

FEBRUARY-MAY 2024

IMAGINE

A MAGAZINE ON MENTAL HEALTH

ENDURING A SILENT STRUGGLE

Why persistent depressive
disorder often goes
unnoticed



GATEKEEP YOUR BOUNDARIES
And say 'yes' to well-being and healthier relationships



GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health Programme for General Practitioners and Family Physicians

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- ✔ The principles of different treatment approaches;
- ✔ Applying assessment methodology to different mental health disorders; and
- ✔ Managing and prescribing basic psychiatric medications.

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Mental health disorders are one of the top four leading causes of disease burden in Singapore, according to the Ministry of Health's Global Burden of Disease 2019 study findings. Doctors in primary care – General Practitioners (GPs) and Family Physicians (FPs) – therefore play a significant role to provide early and accessible mental health services to individuals in the community.

The **Graduate Diploma in Mental Health (GDMH)** is jointly offered by IMH and the Division of Graduate Medical Studies, National University of Singapore. The programme, into its 14th year and conducted by mental health specialists, aims to enhance the knowledge and skills of GPs and FPs to assess, identify and manage less severe psychiatric conditions.

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Division of Graduate Medical Studies
Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine



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Live Well
Short rest periods can enhance productivity.



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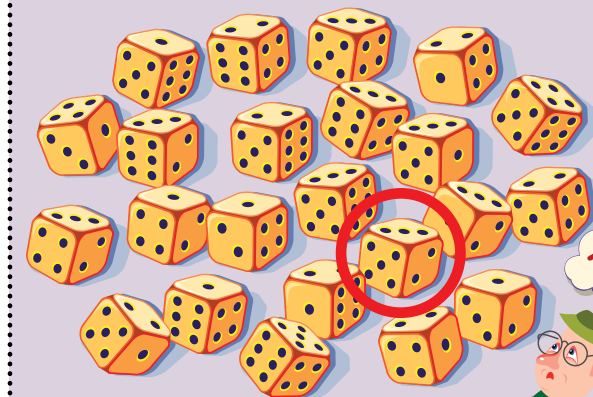
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DICE CHALLENGE

Can you spot the only cube that adds up to exactly 10 dots?



SOLUTION ▲

Turn to Live Well, page 7, for the puzzle.



“Setting personal boundaries is vital for our well-being, safety and the development of healthy connections.”

MS SHIVASANGAREY KANTHASAMY,
Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

BOUNDARIES AND BRIDGES: WHY HEALTHY CONNECTIONS MATTER

The saying “no man is an island” speaks to our human need for interconnectedness. Whether in person or online, our interdependence and desire for connection are evident in family, work, social circles and beyond. But while living in community brings joy, it can also impose overwhelming demands.

Our cover feature (pages 8 to 11) explores the importance of establishing boundaries to carve out a safe harbour for ourselves amid life’s pressures. Setting these limits with others is essential for our well-being, sense of identity and healthy relationships. While advocating thus for one’s boundaries can be challenging, the account by Nisha (not her real name) illustrates how clear communication can foster stronger connections through better mutual understanding and respect.

Connection strengthens all relationships, including those forged during therapy. In her work as a mental health practitioner over the last decade, Ms Ruth Komathi has realised that judiciously sharing her personal struggle with bipolar disorder helps her connect more deeply with clients with similar battles (pages 12 and 13). This empathy from lived experience likewise enables Mr Asher Low and his team at Limitless to better understand Gen Zs (page 3). Their bold ventures online have opened up new pathways of support, making young digital natives feel more at ease and bridging the gap to them seeking help.

Elsewhere in this issue, we shed light on persistent depressive disorder (pages 14 to 16), a less visible type of chronic depression that often goes undiagnosed for years. Because the individual can largely carry on with daily life, symptoms are sometimes dismissed as personality traits. But a pause — and a hard look within — might reveal whether one is truly living, or only existing. Our article discusses when to get professional help, and what form that help could take.

Whether it is connecting with others, or holding space for self-reflection and care, both are necessary for fulfilment in our interpersonal relationships and within ourselves. We hope these stories encourage you to find a balance between nurturing your connections, and making the time to attend to your own needs.

Happy reading.

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interview • MY SAY

A safety (inter)net for GEN Z

To connect with youth, it’s vital to think like them, says this non-profit leader who is committed to engaging teenagers and young adults in digital spaces before they slip through the cracks.

Text KOH YUEN LIN // Photo AIK CHEN

MR ASHER LOW

Founder &
Executive Director,
Limitless

Online platforms often get flak for their potential risks to young users, but Mr Asher Low views them as powerful outreach tools. At 29, he founded Limitless to encourage young people aged between 12 and 25 to get help for themselves. Starting with three members in 2016, Limitless has since grown to a 22-strong team to meet increased help requests that came mainly through word of mouth.

The COVID-19 pandemic spiked demand, as teenagers and young adults struggled with isolation and adjustments to new routines. “Our first TikTok video (in 2021), on ‘13 reasons why people don’t seek help’, led to 150 new help requests that weekend,” Mr Low recalls.

Riding on the momentum, in mid-2021, Limitless added the Discord platform to its digital tools by launching its Safehouse server, where young people can chat anonymously with Limitless’ trained mental health support staff, interact with peers and share their mental health journeys. To date, more than 1,000 youths have engaged with Limitless via Safehouse.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Mr Low acknowledges the limits of online communication, such as how anonymity can hamper deep connections. Yet, he considers virtual environments essential for engaging with Gen Z — the generation born between 1997 and 2012 — who view these digital realms as convenient and a space to feel at ease.

“You’ll lose mentally burnt-out youth if they have to go out of their way (to get support): one step too many, one form too many, one question too many,” he says, advocating for online platforms or text-based services as a first step to

reach digital natives who feel tentative about seeking help. Aside from its online community, Limitless also provides direct casework and in-person counselling, and may refer complex cases to hospitals for additional support.

While acceptance of professional mental healthcare has grown, Mr Low highlights that stigma around seeking formal help at healthcare institutions remains. “Not all cases require hospital-based care. There are many community-based or online resources that youth can start with,” he says. Limitless aims to “shift the needle” on young people seeking help, though he says there is still a long way to go.

EMPATHY AT THE CORE

Gen Zs connect better with peers or those with shared experiences, says Mr Low. “Respect is huge,” he elaborates. “They want someone who doesn’t put them down — and that calls for deep understanding and sensitivity.” Limitless prioritises hiring empathetic psychologists, social workers and other staff, many of whom have lived experiences of mental health challenges, which help them better relate to the young.

Mr Low stresses the need to treat young individuals as equals and to empower them. “We’re only helping them navigate a different pathway, (ensuring) they don’t lose dignity when reaching out for help,” he says.

