

The Editors' Musings

DR TINA TAN

Editor

Dr Tan is a psychiatrist in private practice and an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. She treats mental health conditions in all age groups but has a special interest in caring for the elderly. With a love for the written word, she makes time for reading, writing and self-publishing on top of caring for her patients and loved ones.



If we were to spotlight every hot topic mental health issue in this month's newsletter, we would probably have to print an issue about two to three times the usual volume. Hence, we have narrowed our focus to psychiatry. In this issue, we carry an interview with Dr Chee Kuan Tsee, a well-known local figure in the psychiatric community, where he shared a glimpse into his past experiences working at the old Woodbridge Hospital. We have also included an article on community mental health by Dr Jerome Goh, which highlights the importance of having access to help beyond acute mental health services.

Instead of seeking doctors to write about their mental health experiences, which is

understandably very difficult, we also have the honour of presenting illustrations by Dr Justinian Zai and Dr Ada Ngo. Their pieces showcase in varying levels of detail the unseen and unnoticed challenges that doctors may have. I hope their artwork encourages those in our profession who are struggling to seek help and to have hope.

Finally, Wong Shi Hui – an NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine student – is the latest addition to our student correspondent team, and will be helping to bring up issues that are pertinent to medical students and soon-to-be junior doctors. Welcome, Shi Hui.

A/PROF DANIEL FUNG

Guest Editor

A/Prof Fung is a father of five grown-up children and four cats (although one has abandoned us), and a grandfather of three toddlers. Gardening and playing video games are two of his hobbies, but his one wish before he retires is to watch the Tottenham Hotspur Football Club lift a trophy (any trophy)!



I was at a meeting with doctors when one of them casually remarked that some plans for healthcare were rather schizophrenic. His comment was to illustrate how our services could be contradictory and cause perverse outcomes, but to me, the stigma of mental illnesses in his words stood out. Why do we not say that something is diabetic when things are not going well, or that it is hypertensive to push our workers so hard?

Many persons with mental illness struggle in their recovery and experience being marginalised. They slide down the social ladder and cannot be meaningfully occupied. Mental illness today is stigmatised like how leprosy was stigmatised in ancient times. Singapore's only mental hospital was built 95 years ago in the jungles around Hougang rather than downtown where the rest of the medical facilities like Singapore General Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital were located. Today, about 1,200 patients live as long-term residents in the Institute of Mental Health. About 40% to 60% of Singapore

residents still do not want to live or work with someone suffering from a mental illness.¹

This issue focuses on mental health and illness from different perspectives. From a senior psychiatrist, you can understand the historical development of our mental health ecosystem. We also have an artful communication about doctors who suffer from mental health issues as well as a glimpse into how community mental health is integrated into the overall health and well-being initiatives that underlie the concept of population health. Finally, we have a review of the Lasting Power of Attorney legal document under the Mental Capacity Act. I hope that with greater understanding, doctors will be more willing to help the least, the last and the lost in our society. ♦

Reference

1. National Council of Social Service. Attitudes towards persons with mental health conditions. In: Infographics for Public Attitudes towards PMHCs. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3LI89wk>. Accessed 4 September 2023.