

# HEAL



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## President's address

The third alphabet in HEAL represents Acceptance.

Acceptance is key to the process of healing.

In Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' original model of bereavement, acceptance is the final stage of recovery from grief.

As in bereavement, when a person falls ill, especially with a chronic mental illness such as schizophrenia, there is the possibility of loss – the loss of a job, the loss of a scholarship, the breakup of a marriage – all of which can be traced to some loss of function that comes with the illness. Similarly, caregivers may 'lose' a son or a daughter or a spouse or a parent when that loved one develops a mental illness.

What can we do then, apart from accepting whatever that has happened as inevitable? Seeking to blame circumstances or people leads nowhere.

In fact, it is only when we accept that we move towards a positive line of action that helps, soothes and heals.

I see the practice of fasting as a parallel.

When a Muslim accepts that in the month of Ramadhan he should refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk, he would be careful to observe all the requisites of fasting such as eating the predawn meal, observing the daily prayers and breaking fast with a healthy meal. The result? What seems extremely difficult to others turns out to be relative easy for the accepting Muslim.

The same goes for persons with mental illness and their caregivers. When they accept the reality of mental illness, they will be careful to do whatever is necessary to recover – be it to take medication, to attend useful counselling and support group sessions, or to mingle with people who are positive and who aid in recovery, and to avoid those who see the world through dark lenses and who pull others down with them. They develop recipes for success because they have accepted and they have chosen to move on.

Islam teaches us that behind everything that happens is a reason (hikmah). Full realisation of this simple truth will allow a believer to accept every challenge with grace and dignity. It equips him with the twin qualities of patience and perseverance.

For the righteous, they are not overly stressed by any task at hand because these tasks are viewed as 'tests' from Allah to see who among them the true believers are:

*"Or do you think that you shall enter the Garden (of Bliss) without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were so shaken in spirit that even the apostle and those of faith who were with him cried: 'When will come the help of God?' Ah! Verily the help of God is always near!" (Al-Baqarah 2:214)*



Also, any loss, whether material or non-material, is again viewed as a 'test' from Allah, and their response towards any loss is "Innaa lillaahi wa innaa ilaihi raaji'uun" ("we belong to God, and to Him we return"):

*"Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, Who say, when afflicted with calamity: 'To God we belong, and to Him is our return':- They are those on whom (descend) blessings from God, and Mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance" (Al-Baqarah 2: 155-157)*

And so, at Club HEAL, we try to reinforce this. Let us all learn to ACCEPT our challenges – with grace and dignity!

“For after all, the best thing one can do when it is raining is to let it rain.”

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

### About Club HEAL

Club HEAL is a charity that aims to assist and empower persons with mental health issues (PMHIs) to regain confidence in themselves and others in their journey towards community reintegration. It also aims to eradicate the stigma surrounding persons with mental health issues thereby breaking unnecessary barriers to their recovery process. Services provided by Club HEAL include psychiatric rehabilitative services, home visits, public education, caregiver support groups and volunteer training.

1. **China Trip**  
By Yohanna Abdullah



**I went to China recently (1 – 8 Jun 2015) and saw not only breathtaking sights, I also gained a deeper insight of myself. I would like to share the journey within and the journey without.**

I count myself lucky to be alive every day. That thought keeps me grounded in the fact that life on earth is short and must be appreciated. Seldom do we get near death experiences, but a brush with death and health issues during the short break in Yunnan reminded me of my own mortality.

I was in a low mood when I left Changi Airport for China but I remained hopeful that the mood would balance out and tilt to the positive soon. As long as I do fun things, think positively and know where I want to be, that is how things turn out. The turning point came after two days of being a picture of depression, when I literally began bubbling with happiness.

