

HEAL



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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

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.

LONER NO MORE

By Yohanna Abdullah

Fairuz Bin Rahim, 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 (*Jin*).

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 spiritual side. Fairuz comes from a traditional family that believe strongly in consulting a *bomoh* (shaman) or *dukun* (village doctor) for spiritual aid against illness and, to this day, he believes that his illness is at least partly the result of others putting a hex on him.

Genies galore

"It is easier to believe that somebody put a hex on me than to face up to the reality that I had a long-term illness, especially when it was mental illness with a stigma attached. However, when I came to terms with being responsible for my own health, I was able to manage my illness better," says Fairuz.

For years after graduating from Singapore Polytechnic, Fairuz did not work 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 smoked excessively and lost 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 day rehabilitation at Bukit Batok East, he is now a HEALing Friend (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 Junn (Peer support specialist Junainah Eusope) from the first time he touched clay at Club HEAL.

Polishing talents

"I feel touched by the extent to which Club HEAL nourishes our talents. For example, they organised a small group talk for the artistically inclined at the studio of well-known artist Sunar Sugiyou;



one thing 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 work very hard because of me yet remains patient and loving. But I've realised it ultimately boils down to myself – I used to self-stigmatise and was very negative in my outlook. Who best to help you than you yourself? Recovery starts with you," he reflects. For the past 15 years, he has had a freelance job doing the decorations at weddings and events for a relative's company. This provides him with an income that covers his expenses and allows him to save for a rainy day. At Club HEAL, he has shaped many of the items ordered by other organisations. For his maiden efforts, he was paid \$500, which he appreciated very much.

"I was very anxious, worried about my future and I could have become crazy in my isolation, all alone in my head. I was fortunate to find Club HEAL and I believe I am now really recovering and developing. I feel prepared to take on a full-time job," declares Fairuz, who holds a diploma in electrical engineering.

The reserved and fit man who loves to work out leads a healthy lifestyle except for his smoking habit. He is caring and polite and aims to help people with any problem regain their vitality in life.

Fairuz has found many blessings at Club HEAL. "I am an introvert but here I interact with my peers, unlike in the past when I was isolated at home. I have rediscovered my talents in art through expressive therapy which involves artistic expression. I have always known I had skills in art but I never explored this field. Now I am rediscovering pottery and other art works and I have become more open. I have started to listen to others and become more positive towards life. I

like the motivational talks by Shari, appreciate the care and concern of my counsellor Zainal and am inspired by Kak Junn – how she has recovered from depression and is now a Peer support specialist and my guru in pottery and other works of art. I hope in the future I will be so well that I can ease off my medications.

Fairuz has accepted the script of his life as written by God and he feels blessed to have gone through his health challenges. "Indeed it is a blessing, Allah never tests us with something that we cannot bear," says Fairuz.



MINDING MINDS

By Yohanna Abdullah

To Club HEALers, Sharifah Munira Bte Syed Mohamed Al-Mashoor, 57, is known simply as Shari, a woman who inspires love, hope and reality checks. Shari 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. Her session is called Healing from Within, Managing Your Mind. Shari shares her journey with Club HEAL.

How I started on this journey

It all started with an initial meeting with Dr Radiah Salim, San'ah Abdat and Hamidah Bahashwan. I was impressed with their ideas about Club HEAL and, being a certified hypnotherapist, I felt I could apply my knowledge in this area 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 it interesting and interactive. This 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.

Peers need help

People do not choose to succumb to mental illness but when the mind is not managed properly, issues are difficult to overcome and 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.



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 wonderful positive changes gives me great joy.

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 at 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" with love 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.

"THE JOY OF LIVING IS BEING ABLE TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND ENJOY THE SIMPLEST THINGS IN LIFE ... LET US SMILE AND BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER"
- SHARI

4. Talk "Mencapai Minda Sihat" – 28 February, Dover CC

Dr Radiah had a wonderful time exercising her arthritic knees (along with Dover CC MAEC members) under the guidance of PT Sha Skyman, before speaking to a captive audience.