He observes a rise in complex cases among the young people he has seen, worsened by their exposure online to global crises, from economic downturns to climate change. “We have a passionate generation of youth who are hyper-connected yet isolated,” he says. “They’re

flooded by world news online, but often don’t have the maturity to handle these issues. They end up feeling stressed and uncertain about the future. It’s a perfect storm.”

His message is hopeful: help is available, and there is no need for fear or shame in seeking it. “If your first therapist doesn’t work out, don’t give up,” he adds. “Different therapists have different approaches. You can work with a few until you find someone you’re comfortable with.” With his dedication to empowering young people, Mr Low stands out as a champion in the community for youth mental health.

FOR YOUTH: TEXT, CHAT & CONNECT

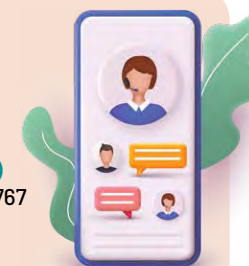
> **Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)**
CareText: 9151 1767 (WhatsApp), 24 hours daily

> **CHAT webCHAT (ages 16 – 30):**
www.chat.mentalhealth.sg, 1pm – 8pm, Tue – Sat (excl. PH)

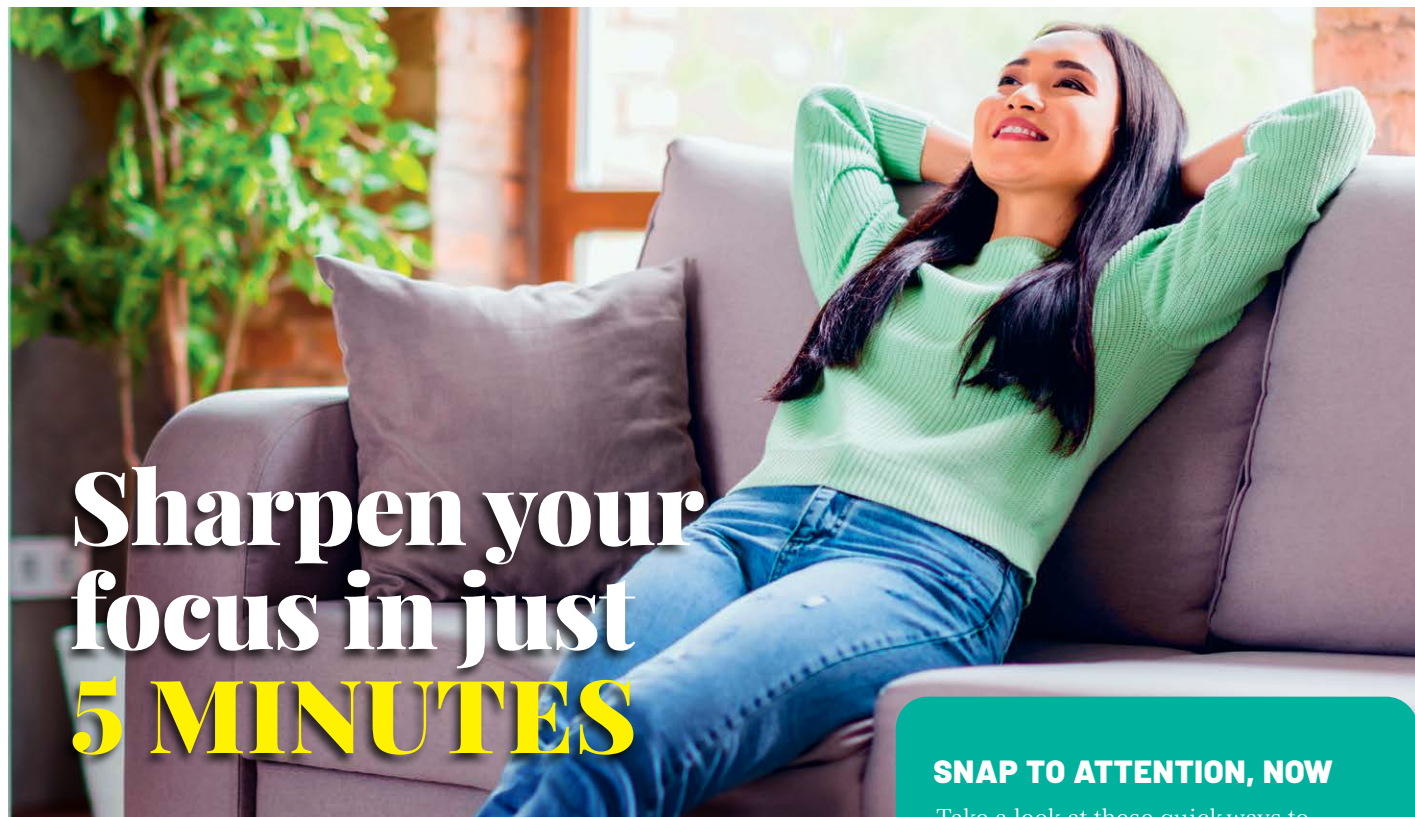
> **Limitless (ages 12 – 25):**
www.limitless.sg/talk

> **ec2.sg by Fei Yue Quick Chat (ages 12 – 25):** www.fyqs.org/ec2-sg, 10am – 12pm and 2pm – 5pm, Mon, Thu, Fri (excl. PH)

> **Care Singapore Hear4U (ages 7 – 16):**
6978 2728 (WhatsApp), 10am – 5pm, Mon – Fri



LIVE WELL!



Sharpen your focus in just 5 MINUTES

SNAP TO ATTENTION, NOW

Take a look at these quick ways to regain your focus.

- > **Deep breathing** Deep, controlled breaths can reduce stress and improve focus. Try inhaling for four seconds, holding for seven and exhaling for eight.
- > **Find a sense of stillness** Minimise distractions and find a quiet place. Close your eyes, relax your body and clear your mind. This moment of tranquility can refresh your attention span.
- > **Pomodoro technique** This popular life hack entails working for 25 minutes, then taking a five-minute break — much like the method used in A/Prof Ginns' study. This cycle helps to sustain concentration, and staves off fatigue.



>> A new study from the University of Sydney reveals a surprisingly simple solution for rejuvenating our minds: just five minutes of doing absolutely nothing. Published in the *Educational and Developmental Psychologist* journal, the research shows that a short break from any task can significantly enhance concentration and attention.

The small study, which involved 72 Australian university students, tested the effectiveness of unstructured rest versus nature-based rest through a video after a mentally taxing 20-minute maths test. Results indicated that participants who took a five-minute break — either doing nothing or watching a nature video — outperformed those who did not take one at all. The type of rest did not markedly affect the outcome; what mattered was the act of taking a break.