I have bipolar disorder and the mood swings between high and low are really evident unlike the normal human experience of feeling happy or sad. In fact, I had two episodes of mania overseas in the past – once in Istanbul and the other in Kuala Lumpur – so my parents worry that I might disappear in a foreign country and get into trouble. Thankfully, Dr Radiah gave my parents assurance that I would be well taken of. This trip, as well as the one I had a couple of weeks earlier, has made me confident that I can manage myself, so as not to go overboard in my sadness or happiness, and that I can travel with trusted and understanding travel mates – a milestone in my recovery.

My encounter with death occurred when I choked on my food. I was not aware that my medication gives me a dry mouth and throat and that I have to moisten them by drinking water before eating. I happily tucked into a meal at a restaurant and suddenly found that I could not swallow it – it was stuck in my throat! I felt faint and began losing consciousness. Followed the good advice of former nurse Mdm Junainah Eusope, I began to sip water slowly. After what seemed like the longest time, I went back to normal.

Similarly, I half expected to die on the treacherous steps of a humungous cave we visited as there were so many steps to climb and I became breathless with physical exertion. Dr Radiah explained that my thalassemia minor was the cause – I had smaller red blood cells, so they carry less oxygen than those of

normal folks. I also have leaky heart valves and am prone to palpitations. Because of these conditions, I feel fatigued easily. Nevertheless, I did not want to be carried on a sedan chair because I wanted to overcome my fear and pain threshold.

The stairs were steep and dangerous. When I looked down I felt faint and scared. So I willed myself to concentrate on just one step at a time and not think of anything else. It turned out to be a good thing because when we reached the top, I was told that the tram was not working and that we had to walk for another 3km – more steps to climb!

In the end, having pushed the extra mile and knowing that I could conquer my fears, my sense of achievement was absolutely satisfying.

Our tour organiser, Ms Mariah Mah, brought us to schools and mosques that she helped build through donations from Singaporeans who support her missionary work. Some of these places were in the villages. We found out from a TCM doctor, Mr Yusof, that remedial care for the mentally ill was not easily available. As such, many mentally ill were left to roam the streets. They live in a world of their own, even rolling naked on the streets.

Perhaps Singaporeans can help sponsor a student to become a psychiatrist who will serve these areas when he or she graduates. It is a small gesture that we can make to help life better for those with mental illness in China.



The Chinese that we met live in the mountains and plant fruits and vegetables in picturesque terraced slopes. They work hard for a simple life and plant on every plot of available land.

The street sights were also colourful, with snacks that we have never encountered before on offer, such as a nest of fried potato chips with a fried egg in the middle. The food was good and I enjoyed the meals. Crossing the unsystematic roads, however, was a challenge; scooters were everywhere, sometimes a whole family of four would

be riding on one, and not just on roads, but even on pavements!

The natural sights of China were amazing, such as the Stone Forest, where rock formations that used to be under the sea surfaced about 750 million years ago, creating magical sights.

The most important thing about the trip, however, remained the fact that I found the strength in myself to rise above tribulations and complete my mission even when it hurt so much that I wanted to give up. And in succeeding, my belief that reliance on Allah will see me through any situation was reinforced.



[www.clubheal.org.sg/media/videos/](http://www.clubheal.org.sg/media/videos/)

3. **On Acceptance**

The film "Ali" in the series of short films by Sanif Olek features Ali and his 'difficult' wife. Theirs is an unhappy situation where Ali's wife is a domineering housewife fond of spending hours on Facebook, and who neglects her duties as wife and mother. She calls him weak and is violent towards him, but he does not retaliate. As a result, Ali is driven to depression.

This film shows how one person with a mental health issue (Ali's wife probably has bipolar disorder and perhaps a personality disorder as well) can drive another family member towards depression. Following that is a cycle of violence and depression that affects other members, in particular, growing children.

This film highlights some issues that brings to mind the role of "Acceptance"- How does one react when a family member falls ill? What impact does a lack of acceptance by the person with mental illness have on family members? How do we facilitate acceptance on the part of family members and people with mental illness?