5. Booth @ World Bipolar Day Celebrations – 12 March, IMH

Kudos to IMH for organising the event, where we got to know the bipolar circle of friends and community partners. With social acceptance and support, we hope our bipolar bears continue to strive forward and celebrate life to the fullest. Thanks to all who dropped by our booth to say hi.

6. Booth@ Community Health Fair – 13 March, BBE

Club HEALers Dr Radiah, Aneez and Hafizah spent their Sunday morning promoting mental wellness and our two *Shattered, We HEAL* books to residents of BBE.

7. Panel Discussion "Heroes! Recognising Efforts, Inspiring Action" – 18 March, NUS

This dialogue was organised by the mental health wing of the Chua Thian Poh Community Leadership Programme. We were honoured to be invited as panelists alongside old friends from Over The Rainbow, The Achievers Volunteers and Silver Ribbon. We shared with students about the formation of Club HEAL and how vital it is to work collectively as a community to tackle mental health stigma. The deep, thoughtful questions that followed were most gratifying.

8. Briskwalking cum talk "Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body" – 19 March, Marsiling

Club HEALers Dr Radiah, Kak Junn and Daryl joined

Mdm Halimah Yacob and Marsiling residents for an early morning walk at Woodlands Town Garden.

We then gave a talk on "Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body" in three languages to the residents, followed by our Peers sharing their experience of mental illness to an attentive audience.



9. Booth@Health Fair – 20 March, Tampines East CC

Club HEALers Dr Radiah and Ridzuan joined EXCO member Rohanah Pagi in promoting mental wellness and our two *Shattered, We HEAL* books.

10. Dementia Champions Training – 26 March, Masjid Ar-Raudhah

Taufiq Nazri from AIC and Dr Radiah had a wonderful time conducting our inaugural DCT for befrienders and mosque staff. Many were deeply touched by the award-winning "Going Home" video which highlights difficulties faced by persons with dementia.

11. Club HEAL@Book Club – 29 March, Yishun Library



Authors Yohanna Abdullah and Radiah Salim shared their insights about the *Shattered, We HEAL* books with Yishun Library Book Club members as part of our ongoing efforts to shatter stigma.

Launch of HEAL Me Club @ Marsiling – 17 January 2016, Fuchun CC

Club HEALers took part in the official launch of "HEAL Me Club @ Marsiling" with Marsiling Women's Executive Committee (MWEC) ladies and our patron Mdm Halimah Yacob. This is a year-long programme based on partnership between MWEC, Club HEAL and the Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) to promote mental wellness among residents of Marsiling. Planned activities include a series of health talks, joint home visits to vulnerable individuals and their families, free counselling services and a day rehabilitation service for persons with mental illnesses at Club HEAL @ Marsiling.



SNAPSHOTS OF PAST EVENTS

1. Staff Retreat – 10 January, Yayasan Mendaki

Identifying our individual and organisation goals and exchanging ideas served to refresh both staff and EXCO, so that we can better serve Peers and caregivers.

2. HFT – 16 January, BBE

Our first HEALing Friends Training at BBE, led by EXCO member Saifudin Maarof, was attended by a cosy group of volunteers.

3. Beach Outing – 9 February, Changi

We made full use of the long holiday by taking our Peers to unwind at the beach. Beautiful weather, good food, fun games and great company – we could not ask for more!



UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

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 Jacob 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 Ghufuran 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

“You see, the Mu’min in their mutual piety, love and affection, are like a (single) body. When 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!

Creative Corner

And Ever After By Aneez Fathima

*Fate played cruelly
Decisions turned foolishly
Misfortunes came jointly
Love altered blindly
Life vanished cowardly
Words became scanty
World eyed suspiciously
Unjust words wounded venomously
Desires diminished sentimentally
Feeling crushed deadly
Emotions burnt heavily
Enemies laughed heartlessly
Past weighed pessimistically
Faced all situations courageously
Loneliness becomes lovely
Books beckon friendly
Friends help wholeheartedly
Future brightens optimistically
Family pacifies lovingly
Time flies rapidly
Prayers strengthen completely
Hereafter urges enthusiastically*

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?*

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