The study shows that a short rest period can help to boost productivity and learning, and is an easy hack for anyone looking to optimise their cognitive performance. "You need to be doing something different for five minutes," said Associate Professor Paul Ginns, the study's author. "Move away from your computer or device, do some breathing or just sit quietly to rest your brain from the task. Scrolling through social media does not count as rest — you need to take a break from devices."

STUB OUT AND SAVE YOUR BRAIN

Every cigarette may shrink your brain, revealed a new study from Washington University School of Medicine in the United States. Using data from more than 32,000 individuals in a United Kingdom database, the researchers showed a direct link between smoking and reduced brain volume, especially in heavy smokers. >



Published in *Biological Psychiatry: Global Open Science*, the study also found that genes did make a person more likely to smoke, which can then lead to decreased brain volume. "It sounds bad, and it is bad," said senior study author Dr Laura Bierut. "A reduction in brain volume is consistent with increased ageing. This is important as our population gets older, because ageing and smoking are risk factors for dementia."

Furthermore, the reduction in brain volume seems to be irreversible, even for those who quit years ago. "You can't undo the damage that has already been done,

but you can avoid causing further damage," said lead researcher Yoonhoo Chang. Their findings support prior research on smokers' higher risks of age-related cognitive decline and Alzheimer's, and offers another reason to quit.

HELPLINES

- > **Health Promotion Board (HPB) QuitLine: 1800 438 2000**
- > **National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) All Addictions Helpline: 6732 6837**
- > **WE CARE Community Services: 3165 8017**



THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Sacrificing sleep does more than make us yawn — it heightens anxiety, sours moods and disrupts emotional health. These findings are from a University of Houston study that drew on over 50 years of research. Published in *Psychological Bulletin*, this review is the most comprehensive to date, and shows the connection between sleep deprivation and emotional well-being.

The researchers scrutinised the outcomes of 154 studies that involved 5,715 participants and found a clear pattern: insufficient sleep — whether it's staying up late or facing interruptions during the night — significantly reduces feelings of joy and contentment, while ramping up anxiety symptoms. "Our findings confirm that even when sleep is only mildly deficient, there are measurable negative changes in how we react to everyday events," said Professor Candice Alfano, the study's co-author and director of the university's Sleep and Anxiety Center of Houston.

The study points to why sleep is key to maintaining both physical and emotional health, and reminds us that sleep should be non-negotiable in our lives. "In our largely sleep-deprived society, quantifying the effects of sleep loss on emotion is critical for promoting psychological health," added Assistant Professor Cara Palmer, a co-author of the study.

TAKE BACK YOUR BEDTIME

Many people put off sleep to reclaim their personal time due to their packed daily schedules. "Revenge bedtime procrastination" is delaying sleep for activities like watching TV, scrolling through social media or gaming. This can lead to sleep deprivation, and affect mental and physical health. To break this cycle, reorient your night-time routine towards relaxing activities that prep you for a good night's rest.

TRY THIS:

- ✓ Take light snacks like nuts
- ✓ Sip on herbal tea like chamomile
- ✓ Write tomorrow's to-do list
- ✓ Have a warm shower
- ✓ Relax to soothing sounds (like waves crashing, rain falling)
- ✓ Read a light book

NOT THIS:

- ✗ Eat a heavy meal
- ✗ Drink coffee and other caffeinated beverages
- ✗ Answer work e-mails on your mobile phone
- ✗ Do household chores
- ✗ Listen to fast or loud music
- ✗ Play an exciting video game

INSUFFICIENT SLEEP REDUCES FEELINGS OF JOY AND CONTENTMENT, WHILE RAMPING UP ANXIETY SYMPTOMS.





A GREEN SPACE IS THE PLACE TO BE

You can turn your small balcony garden into a sanctuary that blooms with life and nurtures your well-being. A recent study in the *Design for Health* journal, by researchers from the University of Surrey and the Royal Horticultural Society in the United Kingdom, shows exactly this by looking at the health benefits of well-designed gardens.

The comprehensive review distilled insights from 17 peer-reviewed articles, spanning 1996 to 2019, to identify the key elements for enhancing well-being in garden spaces. The study called for diverse plantings, serene spaces, distinctive areas for various purposes such as calmness or invigoration, and features that encourage exploration and sensory stimulation. Accessibility and cultural diversity are also pivotal, so that gardens are inclusive while reflecting tradition and history.

"These six key design features to optimise well-being apply to gardens in any context and of any size. Whether it's a small home garden or balcony, a neglected community space, a green schoolyard, or a rehabilitation centre garden, aim to incorporate as many evidence-based aspects as possible," explained Lauriane Suyin Chalmin-Pui, co-author of the study, in *Psychology Today*.

>> FIVE THERAPEUTIC GARDENS IN SINGAPORE

- > **Tiong Bahru Park** Designed in collaboration with the National University of Singapore Mind Science Centre, this park engages the senses in different zones, which highlight fragrances, colours and textures.
- > **Yishun Pond Park** Built in consultation with Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, it is ideal for therapeutic horticulture and rehabilitative activities, with a wheelchair-accessible exercise bridge, therapy stairs and a three-generational fitness corner.
- > **Sembawang Park** Has various zones such as a forest classroom, an active playscape, and an inclusive outdoor fitness corner for seniors with dementia and children with special needs.
- > **Pasir Ris Park** Just 67m from the sea, this is the country's first therapeutic garden with sea views up close, thanks to an elevated vista and a viewing deck.
- > **Jurong Lake Gardens** Singapore's largest therapeutic garden has accessible movable planters, a children's section designed with sensory zones and play elements, nostalgic features such as a stone chess table, and more.

Embrace your inner hero

Whether you resonate more with Batman or the Black Widow, discovering the hero within could be your secret to fulfilment. A new study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that applying the "hero's journey" to personal narratives can profoundly enhance well-being and meaning.

Researchers from Boston College and the University of North Carolina found that individuals viewing life as a heroic quest reported improved mental health and a stronger sense of purpose. "When people see their lives as heroic quests, they report less depression and cope better with challenges," the authors wrote in *Scientific American*. "These 'heroic' people reported a clearer sense of self, more new adventures, strong goals, good friends and so on." The approach showed how it could help people deal with life's trials while fostering resilience and creativity in facing new challenges.

The researchers introduced a "restorying" intervention in six studies with more than 1,700 participants, encouraging them to reframe their life stories with elements of the hero's journey. Participants felt their lives were more meaningful — demonstrating the transformative power of seeing

oneself as the protagonist of a grand epic. It suggests that the stories we construct about our lives can impact our psychological well-being, personal transformation and happiness.

