

Finding Wholeness in the Human Condition

Text by A/Prof Daniel Fung, Editorial Advisor

Some years back, I had lunch with a family physician who was also a devout Christian. She spoke passionately about her discovery of healing beyond medicine. As a psychiatrist, I have spent many years listening to young people and their families share their inner struggles – confusion, self-doubt, exhaustion, loss. While modern psychiatry provides valuable tools to support recovery, I have found that healing does not always come from medications or structured forms of therapy alone. Sometimes, what truly makes a difference is the return of something harder to define: a sense of meaning, hope or connection. This reflection is both professional and personal. Over time, I have come to see that mental healthcare, while essential, must also make space for the deeper questions people carry about identity, purpose and what makes life worth living.

Much of our clinical work is focused on helping patients cope, manage anxiety, regulate mood or restore function. These goals are important. But some individuals come to us not asking only "How do I feel better?", but also "Why should I keep going?" One young man I have known, who came to me at 16, chose to stop attending school. He was not unwell in the clinical sense. He told me, simply, "I can't keep up with my classmates, and I don't think this path is for me." Instead, he began working part-time, trying to figure out what really gave him a sense of direction. For him, the issue was not illness, it was

the weight of expectations, and the need to feel his life had meaning beyond academic achievement. This kind of struggle is not captured by diagnostic criteria, yet it reflects a growing reality for many young people. In such moments, we need to see beyond symptoms and understand the person's search for significance.

In my own life, I have found that the person of Jesus speaks to these human questions, not with easy answers, but with presence. For me, Jesus offers a way of understanding brokenness and healing that connects deeply with what I see in my work. He meets people where they are, not just in strength, but in uncertainty and weakness. That has shaped how I try to sit with my patients: not as someone with all the answers, but as someone who sees value in every person's journey.

I believe strongly in evidence-based medicine. Medications and therapy are life-changing for many. But I also believe in the human capacity for meaning making, and that sometimes, healing requires us to draw on resources beyond the clinical setting. Spirituality is one of those resources. It is not about religion alone, but about how people make sense of their experiences, how they hold on to hope, how they find peace and what gives them strength. I have seen how spiritual beliefs help people endure, recover and reconnect. As professionals, we often refer to the "biopsychosocial" model of care. I would suggest adding

one more dimension: the spiritual. Not to impose belief, but to recognise that many of our patients already bring this dimension into the room. To ignore it is to miss a part of their reality.

I offer these thoughts not as a prescription, but as a personal reflection. Each of us finds our own way to understand suffering and resilience. For me, faith has been a source of grounding and clarity, not separate from science, but alongside it. Ultimately, whether through therapy, relationships, service, reflection or belief, I think we are all seeking wholeness. And as clinicians, it is our privilege to walk alongside those who are searching, not only for relief from illness, but for meaning amid being human. ♦

A/Prof Fung is a father of five grown-up children and grandfather to five toddlers. He has worked as part of NHG Health for 25 years and has been married to his wife Joyce for 33 years. He will celebrate 55 years of child psychiatry in Singapore this year, and he counts it as a blessing that he can still give back as a volunteer in Singapore and globally.

