gone beyond their call of duty and made impactful contributions to the profession and community.

IMH Chief Nurse Samantha Ong with her President's Award for Nurses, Singapore's highest honour for the nursing profession.

Ms Ong has dedicated 33 years of her nursing career to caring for patients and leading the transformation of nursing services in IMH. This includes empowering nurses to foster collective leadership, decision-making and to promote nursing autonomy. As a strong advocate for recovery and rehabilitation, she has also been involved in introducing various programmes to help patients reintegrate into the community.



# Face the facts

Do you see human-like expressions in the pictures on this page? You are not alone — and there's a simple explanation for it.

**YOU ARE EXPERIENCING:** Pareidolia, a psychological phenomenon that causes people to see a random image as something significant. Very often, this is a human face – and ‘faces’ have been seen in everyday objects ranging from inkblots to appliances. This is the result of our brain trying to impose order on our surroundings by identifying patterns and making associations. When we come across an image, the brain sifts through a range of possible matches in our memory, finds one that is the most relatable and assigns this to the image we see. But why ‘faces’? That’s because a facial pattern is preferred by our brains, as it is what we recognise best from an early age.



More than just discovering faces in inanimate objects and abstract patterns, pareidolia accounts for why we make out familiar shapes and figures in clouds as well!

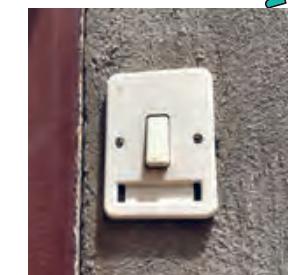


Photos: Courtesy of Instagram #iseefaces



## Now You See Me

Check out examples of ‘faces’ captured in everyday life. There’s the Instagram hashtag #iseefaces and @FacesPics, a popular Twitter account, which leads to a library of user-contributed content.



# 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)

### 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

### 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  
(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)

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  
Friday 8am to 5pm

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

# Mental Health CARNIVAL

@ INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

— 26 OCTOBER 2019, 9am – 3pm —

**FREE  
ADMISSION**

*Make your Saturday a therapeutic one!*

**Have fun learning to care for your mental health with these activities:**

- Animal-assisted Activities
- Drum Circle Activities
- Horticulture Activities
- Art & Music Therapy
- Reminiscence Therapy
- Relaxation Workshops
- Mental Health & Wellness Talks

Also in the line-up:



Guided Tours around IMH



Handicrafts Bazaar

COME  
JOIN US!

## CARNIVAL HIGHLIGHT

Meet horses from EQUAL and get a chance to groom and feed them!



We are at 10 Buangkok View, Singapore 539747.

Scan QR code to visit website



**FREE Shuttle Service** (15-min intervals)

Hougang MRT → IMH : 8.45am - 2.30pm

IMH → Hougang MRT : 9.45am - 3.30pm

Hougang MRT pick-up point : Taxi stand outside UOB

**Register for talks and selected activities!**  
For more details, please visit [www.imh.com.sg](http://www.imh.com.sg)