DISCOVER YOUR POWER — CAPE OPTIONAL

Here's how your life can embody a hero's journey, according to *Time* magazine:

- > **Reflective journaling** Identify key moments and figures in your life, such as pivotal changes, challenges and potential allies. Contemplate the legacy you wish to leave behind.
- > **Casting your life movie** Picture who would play you in a film. This exercise helps you see yourself objectively by recognising qualities like passion and resilience that you admire in others, and that you yourself hold.
- > **Seek new adventures** Just as heroes in tales confront their fears, take part in new experiences to enrich your life. Embrace novelty, even in the little things like minor changes in your routine.



MODIFYING YOUR MINDSET: A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

Imagine improving your mental wellness by changing your outlook. It seems easy, yet recent research shows that fresh perspectives need to be deliberately integrated into daily life for a real impact. Published in the *BMC Psychology* journal, the German and Dutch study revealed that those who received mindset interventions developed more positive beliefs about stress than the control groups. However, maintaining these changes was tough, because the improvements were short-lived and did not significantly elevate well-being. The takeaway? For enduring benefits, we need to actively weave new mindsets into our everyday routines.

KICK-START THE CHANGE WITH THESE SIMPLE EXERCISES

- Monday** Jot down three things you're grateful for in a gratitude journal.
- Tuesday** Repeat positive affirmations to yourself throughout the day.
- Wednesday** Try mindful breathing to stay present and focused.
- Thursday** Visualise yourself achieving your goals.
- Friday** Go easy on yourself. Treat yourself kindly with self-compassion.
- Saturday** Go out with loved ones or make a new connection.
- Sunday** Reflect about the past week and plan for the upcoming one.



DICE CHALLENGE

Can you spot the only cube that adds up to exactly 10 dots?



REFER TO THE CONTENTS PAGE FOR THE PUZZLE ANSWER.





The fine art of drawing the line

Many shy away from setting boundaries with other people due to fears of resistance, or a sense of guilt. Yet, establishing such limits is crucial for mental well-being as we manoeuvre through a demanding world.

Interview **EVELINE GAN** in consultation with **MS SHIVASANGAREY KANTHASAMY**, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

When most people think about the early months of marriage, they envision romance

and bliss. For one newlywed, who prefers to be known as Nisha, that was not the reality. Her first six months of marriage were fraught with sleepless nights and heated discussions with her husband about handling his parents' expectations, which ranged from frequency of visits to criticisms of her appearance.

"They also held some beliefs that didn't align with mine or my family's," Nisha explains. She initially complied with their requests, but this soon left her feeling diminished. "I felt really bad and became a caricature of myself," she shares. "Those negative feelings bled into my personal life and severely impacted our daily life (as a married couple)."

Recounting the challenging period, Nisha, who is in her 20s, decided then to set clear limits to manage her in-laws' expectations in certain areas. For instance, she reduced the frequency of their meetings. "Culturally, setting healthy boundaries isn't widely accepted," she shares. "I had to establish these boundaries with my in-laws knowing that it helps me, even though I felt guilty at first."

Setting personal boundaries – or the rules for ourselves regarding acceptable behaviour within relationships – is vital for our well-being, safety and the development of healthy connections. By establishing boundaries, we ground ourselves, clarify expectations for everyone involved and gain control over what we can manage.

However, conveying these boundaries to others is not always

easy, explains Ms Shivasangarey Kanthasamy, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, Institute of Mental Health (IMH).

Neglecting to set boundaries can lead to a host of negative outcomes, including burnout, resentment, anger and frustration, Ms Shiva points out. Other common warning signs that indicate boundaries have been violated include people-pleasing behaviour, superhero syndrome (the belief that one can handle everything) and feeling unappreciated for one's efforts. "In extreme cases where boundary issues go unacknowledged and unresolved, they may result in depression and anxiety," she shares.

CARVING OUT YOUR SAFE SPACE

Ms Shiva likens personal boundaries to a barricade around a safe room. "You'd only want to let in people who keep your room bright and safe," she explains. "If you think someone might jeopardise its safety, don't let them in."

Establishing our boundaries goes beyond saying "no". It is about recognising our personal requirements and comfort level on an issue, and then drawing the line accordingly. "Only when we know our needs and wants can we communicate them clearly to send the message across," Ms Shiva says. "We do not have to explain ourselves or provide a detailed story about the limits that we set." She further emphasises that each person has "total control" over who or what can enter their safe space.

However, setting boundaries should not be an all-or-nothing endeavour. "Some people have porous boundaries, allowing anyone or

anything to enter their room and disturb its peace," Ms Shiva shares. "Others might have rigid boundaries, strictly controlling who and what they let in, which can cause their room to be empty all the time."

Healthy boundary-setting involves controlling who and what we allow into our safe space, while exercising flexibility when necessary.

BARRIERS TO DRAWING BOUNDARIES

Understanding and effectively communicating boundaries begins in childhood. The family environment and parenting styles are important; without healthy boundaries and communication modelled at home, it can be tough to navigate these waters later in life. "It's a skill that has to be learnt," Ms Shiva shares.



“Neglecting to set boundaries can lead to a host of negative outcomes, including burnout, resentment, anger and frustration.”

MS SHIVASANGAREY KANTHASAMY, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, IMH

For children to learn how to set healthy boundaries, they need a supportive environment where they can express their needs or wants, and the emotions that arise when these go unmet, says Ms Shiva. Such validation of their emotions should take place whether or not their requests are met, and requires thoughtful communication from their caregivers.

In the workplace, organisational culture matters. In environments that prize competitiveness and high performance, healthy work-life boundaries may be less of a priority. "Employees may be made to feel that asking for work-life balance is inappropriate, or shows a lack of dedication or underperformance," Ms Shiva says. "However, work-life balance and work performance are not mutually exclusive. If an organisation does not support or encourage work-life boundaries, an unhealthy culture of overwork may arise and risk employees facing burnout."

Ms Shiva often observes a lack of communication in her clients when it comes to speaking up about their boundaries. "Fear and guilt stop them from communicating the values that define their boundaries," she shares. "If they can open up, break down the walls and communicate with one another, they'll usually find a way (to bridge their differences)."

BALANCING GUILT AND GROWTH

Experiencing discomfort is a natural part of establishing boundaries, especially when we face pushback or feel guilty, explains Ms Shiva. After all, not everyone will be receptive, even with assertive yet calm communication. "They may test your limits and question you, which often leads to self-doubt," she says.

But like any emotion, guilt comes and goes. Ms Shiva's advice? "Don't

Healthy boundary-setting involves controlling who and what we allow into our safe space, while exercising flexibility when necessary.



avoid or suppress it. Embrace it by acknowledging that guilt is part of the process of communicating your needs."

