YOUNG ONES, BIG HEARTS
Youths getting ahead in volunteerism
P08
National Healthcare Group is a Regional Health System for Singapore. NHG collaborates with Hospitals, Speciality Centres, Polyclinics, Patients, Caregivers, Partners, Volunteers and the Community to Add Years of Healthy Life to the nation.
"Volunteering has been associated with increased happiness and overall subjective well-being."

Ms Huang Shan, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Psychology Service, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

FEATURES

COVER STORY

08 YOUNG ONES, BIG HEARTS
Three youths share how volunteering has influenced their lives.

14 TOO EARLY, TOO LATE
How a child is affected when puberty occurs too soon or is delayed.

16 ORAL HEALTH AND YOU(TH)
Dental health issues concerning children and teenagers.

18 COLOURFUL HERITAGE STORIES
Fun facts about the National Healthcare Group’s role in shaping Singapore’s healthcare landscape.

21 LET’S TALK ABOUT SUICIDE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE
A mental health expert’s insights on this social issue.

24 BREAKING NEW GROUND
The Singapore Health and Biomedical Congress (SHBC) 2019 put the spotlight on how health technologies can be maximised to achieve better outcomes.
HEALTH 360

32 UNDER ONE ROOF
Ways to make co-living a more pleasant experience.

33 DEFYING GRAVITY
What a champion athlete does to stay in shape.

34 MAKE MINE MALA
Does spicing up your meal with chilli benefit your health? And when does it get harmful?

36 ALWAYS IN STEP AND MOVING WITH LIFE
Tips on living well from an octogenarian.

31 Skimmed milk hydrates your body better than water
A NEW YEAR — AND A NEW DECADE — is an opportune time to change up your life and march to a different beat. Amid the resolutions to take better care of yourself and your loved ones, consider venturing beyond your comfort zone and make a difference to the lives of others in the community. Being a volunteer is one such option and as proven by research, the benefits are multifold and go both ways. Not only will you bring joy to the people you serve, volunteering also boosts your own mental well-being.

Our cover story Young Ones, Big Hearts shines the spotlight on three youths who have been inspired to volunteer. As their actions demonstrate, you are never too young to give back, and volunteering builds new life skills and develops new friendships. Read their motivating stories on page 8.

As NHG goes upstream to educate our population on birth and childhood and beyond, it focuses on young people. For some, excelling in sports is a way of inspiring their peers. Indoor skydiving champ Kyra Poh won her first gold at 14, and has not stopped in her quest for excellence. In Defying Gravity (page 33), the petite athlete shares her secrets to staying in shape, physically and mentally.

Attention to self-care is an important facet of an individual’s growing-up years. We highlight oral health as an area that warrants attention where young people — in this day and age — are concerned. Rather than labelling the subject as taboo, Let’s Talk About Suicide Among Young People, as the Institute of Mental Health’s Professor Chong encourages us to do on page 21. And if there is someone who can inspire young people that age is but just a number — and that you should pursue your passion for as long as you can — then it has to be octogenarian Mrs Jean Chan. Her secret? Just keep moving! Find out how she does it in In Step with Life (page 26).

To ring in the new year, let’s step out and step up in 2020! Here’s wishing you a peaceful, joyful and healthy new year!

THE EDITORIAL TEAM
Young people do get hooked on social media, and it is time to take another look at its effects, some of which may actually be positive.
A ccording to a 2018 survey by market research firm GlobalWebIndex, those between the ages of 16 to 24 years typically spent up to three hours daily on social media, and were its most prolific users. From Instagram and Snapchat to YouTube and TikTok, this constant exposure to varied content inevitably shapes young people’s actions and thoughts over time. With frequent screen time linked to self-esteem issues, self-harm, and anxiety, as well as depression in teens, it is understandable that older adults may perceive social media as being more harmful than helpful. They are not incorrect in their view. “Some teens may use social media obsessively, be overly concerned about what their peers post, worry about how their posts are being interpreted by others, and be excessively emotional over online interactions,” says Mr Brian Poh, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Developmental Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health (IMH). Others, Mr Poh adds, may also be targets of cyberbullying. By itself, social media is a neutral and convenient platform to transmit information. “The crux of the matter is how it is used,” says Mr Poh. In other words, social media only becomes a problem when negative factors come into play. A 2019 British study found that the use of social media alone does not negatively impact the mental health and well-being of teenagers. Rather, what leads to unhappiness and anxiety in young people is the combination of social media with other factors such as cyberbullying, sleep deprivation, and lack of exercise.
“IF YOUTHS SENSE THAT THEIR FRIENDS ARE NOT DOING WELL BASED ON THEIR ONLINE POSTINGS, THEY CAN REACH OUT AND OFFER SUPPORT TO THEM.”

Mr Brian Poh, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Developmental Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health


The study analysed data from nearly 10,000 teenagers aged 13 to 16 between 2013 and 2015.

“Our results suggest that social media itself does not cause harm, but that frequent use disrupts activities that usually have a positive impact on mental health, such as sleeping and exercising, while increasing exposure to harmful content and negative experiences like cyberbullying,” said Professor Russell Viner, the study’s lead author.

