

# 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.



"It takes a village to raise a child, but where is the village?"

I quote this from our Feature article on autism spectrum disorder, written by registered social worker Ms Magdalene Foo and Dr Lan Zhongzheng.

Indeed, where is the village?

Each of us will have, in the course of our clinical practice, treated patients considered to be "vulnerable". This issue, we spotlight a segment of medically vulnerable patients, with a focus on children and youth.

Why is this important? Those in vulnerable populations are at an increased risk of health

problems which, if left unchecked, may pose an increased strain on our healthcare system. Therefore, understanding the needs of this group of individuals would lead to early detection, early support, and potentially reduce the risk of caregiver burnout and other untoward effects. While this issue of *SMA News* does not claim to have the solutions to this complex myriad of issues in our medically vulnerable patients, I hope that the collection of articles we have pieced together brings increasing awareness and by extension, support. Because that is how we as a village can come together to help those in need.

## DR LIM ING HAAN

Guest Editor

Dr Lim is the first female interventional cardiologist in Singapore. She is an early adopter of new technology and is a key opinion leader in international cardiology conferences. She shares a clinic with her twin, Dr Lim Ing Ruen, an ENT surgeon at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. Both believe in the power of food, travel, laughter and loyalty in forming strong family bonding.



This issue of *SMA News* focuses on the health and well-being of the vulnerable population, with a number of excellent and complementary articles on adolescent mental health, autism spectrum disorder, and cancer in children. When curating and inviting articles, I did not expect that the National Youth Mental Health Study sponsored by the Ministry of Health (MOH) would be published in September 2024.<sup>1</sup>

The Singapore Mental Health Study conducted in 2010 and 2016 revealed that the vulnerable age of developing mental disorders occurred during teenage and early adulthood. This led to the development of the National Youth Mental Health Study by researchers in the Institute of Mental Health and National University Hospital.<sup>2</sup>

This latest study finds that up to a third of youths aged 18 to 35 years suffer from stress, anxiety and depression. Excessive social media use and body shape concerns are commonly associated with such conditions. Cyberbullying, vaping and smoking frequently coexist with severe anxiety and depression.<sup>3</sup> Sadly, one in three youths may not seek help, sometimes resulting in disastrous consequences.

I think raising awareness of mental health issues is important. As doctors, appreciating

the scale of the problem, recognising trigger events in poor mental health, and acknowledging the role of academic stress may help ameliorate the unmet needs in mental health services. Ultimately, it is reassuring to see that MOH is taking a targeted approach with its whole-of-society efforts to support the mental health and well-being of youths in Singapore.<sup>4</sup>

I also hope to see discussion on the generational shift in understanding gender identities and its role in youth mental health. That will likely be a topic for another day. Happy reading! ♦

### References

1. Teo J. Depression, anxiety, stress: 1 in 3 youth in S'pore reported very poor mental health, says IMH survey. *The Straits Times* [Internet]. 19 September 2024. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3BU1o2J>.
2. *The National Youth Mental Health Study*. In: Institute of Mental Health. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3C8Kb5G>. Accessed 24 October 2024.
3. Institute of Mental Health, National Healthcare Group. Excessive social media use, body image concerns and being cyberbullied are significantly linked to mental health symptoms among youths. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4eRSuBu>. Accessed 24 October 2024.
4. Whole-of-society Efforts to Support Mental Health and Well-being of Youths In Singapore. In: Ministry of Health Singapore. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3NDs1eV>. Accessed 24 October 2024.