She recounts a personal experience of denying a large loan to a former close friend. "Initially, it was difficult to say 'no', but I opted to prioritise my values: that relationships should be genuine and without resentment, and that friendships should be reciprocal," she recalls. She had long felt the friendship was one-sided, with herself always in the role of the giver. Although her friend did not keep in touch after the incident, Ms Shiva stands by her decision. "I chose short-term discomfort over long-term resentment," she says.

LIKE TRAINING A MUSCLE

To Nisha, setting boundaries is akin to strengthening a muscle — a process that requires consistent effort and practice. For Nisha and her husband, establishing their limits as a couple proved challenging initially. However, after her husband witnessed her struggle to meet his family's requests, he supported her by communicating their boundaries to them.

It was a turning point. Despite initial "big feelings" from all parties involved, remaining firm, consistent and clear about their reasons proved beneficial. Open communication with her husband and his unwavering support were also key.

"The first few discussions were always hard," she says. "For example, if we said we wanted more personal time, it led to pushback. But we navigated it each time, clarified our reasons and stuck to our guns. With time, our actions spoke louder than our words."

Nisha acknowledges that compromises can be made at times, too. "For example, if I plan to see my husband's family once a week or every other week, yet there's a special situation that suddenly arises, such as someone falling ill, I can work with that," she says. "Likewise, if I don't feel my best, my husband accepts that I may miss a family event. It goes both ways."

As much as we want to set boundaries to protect ourselves, we should also consider the flip side. "Just as you want to state your needs and wants, the other person may want to do that as well," Ms Shiva points out. "Don't take it personally; they are not targeting you."

Now, more than a year into their marriage, Nisha feels their attempts in setting clear limits have paid off. In fact, her relationship with her in-laws has improved because everyone has gained a better understanding of one another's needs.

"The journey can be very hard, but it's something you have to keep doing," Nisha says. "At some point, it will pay off."

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SETTING LIMITS

The skill of setting healthy boundaries protects your mental well-being amid overwhelming demands from other parties. It can also transform your relationships and self-esteem. Here's how to start:

- 1 Identify your needs, wants and priorities.** Once you've identified them, it will become easier to establish boundaries that respect them.
- 2 Communicate clearly.** Use "I" statements to express your boundaries in a firm, kind and neutral manner. For example: "I feel overwhelmed with too many weekend events. I need time to recharge." Avoid blaming others with statements like, "You're making me exhausted and not giving me time to rest."
- 3 Say "no" gracefully.** You do not have to overexplain or justify your decision. If necessary, restate your needs.
- 4 Walk the talk.** If you have told your boss or colleagues that you will not respond to work e-mails or messages after working hours, stick to it, except in genuinely urgent situations. This consistency shows others that you are serious about your boundaries.



MS RUTH KOMATHI

Team Lead, Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) Oasis Day Centre



Empathy through experience

From her personal battle with bipolar disorder, this young woman has turned her challenges into a source of strength for others seeking healing and understanding. Interview KEENAN PEREIRA Photo DILLON TAN

People often assume that Ms Ruth Komathi's career as a mental health practitioner was motivated by her own experience with bipolar disorder. After all, the 34-year-old openly shares her struggles living with the condition. "I do it to spark conversations in the community," she remarks. "Previously, when I wasn't feeling well mentally, I didn't know how to talk about it. Little did I realise that so many others who face similar struggles can't voice them out!"

But she tells *Imagine* that her passion

for mental health, psychology and counselling predates her diagnosis, as she had always been interested in people and their lived experiences. "My studies in psychology and counselling had little to do with the fact that I have a mental health condition," says Ruth, who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when she was 18. "Living with one just provided different insights to what I learnt in a textbook."

Having bipolar disorder has not only built Ruth's resilience but also deeply informed her approach to counselling,

by bridging personal insights with professional expertise. That skill helps her in her role as a Team Lead at the Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH)'s Oasis Day Centre. Together with the Deputy Head of the Centre, she works with a team of four full-time staff and volunteers who support individuals recovering from mental illness. She also trains corporates and those outside the mental health sphere to broaden their understanding of mental wellness.

A MISSION TO MEND MINDS

But Ruth's primary responsibilities lie in casework and counselling, and the role she cherishes the most at SAMH is that of the latter. "Counselling gives me an opportunity to know my clients on a deeper level," she explains. These interactions are shaped by her personal experience with bipolar disorder. The early days were "torturous,

painful, lonely and dark", she describes, when she was consumed by feelings of helplessness, sadness and even thoughts of suicide. "And yet, I appeared happy in front of everyone until I could not hide it anymore," she says.

She knows firsthand that mental health struggles are often hidden behind smiles. "Mental illnesses can present themselves in so many ways – for instance, anxiety symptoms can look vastly different from person to person," she explains. "That's something I realised through my own journey."

This understanding has informed her approach to clients. "The answer they need may be as simple as telling them to pick up the phone and speak to a loved one. It seems easy, but I can understand when even touching your phone feels Herculean," she shares. "So, I'm less likely to say, 'Just do it'. I've had well-meaning people say that to me in the past, and I know how unhelpful it can be."

“Without having experienced the mania, depression and anxiety that so many of my clients go through, I may not have been able to empathise so deeply with them. So, it's something I'm thankful for, in a strange way.”

With 10 years' experience of working in mental healthcare, she has also refined her counselling technique. "As a naturally curious person, I used to want to know how people were doing," she reveals. "Now, I'm more inclined to give them space to just be."

She gives an example of someone who may not seem well, but who denies it when asked. "You may have good intentions and want to help, but it may not be what the person needs in that instant – and counselling is therefore an exercise in this self-restraint," she says.

AUTHENTICITY IN ACTION

In certain situations, Ruth has found that disclosing her own story can be beneficial. "Clients appreciate knowing that you understand what the symptoms feel like," she says. "There's a sense of a shared journey – for instance, I have bonded with clients over our experience of receiving inpatient treatment for our condition."

Yet, she reveals her condition selectively, only if it serves the client's interest. "It's not

always relevant, so I do practise some discretion."

She is mindful that individuals make their own path. "What I found difficult may be easy for others; it may be a simple task that can change their life and outlook," she says. "My experience with bipolar disorder helped me realise that life isn't always what we see, and is not what we assume. Even though my recovery was tough, it doesn't mean others will have such a difficult time. It's awakened me to how unique everyone's journey is."

SAFEGUARDING HER WELL-BEING

Ruth is conscious of the need to preserve her own mental health, in the course of supporting her clients through difficult times as a professional. "I don't bring my clients' issues home. I accept my own limitations," she notes. "Naturally, I do think about how I can help them even when I'm not at work, but I remind myself that this is their journey."

