IN PURSUIT OF THE “HAPPY PILL”

I first learnt of the “happy pill” when I studied psychiatry back in 1993. Prozac was hailed as a major breakthrough that helped many get through their bouts of severe depression.

If it is true that Prozac and other selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (“SSRIs”) make people “happy” and we now know that they are readily available and affordable, why then are there still so many unhappy persons and the suicide rate continues to climb?

Could it be because those with depression are not getting the help of psychiatrists so that they may benefit from taking medication?

Could it be that taking antidepressants alone is insufficient?

Is it true that teens who take SSRIs are at an increased risk of suicide … and, if so, shouldn’t we then ban them from being prescribed?

Undeniably, antidepressants do help people with depression, for we know that depression, like other mental illness, has a biochemical basis in terms of the lack of a neurotransmitter named serotonin sitting in the synapses between neurons. Unfortunately, for most people, it takes about four weeks for these SSRIs to take effect. Unpleasant side-effects such as headache and insomnia may occur before any benefit is seen.

My late mum was fortunate. I have personally seen her mood lifted within two weeks of taking Faverin, another SSRI.

Of course it is also possible that, in expecting her mood to rise, I behaved in a more optimistic manner and that helped lift her mood! A happier environment makes everyone happier.

A “happier” way of viewing life also plays a role – seeing the positive behind every challenge; being grateful for one’s blessings; reviewing our material wants; prioritising our needs; and focusing on the things that really matter, work wonders.

The other pill that helps is the ‘love pill’ – the feeling of being loved unconditionally by a family member or a friend can be lifesaving … and can stop a person from the downward spiral towards suicide.

When my mum changed from being a cranky old lady to a joke-cracking grandma, my relatives were pleasantly surprised and some even chided me for not detecting her depression earlier.

Which brings me to another point – depression among the elderly can easily be missed because they may not display the typical signs. If you are a caregiver, do look out for them – the ‘crankiness’ that drives you nuts might simply be because they are lonely and depressed. Solve the depression and you may get your sweet grandmother back!

About Club HEAL
Club HEAL is a charity that aims to assist and empower Peers (Persons with mental health issues) to regain confidence in themselves and others in their journey towards community reintegration. It also aims to eradicate the stigma surrounding Peers thereby breaking unnecessary barriers to their recovery process. Services provided by Club HEAL include psychiatric rehabilitative services, home visits, public education, support groups and volunteer training.
FAIRUZ BASKARAN, 35, has suffered from depression since he was 15. He was diagnosed with major depression as a student in Singapore Polytechnic, but did not believe his psychiatrist. He believed that he was being hexed by enemies or being disturbed by unseen creatures such as genies.

He only took his medications after he saw an ustadz (male religious teacher) who informed him that his condition was partly medical and partly due to disturbances from unseen beings. The ustadz encouraged him to seek medical help while helping with the decorations at weddings and funerals, where he observed that people believed strongly in consulting a bomoh (shaman) or dukun (village doctor) for material and spiritual problems.

His condition worsened and, after gaining a part-time job at Club HEAL, he has had many episodes of psychotic breakdowns and has spent time at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). He feels blessed to have gone through his health challenges. “Indeed, it is a blessing, Allah never tests us with something that we cannot handle,” says Fairuz.

For the past 15 years, he has had a freelance job doing the odd work out leads a healthy lifestyle except for not working and spent his days at home, sleeping or lying in bed or watching TV. He took no interest in anything, neglected self-care and did not bathe for days. He would become increasingly exhausted and lose connection with his friends and the outside world.

Fairuz was happy when he found community care and help in Club HEAL. After seven months attending rehabilitation at Bukit Batok East, he is now aastoast a Healer (volunteer) who shares his expertise in pottery with his peers. He spends most of his weekday mornings and afternoons at his second home. Being naturally an artistic person, he excelled in pottery under the tutelage of Kak Jinn (Peer support specialist Junainah Eusepe) from the first time he touched clay at Club HEAL.

Polishing talents
Fairuz now has an extra talent to his repertoire. He feels blessed to have gone through his health challenges. “Indeed, it is a blessing, Allah never tests us with something that we cannot handle,” says Fairuz.

One that I learned from the short session with him is that an artist must be versatile,” says Fairuz. Fairuz is fortunate because he has great support at home from both his parents, especially his mother. “My mother has had to put a lot of effort into me because of my mental illness, but she never regrets it,” says Fairuz.

One of the very first persons in whom I saw change was Iza, now a taxi driver. I saw the changes she went through, slowly gaining her confidence. A few others have followed suit. Seeing such positive changes is a real boost. My reward for doing these sessions is just seeing their smiles, and the glimpse of hope knowing that I can help in making a small contribution to Club HEAL.

Healing ingredients
Both spirituality and religion play a very important and strong part in healing as it is the basis and foundation of life (provided it is not a fanatical approach – everything is about balance). We must have faith and belief in a higher power to guide us as it gives us a sense of belonging in this universe.

Healing starts from within. When an individual is ready with the mind-set of positivity, it makes it easier for healing to begin. To heal, you need awareness, forgiveness, acceptance, “letting it go,” and gratefulness. Positive thoughts become words that create calm positive emotions, which is the energy towards healing. This must be a daily practice, just like breathing.