When a family member becomes ill, and in particular if he or she shows symptoms of mental illness such as a severe change in mood such as mania or depression, or behaving strangely such as talking to himself or herself or having weird ideas, other family members are usually shocked, bewildered and frustrated. Some cope by denying that their loved one has fallen ill and instead attribute the changes to 'evil spirits'.

2. **ACCEPTING who you are**  
By Kasyful Ikhlah Bin Abdullah

**ACCEPTANCE: For Club HEAL's participant Kasyful Ikhlah Bin Abdullah, 26, acceptance is like being a fish in deep sea amidst beautiful corals and sea creatures.**

Nature has given us clear examples. Those corals in the sea situated in deep parts of the ocean, often with strong waves and pressure, are much livelier and colourful. They are also surrounded by thousands of beautiful fishes and interesting creatures. On the other hand, corals situated near the shore, often with calmer waves and less pressure, are less lively and have a paler appearance.

Now, let us look among ourselves, who have mental illness. Do we accept the condition we are currently facing? What I have learned is that some of us are able to accept it, while some are not. Those who do not often blame themselves or others. They do not realise that they were chosen to live in the deep part of the ocean so that they can recognise their true strength.

If you look closer at those who have mental illness, you will find that they are given extraordinary care, like those corals deep in the sea surrounded by many beautiful fishes and other creatures. We are well recognised and there are many people out there to take care of us.

**Depression, now anxiety**

I was only 16 when I started having depression and, recently, I have developed anxiety issues. I was sad about my illness but I accept it as I have met people whose condition is similar to mine or even worse.

My parents accept my condition, but some of my family members do not. Not all my friends are caring, maybe due to stigma against mental illness. Nevertheless, I still have friends who understand and accept me.



My illness has shaped me into someone better: I realise how strong I am, and I have becoming more empathetic towards others.

**Have faith**

My advice to fellow peers is do not lose hope – start having faith. Support is always there when you need it.

What is true acceptance? To me true acceptance is when you recognise that you are strong not weak, in spite of the mental illness. I view myself as someone who has gone through hardships for years and that my illness is the outcome of what I have gone through.

What about acceptance to take medications? For me, I only accept the role of medication when I truly need it. Acceptance includes getting appropriate medicine when I know what kind of illness I am facing.

Does the public accept those with mental illness? While it is true that not all will accept us, some do. And those who do, do not criticise us. Instead, they offer us a helping hand.

As for employers, not all can accept us as they may need able-bodied employees. This is something we need to accept.

What about the usual dream of work, marriage, children? How does that fit into my life plan? It is possible but it can be challenging. As long as we maintain our hopes and faith, I believe we can attain these. Or we will get something different that may nevertheless still provide us with similar satisfaction.

To sum up, my understanding of acceptance is this: the level of acceptance will vary according to individual strengths, situations and conditions. What is important is, no matter what, to look out for and give support to, others, and to not live alone. At times, we do need time for ourselves, but it can be dangerous if it is for a prolonged time.

So let us remember, when we are in a bad situation, THAT is when we are about to find where our true strength lies. And support and care will be there when we seek or need it.



Snapshots of past events



1. **IslamicEvents.TV (Apr - May 2015)**

The Club HEAL short films made by acclaimed filmmaker Sanif Olek are aimed at generating awareness and reflection of mental health issues among viewers. To this end, Club HEAL collaborated with Islamic Events TV to produce a series of four panel discussions of these films. This was televised live on IslamicEvents.TV between 30 April and 22 May 2015.



2. **Talk on mental illnesses and treatments @ Muhammadiyah (16 May)**

Dr Radiah gave a talk on "Common Mental Illnesses and Treatments" to an attentive audience of 30 women from the Muhammadiyah's Women's Wing. Interest in mental health issues led many among the ladies to purchase copies of our book Shattered, We HEAL.