Exercise acts as her work-life buffer. Gym time is "non-negotiable", she says, often dedicating three to five sessions a week to pumping iron. A healthy diet, with meal prep preferred over takeaway lunches, also helps her feel better. "It has really made my mind clearer, and shows how a good diet and lifestyle can impact your mood and wellness," she shares.

These practices, coupled with the stability of a job, enable her to stay well and thrive. She hopes that in some small way, sharing her story will pave the way for others to do so, too.

HERE TO HELP

The SAMH Oasis Day Centre, nestled within Potong Pasir, is dedicated to empowering clients toward recovery by enhancing independence, interpersonal skills and job readiness. Its services include:

- Counselling
- Case management
- Family intervention
- Psychoeducation
- Skills/vocational readiness training
- Social and recreational services
- Physical wellness programme



For more information on this psychiatric rehabilitation programme, please visit www.samhealth.org.sg.

The long shadow of melancholy

Imagine feeling down and blue on most days, over two years or more. This is the reality for those with persistent depressive disorder — a lesser-known, chronic form of depression.

Interview **EVELINE GAN** in consultation with **DR STEVE LEE**, Consultant, Department of Mood & Anxiety, IMH

>> WHEN A PERSON HAS depression, the potentially serious mood disorder can significantly impair his or her ability to function. Even simple tasks can be daunting. Whether it is mustering the energy to get out of bed, take a shower, go to work, socialise or perform chores, the struggle is relentless.

What about those who manage to fulfil their daily obligations — work, school, deadlines — but feel emotionally empty for some time?

This pervasive, long-running low mood has a clinical name. Persistent depressive disorder (PDD) is a type of chronic depression that can last for years, says Dr Steve Lee, Consultant, Department of Mood & Anxiety, Institute of Mental Health (IMH). It is also known as dysthymia, a term that is derived from Ancient Greek meaning “bad state of mind” or “low spirits”.

While there are no statistics available for PDD in Singapore, according to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), about 2.5 per cent of individuals in the general population will experience the condition at some point in their lives.

“PDD often goes undiagnosed due to its long-lasting nature, unlike major depressive

disorder with its intense, episodic symptoms,” Dr Lee notes. “Individuals with PDD may see their symptoms as personality traits, and not a medical condition. Hence, they may minimise or neglect these symptoms as they seem less severe.

“Furthermore, for a diagnosis of PDD, there must be depressive symptoms over a period of at least two years,” Dr Lee adds. “Assessing and tracking symptoms over such a prolonged period can be challenging.” To complicate matters, PDD frequently co-exists with other mental health issues including anxiety disorders, substance abuse and other mood disorders, he says.

While the root causes of PDD remain unclear, some risk factors that can contribute to its development include a genetic predisposition, childhood



PERSISTENT DEPRESSIVE DISORDER is a type of chronic depression that can last for years, and which often goes undiagnosed.



“Individuals with PDD may view their symptoms as personality traits and minimise them because they appear less severe.”

DR STEVE LEE, Consultant, Department of Mood & Anxiety, IMH

trauma or abuse, neurochemical imbalances, and certain personality traits like pessimism, low self-esteem or being overly self-critical, alongside ongoing or chronic stress.

A SENSE OF EXISTING, NOT LIVING

The symptoms of persistent depressive disorder are largely similar to those of major depressive disorder, but differ in some ways. PDD typically begins in the teenage years or early adulthood, unlike major depressive disorder, which can develop at any age, says Dr Lee.

PDD also differs greatly in duration from major depressive disorder. Adults with the disorder experience symptoms on most days for at least two years, while for children and adolescents, symptoms must have lasted for at least a year. On the other hand, major

depressive disorder episodes are more acute, and last a minimum of two weeks.

Dr Lee shares that individuals with PDD often experience a pervasive depressed mood, lack of energy and difficulty concentrating. They may also have feelings of hopelessness and experience changes in their sleep and appetite. However, the symptoms are often less disruptive and severe, unlike those of major depressive disorder.

“As a result, they may still be able to continue with their daily life activities such as work or school, or take care of their basic needs, but with decreased motivation or pleasure,” he says.

The chronic nature of the disorder means that individuals may persistently experience a lower quality of life as they struggle with

focus • PERSISTENT DEPRESSIVE DISORDER

a consistently low mood and lack of enjoyment in activities. “Relationships, social interactions and personal goals may be affected, leading to feelings of isolation, hopelessness and frustration,” Dr Lee explains.

PDD may evolve into major depressive disorder and heighten the risk for additional mental health issues if left untreated, Dr Lee adds. Professional help could be beneficial when the individual experiences changes or impairment in

DOUBLE TROUBLE?

Yes, it is possible to experience both persistent depressive disorder (PDD) and major depressive disorder (MDD) at the same time.

Known as “double depression”, this condition occurs when someone with PDD also undergoes a major depressive episode, says Dr Steve Lee. “In such cases, individuals continue to experience persistent depressive symptoms along with the more intense symptoms of MDD,” he shares.

Studies indicate that this “double whammy” experience can intensify feelings of hopelessness compared to having just one of the depressive disorders. Double depression can significantly impair a person, raising the risk of suicidal thoughts and diminishing the effectiveness of treatment, Dr Lee adds.

While living with double depression can be challenging, the right treatment and support can help individuals lighten their load. Support is available at these helplines:

- **Mental Health Helpline (24 hours): 6389 2222**
- **Samaritans of Singapore (24 hours): 1800 221 4444**
- **Singapore Association for Mental Health: 1800 283 7019**
- **Care Corner Counselling Hotline (Mandarin): 1800 353 5800**





Persons with persistent depressive disorder are also encouraged to adopt self-care and healthy lifestyle habits.

daily function, such as social withdrawal, neglect of self-care, substance abuse or suicidal thoughts.

LIFTING THE GLOOM

Getting the right help early is crucial for overcoming any mental health condition, and persistent depressive disorder is no exception. Recovery is possible, says Dr Lee. The first step is an accurate diagnosis, followed by a tailored yet holistic treatment approach. This may include psychotherapy, medication or a combination of both. Patients are also encouraged to practise self-care and healthy lifestyle habits.

Given the entrenched negative thinking patterns in individuals with this form of depression, cognitive behavioural therapy is frequently used to modify

these thoughts and the consequent behaviours, says Dr Lee. It also helps in developing coping skills and problem-solving strategies.

Other therapies such as psychodynamic therapy or interpersonal therapy may help individuals understand the underlying causes of their depression, and foster healthier thought patterns and interpersonal relationships.

Some patients may also benefit from antidepressant medications, which work by adjusting neurotransmitter levels

in the brain to reduce depressive symptoms. It may take several weeks for the full effects of these medications to be felt, Dr Lee says.