One who dropped by our booth to say hi.

To Club HEALers, Shaniyah Munir Bte Syed Mohamed Al-Masih, 57, is known simply as Shani, a woman who inspires love, hope and reality checks. Shani has been a dedicated volunteer with Club HEAL for the past two years, coming once a week to Bukit Batok East to conduct two-hour motivational workshops. Many look forward to her sessions which are mind changing and spiritually uplifting.

“Since joining Club HEAL and, being a certified hypnotherapist, I felt I could apply my skills to help the participants. My aim is to improve communications amongst the participants and create an interactive class to increase awareness of mind management. My sessions are usually spontaneous, depending on the size of the class, to keep them interested. I try to hold my participants in such a way, the participants share their thoughts more. We keep the sessions neutral and without judgment. I always ensure that we leave with a positive note.

People need help
People do not choose to succumb to mental illness but when the mind is not managed well and becomes too difficult to cope with, healing takes a longer time. Also, without the help of family, friends and professionals, it can be very difficult for the individual to recover.

Each Club HEAL Peer responds differently to their mental illness, but generally they seem to accept the fact they need support and understanding of their illness.

What keeps me going
I realise that Peers at Club HEAL do improve. The changes may be slow, but they happen for those who were keen to make the effort.

To Club HEALers, Faridah and Risdzan joined EXCO member Rohanah Pagi in promoting mental wellness and our two members, Yishun Book Club.

One of the So Far March, Tampines East CC

Club HEALers Dr Radiah and Risdzan joined EXCO member Rohanah Pagi in promoting mental wellness and our two members, Yishun Book Club.

By Yohanna Abdullah

Aneez and Hafizah shared their insights about the...


**Upcoming Events**

1. HEALing Friends Training – 2 April, Marsiling
2. NUSMS Mental Health Forum “Handling Stress” – 8 April, NUS
3. HEAL Me Talk “The Joy of Caregiving” – 10 April, Marsiling
4. Club HEAL Branch Opening and COMIT Launch – 23 April, Marsiling
5. Booth – 9 May, Singapore Press Holdings
6. Talk “Mental Wellbeing in a Highly Stressed Social Environment” – 7 April, Bukit Timah CC
7. AMP Golf Charity in aid of Club HEAL – 17 May, Orchid Country Club

**Announcements**

1. Thanks to COMIT funding from MOH, Club HEAL is able to expand our services to include the elderly with dementia. Through our first mental health nurse, Ms Fazeeda, and our first social worker, Mr Muhammad Ilham Firdaus, we aim to work more closely with other community health providers and hospitals to benefit this sector.

2. Thanks to our patron Mdm Halimah Yacob and her grassroots leaders at Marsiling, we should be able to start operations at our third premises (at Blk 317 Woodlands St 31) from the first week of April 2016. This will allow us to better serve clients from Marsiling and other areas in the north. Thank you, Mdm Halimah!

3. With support from MP Zainal Sapari and his grassroots leaders at Pasir Ris East, we have also secured our very own eastern premises. We aim to move from Darul Ghufran Mosque to Pasir Ris East by May 2016 to better serve our clients in the east. Thank you, Mr Zainal!

NAMS @ Club HEAL – The National Addictions Management Service of IMH conducts a clinic at Club HEAL every Tuesday for existing and walk-in patients with addiction issues. No charge required to speak to a NAMS counsellor. To make an appointment, please call 6-RECOVER (67326837)

**Donations and Sponsorships**

As Club HEAL is an Institution of a Public Character (IPC), all donors will be eligible for 2.5 times tax reduction. Donations can be made by cheque to ‘Club HEAL’ or by GIRO – form available at our website. Please contact us at 6899 3463 for further details or email us at admin@clubheal.org.sg.

**Be a HEALing Friend**

“...and a part (of it) has a complaint, the whole body is united with it in wakefulness and fever.” (Bukhari and Muslim).

As a member or a volunteer, you can contribute in a variety of ways, from assisting in Club HEAL events to conducting rehabilitative activities! We need people from all walks of life who can contribute their time and skills to fulfil our cause. To become a member, please fill up the membership form available at our website (under Resources section) and email it to us at healingfriends@clubheal.org.sg or mail it to: Club HEAL, Blk 244, Bukit Batok East Ave 5, #01-02, Singapore 650244. We look forward to hearing from you!

**Whom Do We Serve?**

By Yohanna Abdullah

Whom do we serve? Lip service on a platter Do you serve yourself or the other? Your promises undelivered You serve none The ones you think will benefit From your wisdom Are no wiser In the end The curtains fall Silence There is no applause Serve yourself by all means You are here to earn a living But serve your client, caregiver and community In that order The client is king We exist to support him in recovery For him to heal he needs his family Supportive, loving and kind And acceptance and respect from the community Whom do you serve? Sincerely is it for the sake of God To whom we owe our existence? If everything we do have a reason, mission and vision Whom do we serve?

Originally written for Club HEAL Staff Retreat on 10 Jan 2016