

The EDITOR'S MUSINGS



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Let's talk about mental health.

This issue comes just after our local media published the latest suicide statistics by Samaritans of Singapore. Suicide rates have risen in Singapore by an alarming 10%, with the sharpest increase among teenage boys. This is a serious matter. There are many explanations as to why this is happening, and experts have begun to analyse the various contributing factors so that we can better identify and help those with mental health problems.

A term I often hear is "mental health literacy", but what does this really mean? The word "literacy" means to know something and to be familiar with it. By extension, having "mental health literacy" would mean being familiar with mental conditions and mental health issues, and knowing what to do about it (in other words, prevention and management). Hence, this month, we've sought to cover a range of topics that will enhance the mental health literacy of our readers.

The Health Promotion Board has contributed an article on various mental health initiatives and preventive programmes available, with a focus on various age groups such as children, the

working population and our seniors. Especially important would be how doctors in primary care can play a part in such initiatives.

My colleagues at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) have also written pieces on mental health resources. Dr Jared Ng's article focuses on community mental health resources, while Dr Goh Yen-Li at the GP Partnership Programme has written about what a GP can do during a patient's mental health crisis.

An all-important topic that each of us needs to familiarise ourselves with is mental capacity and its assessment. As our population ages and more medico-legal issues arise, a patient's ability to make important decisions for themselves has become a crucial part of the practice of medicine. The reality is that none of us can escape from this. Therefore, as a precursor for the upcoming SMA seminar on mental capacity assessment held in October, Dr Giles Tan and A/Prof John Wong from the College of Psychiatrists, Academy of Medicine, Singapore, have contributed an article on this topic.

IMH's second Singapore Mental Health Study found that one in seven Singaporeans would experience a mental disorder in their lifetime.

Dr Tan is a consultant at the Institute of Mental Health and has a special interest in geriatric psychiatry. She is also an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. Between work and family life, she squeezes time out for her favourite pastimes – reading a good (fiction) book and writing.

That's a rather high proportion. The onus is on us to learn to pick up signs of mental distress in our patients and get them the help they need.

But as a reminder, one area that we doctors often neglect is our own mental well-being. If we can't focus because something is stressing us, then we will do no good to our patients – perhaps even do them harm. Physician, you have to heal thyself. Or at least know when you need healing.

So with that, remember, there is no health without mental health. ♦