Due to the chronic nature of PDD, preventing relapse is crucial. "Recovery is typically a gradual process that varies from person to person," Dr Lee explains. "Some individuals may achieve a full remission of symptoms, while others may experience periodic relapses or require ongoing maintenance treatment. Continuous monitoring, self-care, and support from family, friends and mental healthcare professionals can help prevent relapses and sustain long-term recovery."

A holistic treatment approach may include psychotherapy, medication or a combination of both.



A Good Dose of Learning

By earning advanced certifications and contributing to transdisciplinary care initiatives at IMH, this **specialist pharmacist** is redefining the scope of his practice.

Interview KEENAN PEREIRA // Photo COURTESY OF IMH

The date, 23 April 2024, marks a significant milestone in Mr Ng Boon Tat's career. "It'll be exactly 21 years since I started work as a registered pharmacist at IMH," shares the 46-year-old, who is Principal Pharmacist (Specialist) and Deputy Head (Education & Research), Department of Pharmacy, Institute of Mental Health (IMH).

From the outset, the hospital's culture of teamwork resonated with Mr Ng. "Since my first day, pharmacists have actively collaborated with doctors, nurses and other allied health professionals in multidisciplinary teams. The environment is a welcoming one where everybody is encouraged to learn together, and our opinions as pharmacists are valued," he says, citing this collegiality as a key reason he has remained at the hospital.

The last two decades have marked significant professional growth for Mr Ng. In 2006, he became one of Singapore's first two US-Board Certified Psychiatric Pharmacists (BCPP). By 2008, he attained Board Certifications in Geriatric Pharmacy and Pharmacotherapy, qualifying him for advanced practice in these areas. His pursuit of excellence continued with an overseas residency in 2010, and participation in the inaugural Collaborative Practitioners Prescribing Programme (CP3) in 2018.

CP3 is an innovative graduate programme by the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore. It trains



MR NG BOON TAT

Principal Pharmacist (Specialist) and Deputy Head (Education & Research), Department of Pharmacy, IMH

pharmacists and Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) to supplement the medical services rendered by doctors, and practise at the top of their licences. This approach helps to streamline patient care and frees doctors to attend to more complex cases.

IMPACT BEYOND THE COUNTER

For pharmacists like Mr Ng, the CP3 certification brings new responsibilities that stretch beyond their conventional roles of filling prescriptions and medication management. For instance, he interviews and assesses outpatients with treatment-resistant schizophrenia on long-term medication prescriptions. "A key task is to monitor their blood tests and overall health – if I see anything amiss, I will escalate their case to their psychiatrist," he says. "But if all is well and the patient is clinically stable, we will continue with the treatment plan."

Achieving the CP3 qualification entails a rigorous three-month certification programme. That is no small feat, given the pressures of tight manpower and high workloads in many pharmacy departments.

Some might ask, why do it? Mr Ng sums up CP3's value this way: "It has increased my competence and job satisfaction in working with patients and partnering with

psychiatrists. Fortunately, my bosses and colleagues supported me by setting aside time and giving me opportunities to learn," he says, stressing that his certification was a team effort. "I'm grateful for the chance to upskill and extend my role."

Still, tough moments arose during Mr Ng's training. What kept him going was his commitment to his patients. "Many patients and families struggle tremendously before reaching IMH," he says. "Our services can be life-changing for them. Being part of their recovery and helping them regain dignity is a privilege."

Mr Ng is also fuelled by the tenacity and grit of his IMH colleagues. "When I started in 2003, my Head of Department had a small team of pharmacy technicians and only three pharmacists, including myself – we were like 'The Three Musketeers,'" he shares.

Even with the lean staffing in those days, the team supported the country's sole psychiatric tertiary hospital, while also driving improvements in pharmacy services. "I cannot imagine any other hospital pharmacy in Singapore being able to cover that much with so little back then," Mr Ng adds with pride. "I want to continue building on that legacy."

Q&A

ASK THE

Experts

IMH clinicians answer your questions.

Q: MY WIFE AND I ARE UNDERGOING IN-VITRO FERTILISATION (IVF) WHILE JUGGLING OUR DAY-TO-DAY WORK OBLIGATIONS.

The process is costly and intensive, yet the outcomes are uncertain. We're overwhelmed by disappointment each time a cycle fails. It's particularly hard on my wife, who has borne the brunt of the procedures and feels it's unfair when others conceive easily. How can I support her through these emotional challenges?

A: It is heartening to see you wanting to do more to support your wife. Couples undergoing IVF often face uncertainty, disappointment and loss. While it is good to remain hopeful with each IVF cycle, it is equally important to prepare for loss and setbacks. You might find strength in religion, hobbies, your community or even signing up for counselling. Here are some day-to-day tips to offer comfort and support as you navigate this journey together:

- ▶ **Show compassion and empathy:** Be understanding if she struggles with household tasks or social commitments. Saying things like, "I can see it's tough for you to do the laundry or meet with our families. Let's put that aside for now, it's okay", or "I am sorry you're feeling under the weather. How can I support you?" can be very comforting.
- ▶ **Listen, validate and avoid problem-solving:** Let her share her emotions and frustrations. When she does, she might be looking more for catharsis than solutions.

▶ **Help her unwind:** Be intentional about creating relaxing moments, like arranging dates, giving massages or watching Netflix together. Explore stress-relief activities such as meditation, yoga or walking. Small gestures — like making her a warm drink, buying her favourite foods or doing the laundry — will show her how special she is to you.

DR GILLIAN LIM,
Consultant, Department of Mood & Anxiety



Q: RECENTLY, MY ONLY SON, WHO IS 28, LEFT HOME TO RENT A ROOM OUTSIDE.

I miss being part of his daily life and want to stay connected without intruding. How can I maintain our relationship while respecting his independence?

A: Your intention to stay connected while respecting your son's independence is an excellent approach to this new chapter in your family's life.

Adjusting to the change in daily routines — such as no longer preparing his breakfast or having evening chats — is natural. It is normal to miss that proximity and closeness, and both of you will need to make adjustments. Your son might also be contemplating how to maintain the connection.

Engaging in new personal activities and expanding your social circle can help you in this transition. Pursuing your own interests provides fresh topics for conversation when you do catch up with your son, fostering a sense of mutual

happiness for each other's independence.

Regular communication is key to sustaining family bonds. Consider continuing family traditions like shared meals or games, and discuss with your son if he would like to keep these up or explore new ways of staying in touch. Setting aside time for these positive interactions is important.

Offer your support but respect his decisions if he chooses to handle things independently. Just like when he was learning to walk as a toddler, he might need to find his footing in this new phase of life. Enjoy the process of seeing your adult child flourish and navigate his path confidently!