3. **HFT @ MUIS (23 May)**

The Club HEAL team conducted two concurrent Healing Friends Training to two groups of Mosque Befrienders at MUIS, numbering more than 100 altogether. We received positive feedback and some were keen to become Healing Friends. The sharing sessions by two of our peers also helped them gain valuable insights on mental illness from the perspective of peers.

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Similarly, if the person with mental illness refuses to accept his condition, it will have an adverse impact on family members. Denying the illness will lead to refusal to seek professional help, rejection of medication and continuing to have symptoms that others in the family find difficult to cope with.

How then do we facilitate acceptance?

First, it is important for both the person with the mental illness and his or her family members to have hope that he or she can recover. Secondly, hope should be followed by empowerment – everyone should be equipped with knowledge about the illness, and the holistic bio-psycho-social method available to help the person recover. After having hope and becoming empowered, acceptance usually follows, and once that happens, the recovery journey can proceed better.



#### 4. Fast-a-thon cum Iftar @ BBE (27 Jun)

##### 60 non-Muslim from all walks of life join Fast-a-thon 2015

Almost twice the number of fast-a-thoners took part this year, compared to last year, during the yearly Ramadan Fast and Feast organised by Club HEAL. This year's event was jointly organised with Bukit Batok East MAEC, as part of the SG50 KITA Service to Nation week, and was held in the spacious multi-purpose hall at Bukit Batok East Community Club. We raised \$3,000 through the 60 fast-a-thoners.

As noted by our Guest-of-Honour, Mdm Halimah Jacob, the fast-a-thon aimed to bring Muslims and non-Muslims closer by fasting and breaking their fast together. "Nothing beats sharing a common experience together to help us understand each other better. It is an experience which I think our non-Muslim friends will never forget," she said.

##### Broke fast on ice cold water

Said fast-a-thon participant and Club HEAL's adviser, Dr Joseph Leong, who succumbed to his thirst, "I was offered a cold glass of water. It was something so simple yet delicious and I accepted it. I have failed at this challenge for two years but I now understand what fasting means to Muslims. It is not just to be hungry the whole day and to feast at night."

Another fast-a-thoner, BBE grassroots leader Mr Kumar, said, "It was a beautiful experience, very humbling." Indeed breaking fast together with friends and neighbours was awesome, but as people kept streaming in before the iftar (breaking of fast), there were worries that there would not be enough places to sit and dine. But not to worry, we shared and thus we managed.

##### Islamic's famous briyani

The main dish was the delicious chicken biryani cooked and donated by Islamic Restaurant. And for those who could not do without porridge, there was plenty of that to go around as well.



#### 5. Nationwide Friday prayers mosque collection (10 Jul)

We raised \$40,000 by the grace of God. 95 volunteers and staff offered help, including PADI, an association of Muslim taxi drivers who provided transport for volunteers. A big thank you to all involved. You have helped us help PMHIs recover and lead fulfilling lives.

#### Upcoming Events

1. IMH Long-stay Raya (29 Jul)
2. National day cum Hari Raya Celebrations with CRSS & BGGH (5 Aug)
3. Hari Raya Celebrations @the Pavilion, BBE (15 Aug)
4. HFT@ MUIS (25 Aug)
5. HFT@ BBE (29 Aug)
6. Booth and talk @ "Yok Peduli" @ MUIS (30 Aug)

## Creative Corner

### My Mind Will Grow Flowers

*I will grow flowers in my mind  
I will be kind and so very compassionate  
and pluck every thought of muck  
no mess you see in this brain  
it will contain nothing ill of anyone  
not about you  
not even about me  
and never ever about God  
He's been good  
praises and thanks and praises  
I will pause  
smell the rose or coffee or rain  
notice the beauty  
slowly unfrown  
unhurriedly build what will be sound  
as I grow flowers in my mind*

(Sumaiyah Mohamed)



(Mila's drawing)

### 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 68993463 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 damia@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!

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