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PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

Schizophrenia can be a devastating illness for both patients and their families. It affects 1% of the general population. However, if you have a relative with it, your chance of getting it is greater – for example, if you have an uncle with schizophrenia, then the risk is 3%, while if you have a parent with it, that goes up to 13%.

It is an illness that has as its major element psychosis, i.e. disordered thought (such as delusions) and/or perception (such as hearing voices).

The biggest hurdle to overcome is the astonishing ignorance and prejudice towards this illness that results in denial on the part of both sufferers and their families when it happens. Even in this IT age, many still fail to seek help early from professionals, preferring instead to turn to faith healers and charlatans, resulting in delays in treatment that makes it that much more difficult to treat.

Can schizophrenia be treated effectively? 

As in other mental health conditions, a holistic approach that adopts the bio-psycho-social model can be very effective in treating the illness. These days, we have better medicines with less side-effects; there are effective psychological methods such as psycho-education, counselling and CBT; and more and more in the community are coming forward to show moral support for patients and their families. The peer movement in Singapore has also seen more people with schizophrenia coming forward to share their stories to help demystify the illness – and this lends to the reduction of stigma and greater community support.

What can be done for a person who is severely disabled by schizophrenia?

Here in Club HEAL, we have a never-say-die attitude. Our psychiatric rehabilitative program involves not just talk therapy but a lot of hands-on approaches such as the making of handicrafts items, culinary activities, relaxation techniques such as brain gym, as well as physical exercise - including gardening, taking refreshing walks and cycling. This allows our peers who have residual symptoms such as delusions and auditory hallucinations to focus better on other things apart from the troublesome thoughts and voices. In fact, some have discovered new talents and strengths. This not only helps reduce their troubling symptoms … they achieve a new ‘calm’ in their lives … they gain confidence … they shine ☺

“Allah has not sent down a disease without sending a cure for it.” — Hadith from Al-Bukhari.

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I remember anxiously anticipating my pregnancy even since I got married. When I found out that the pregnancy test was positive, feelings of excitement and happiness overwhelmed me. I had been attending talks and classes on parenting before I was even married and I was aware of the importance and blessings, as well as the responsibilities, which this journey of parenthood ahead of me.

There has been worries as well, as a mother-to-be with a mental illness. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia and depression nine years ago. While I have not suffered a relapse since my first episode, I am still on medication and regularly visiting my doctor. From time to time I even experience triggers that I take as warning signs to take action and take care of myself better.

The first concern I had while pregnant was about my baby’s health and if my illness would somehow pass through to my child. Should I be taking medication while pregnant? Would it affect my baby? Allahumdhillah, I consulted my doctor at IMH as well as my gynaecologist and they assured me that the medication would, insha’Allah, not affect the baby. In fact, it is important for me to continue with the medication as, if I did not, my poor mental well-being would impact my child even more adversely!

I also wondered if my child would be negatively affected by being nurtured by a mother like me – someone who is occasionally weak, someone who could break down easily in times of stress, perhaps by reasons others would not find so overwhelming. It was at this point that my mother advised me that the health and well-being of my child is in the Hands of Allah, the Almighty. I needed to have faith that Allah blessed me with this pregnancy because He knew I had the strength, patience, love, and courage needed to go through this journey of motherhood and give my best to my child, insha’Allah. There was no point in worrying about “what-if” and doubting myself.

Throughout this pregnancy, I have experienced bouts of sadness and feelings of inadequacy. I understand pregnancy to be an important phase in the child’s development. Am I reading as much as the Holy Quran as I should, so that I may grow closer to Him and find comfort through it, and so that my child, likewise, will grow up loving the words of Allah? Am I doing enough good deeds and putting in effort to improve my habits? Someone was told me I was placing too many expectations on myself – that I was trying to be the “perfect” mother-to-be. While putting in effort to grow closer to God is good, doing so in a way that stresses myself out is not.

I now tell myself to do what I can, and not burn out by taking on more than I can handle. And I need to remind myself, when I make mistakes or feel bad about myself, not to dwell on them until I drown in negative feelings. Instead, I pray to Allah for mercy and guidance, and move on. Move on and believe that things will be good, insha’Allah. I do something small to give myself a sense of achievement, be it mopping the floor to make my house cleaner or reading just one page of the Quran with the translated meaning.

Above all the negativity, what I feel the most is hope. Here I am - someone who was once hospitalised with schizophrenia; someone who, once in psychosis, believed she was Satan - and now I have developed skills and strategies to manage the illness, married and even conceived a child, praises all be to Allah, the Most Kind. Life is a journey, and there may be much to fear and worry about, but also so much beauty and joys to experience. Let us not give up on ourselves – Allah is going to give us more. And worry about, but also so much beauty and joys to experience. Let us not give up on ourselves – Allah is going to give us more. And so, I made my decision.

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10. Nature walk with FiTree – 2 June, Guilin Park
An enriching walk at Bukit Batok Nature Park on a fine Thursday morning with FiTree and the family of Club HEAL seemed like a return to our fitrah (natural state).

11. Iftar 2016@ Marsiling – 19 June
Iftar at Club HEAL@Marsiling was a simple affair compared to previous years, but it was full of joy and blessings as it was held at our own premises for the first time. Muslims and non-Muslims alike shared their experience of fasting and many peers stepped up to receive awards just for being who they are.

12. Talk on “Signs & Symptoms of Mental Illness and Effective Communication with PMI” at WINGS – 13 June
Dr Radiah and Yohanna had a lot of fun sharing with a very responsive audience consisting of 26 women from WINGS on these topics.

Upcoming Events & Announcements

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1. Longstay Raya @ IMH – 14 July
2. Hari Raya Celebrations @ BBE – 21 July
3. Official Opening cum Hari Raya Celebrations @ Pasir Ris East – 23 July
4. Friday Mosque Collection – 29 July
5. Mental Health Workshop for Asatizahs Part 1 @ Al-Ansar Mosque – 11 August
6. Mental Health Workshop for Asatizahs Part 2 @ Al-Ansar Mosque – 20 September
7. “Don’t Worry Be Happy – On Anxiety and Depression” talk @ Clementi CC – 25 September
8. Presentation of paper on Empowerment Programme @ WMHD 2016 – 7 October
9. “Don’t Worry Be Happy” Day @ BBE – 16 October

Announcements
Club HEAL has commenced operations at our third centre at Pasir Ris East since 1 June 2016.

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 & 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
“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!

Our Voices
By Yohanna Abdullah
I hear voices in the dark
I hear voices in the light
Sometimes I hear voices day and night
That makes me unique
I’m in a special league

Voice Hearers unite
Learn what the voices have to say
Understand the content not the form
And discern the truth from the lies
The good from the bad
The negative from the positive
Embrace your real and imaginary friends

There is no shame in hearing voices or seeing things
We are all unique
Love variety
Celebrate differences
Be happy being you
You are one of a billion
Perfect in all you imperfections

23 May 2016