MS GOH YAN LING,
Senior Medical Social Worker,
Department of Medical Social Work



HAVE A QUESTION FOR OUR EXPERTS? Write to us at enquiry@imh.com.sg.



News

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



Guest-of-honour Madam Halimah Yacob with (from left) Mr Lee Chow Soon, Chairman, WHCF; Associate Professor Daniel Fung, IMH CEO; and Ms Denise Phua, Mayor, Central Singapore District, at *Balls of the Belles*.

IMH'S 95TH ANNIVERSARY CHARITY SHOW: IN GOOD FUN(D)

A special evening filled with good humour helped to support mental health initiatives.

Since 2000, the Woodbridge Hospital Charity Fund (WHCF) of the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) has dedicated itself to creating opportunities for the advancement of mental healthcare in Singapore. The donations it receives go toward supporting needy patients, deepening our understanding of mental health issues, and offering psychosocial programmes such

as vocational rehabilitation that equip patients with the relevant skills and confidence to enter the workforce.

In conjunction with IMH's 95th anniversary in 2023, a fundraising charity show was presented in partnership with local theatre company Dream Academy to support WHCF. Titled *Balls of the Belles*, the event was held on 9 December at the Capitol Theatre. It attracted a

full-house audience of nearly 900 attendees, including guest-of-honour Madam Halimah Yacob, Chancellor of the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and former President of Singapore, and special guest Ms Denise Phua, Mayor of Central Singapore District. Attendees were treated to a night of comedy and laughter. *Balls of the Belles* successfully raised approximately S\$790,000 through ticket sales and donations from corporates and individuals — contributing significantly to the WHCF's mission.



To support WHCF, scan the QR code above or visit for.sg/imh-givingsg. Your donation will make a big difference to persons with mental health conditions!

EXPANDING HER EXPERTISE

One family physician's quest for better mental health knowledge through continuing education.

Amid her busy role as a family physician, Dr Eliyanachii Narasinghan found an opportunity to enhance her support to patients: by deepening her understanding of mental health through the Graduate Diploma in Mental Health, a one-year, part-time postgraduate programme that is jointly organised by IMH and the National University of Singapore (NUS).

"I felt that as a family physician, I could do more for mental healthcare in Singapore," she says. "I wanted to expand my knowledge, and better understand my role in mental healthcare in the community and tertiary (settings)."

Patients rarely come in with mental health as their primary concern, Dr Narasinghan observes. These issues often emerge during consultations for other problems, where she detects signs of anxiety or a low mood. She ensures that her patients know they can return when they are ready to talk about their mental health. "I leave it open, and more often than not, they do come back to discuss," she says.

The course proved invaluable in this regard, offering insights through expert-led lectures, engaging Q&A

sessions and detailed case studies. She is now equipped with a more nuanced understanding of various mental health complexities. "The course kept us up to date on mental healthcare," says Dr Narasinghan, who found its structured modules manageable and enriching, and enjoyed the camaraderie among her peers.

Looking ahead, Dr Narasinghan envisions a society where mental health is destigmatised, and individuals seek help without fear. "I hope that people feel comfortable speaking to their doctors and trusted ones, knowing that they will be supported, not judged," she adds. Her experience underscores the programme's transformative potential. "Do join," she encourages her fellow physicians. "It's useful and, as a solo GP, I juggled it alongside full-time work, taking minimal leave!"



Family physician Dr Eliyanachii Narasinghan was in the 2022/2023 intake of the Graduate Diploma in Mental Health.

Forget me not!

Yes, you can train and improve your memory.

Everyday expressions like “photographic memory” suggest that our ability to remember things is innate, with some people possessing stronger memory recall and others being frightfully forgetful. But the truth about how memory works may not be as clear-cut. Research shows that exceptional memory skills are not linked to unique brain structures or overall cognitive superiority, as was highlighted in a study published in *Neuron*.

Instead, neuroscience tells us that memory is more flexible and adaptable than once believed. Practising cognitive strategies that use devices such as mnemonics can improve memory. These strategies are often used by memory athletes in competitions to show off their remarkable recall abilities. Common mnemonic devices include:

> **Acronyms:** These help encode complex information into manageable chunks. Think “ROYGBIV” for the colours of the rainbow, or “MVEMJSUN” for the positions of planets in the solar system. These acronyms can take the form of phrases as well – like “Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain” or “My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nachos”.

> **Chunking:** Breaking down a long string of numbers – such

as an eight-digit account number – makes it easier to remember.

> **‘Memory palace’:** Also known as the loci method, this technique involves visualising information within a familiar location scene, and then enhancing recall through vivid associations. (See box story for tips.)

These mnemonic devices show the brain’s capacity for patterns, imagery and spatial navigation, and how it forms and retrieves memories. Integrating simple, clear and memorable mnemonic strategies into our everyday life can help us retain information in both short- and long-term memory.

As the *Neuron* study revealed, even those with average memory capabilities can boost their cognitive capacity through these techniques, which seem to reorganise the brain’s network organisation to improve memory performance.

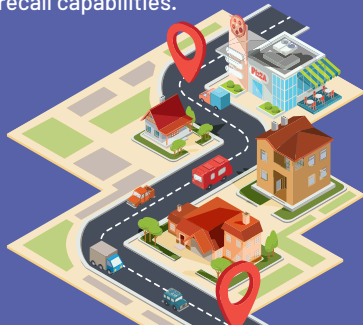
Beyond mnemonics, studies show that lifestyle habits significantly influence cognitive function and memory retention. The basics of good health will certainly bolster your memory: regular exercise, adequate sleep and good nutrition are crucial for recall ability. If there’s one thing you remember, let it be that!



BUILDING YOUR ‘MEMORY PALACE’

Memory experts suggest this ancient Greek method for everyday tasks like memorising a simple to-do list. It taps into the brain’s tendency to remember images more easily than words. Here’s how to apply it:

- > **Visualise a familiar environment**, like your neighbourhood estate. This becomes your “memory palace”.
- > **Pick easily remembered landmarks** on this route, like a tree.
- > **Think of a striking image** for each task, like a dazzlingly white suit for picking up your laundry.
- > **Place each image** at a specific landmark in your memory palace. For example, picture the bright white suit draped over the tree’s branch.
- > **Associate and repeat** this process, linking each task with a unique, vivid image at different locations within your palace.
- > **Mentally revisit your route** to recall images at each landmark.
- > **Regular practice** will boost your memory and recall capabilities.



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 Dementia Singapore

Provides information and assistance for a person with dementia.

Tel: 6377 0700 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 6pm and Saturday; 9am to 1pm)

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 Problem Gambling 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)

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



CHAT can help.

We offer confidential mental health checks for individuals 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 (Tues - Sat, 12nn - 9pm)