Similarly, another 2019 study showed that the amount of time spent on social media does not directly cause mental health issues like anxiety or depression in teenagers. Some 500 young Americans between the ages of 13 and 20 were surveyed over eight years for this research by Brigham Young University in the US.


SWIPE AND SAVE THE WORLD

Increasingly, Generation Z — generally, those born after 1995 — uses social media to raise greater awareness of hot-button issues such as sustainability and climate change.

Trending campaigns include 2019’s “trashhtag challenge”, where participants post about cleaning up their environment.

Youths are also mobilising among themselves, using nothing but a smartphone and legions of followers on Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. Some of the most successful teenagers who first harnessed the power of social media are the survivors of the 1998 Parkland school shooting in Florida, who have since become the new faces of the gun control movement in the US.

In turn, the Parkland teens have inspired perhaps the most famous climate activist today — Swedish 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, who attended the United Nations (UN) climate summit in New York City in September 2019 by sailing across the Atlantic Ocean in a solar-powered yacht. Her regular and passionate tweets are seen by nearly three million — and counting — Twitter followers.

Greta’s actions in kickstarting the global youth climate movement motivated the young organisers of the first Singapore Climate Rally. The group of 15, aged between 19 and 24, reached out to the public using social media platforms such as Instagram and messaging app Telegram. Held in September 2019 at Hong Lim Park, the rally attracted about 2,000 attendees.
not encourage self-harm. Instead, they use these platforms to express their trials and tribulations, and share inspiring stories about recovery and healing.

Social media is also an effective tool for promoting awareness for a good cause, for example, to publicise a social purpose or raise funds for the underprivileged. “When used in a proper and judicious manner, social media possesses many educational and beneficial attributes,” says Mr Poh.

Some teachers use social media as a learning tool in the classroom. This includes creating closed groups on social networks to encourage constructive sharing, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. Teachers who have tried this approach say doing so also helps to create a safe environment for those students who may be shy and are uncomfortable with speaking out.

And while parents may bemoan the fact that their teenaged children today do not read newspapers — social media gets the news to them faster than print ever can. “Online, youths can stay abreast of the latest news and trends, good or bad. If they are able to discern between real and fake news, social media is actually a boon for them,” says Mr Poh.

STRIKING A BALANCE
Polytechnic student Jared Lau gets his news on Instagram, and from local websites like Mothership.sg. An avid photographer who enjoys taking pictures on film and developing them in a dark room a la yesteryear, he connects with like-minded photography buffs on Instagram. Yet the 18-year-old is too aware of how social media use can be overly addictive. At one point, he was spending over three hours daily on social media. Now he uses a timer app to limit such use to about an hour a day.

“We learn about the negative aspects of social media in school, such as unfiltered posts and hate pages, as well as privacy issues. But social media can do great things as well, like raising awareness about climate change, and also for less serious topics like checking out a new burger place,” shares Jared. “Social media is a great communication tool. I use it to keep in touch with friends abroad. And it relieves stress — I relax by scrolling through Instagram.”

How then should youths like Jared navigate social media effectively and safely? It may sound obvious, but the key is simply to use social media in moderation. “Social media is now ubiquitous and part of youths’ lives; it is impossible to completely eradicate its usage. However, we can prepare them for stressful situations such as cyberbullying by teaching them how to handle those situations,” says Mr Poh.

His advice: “They should have a life outside of the cyber world, and be meaningfully engaged in other areas of their lives.” That means sleeping at least eight hours a day, exercising regularly, eating healthily, and getting involved in a hobby.
GROWING THROUGH GIVING

PEOPLE VOLUNTEER FOR ALL SORTS OF REASONS. Some are genuinely altruistic in wanting to help the less fortunate and make the world a better place. Others see it as a way to acquire new skills for personal and career development. There are some who may join a volunteer group to meet like-minded people and make new friends.

In Singapore, most young people initially get into volunteering at school, where community service is compulsory under the Values In Action (VIA) programme. The idea of “compulsory volunteerism” may seem like an oxymoron, and evidence is mixed on whether it affects subsequent volunteer behaviour. Based on data from the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre’s Individual Giving Survey 2010, findings showed that among Singaporeans aged 15 to 29, those who had previously participated in compulsory community work in schools had a higher volunteerism rate (35 per cent) than those who had not (15 per cent).

However, in a 2017 study involving high school students in Canada and published in the journal Education Economics, it was revealed that those who had undergone mandatory school-based community service volunteered less than they otherwise would have been expected to after high school completion, signalling no increase in altruism.

Whatever one’s motives for becoming a volunteer, the benefits conferred on the recipient make that time and energy spent meaningful. In fact, volunteering is a two-way street as the rewards go both ways. “The mental health benefits of volunteering have been well-researched. Volunteering has been associated with increased happiness and overall subjective well-being, stress reduction, and decreased risk of depression,” says Ms Huang Shan, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Psychology Service, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH).

These benefits are aligned with the PERMA model developed by American psychologist Dr Martin Seligman, which identifies the key ingredients for leading a life of fulfilment, happiness, and meaning. As Ms Huang explains:

**THE YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM RATE IN SINGAPORE ROSE FROM 23% TO 40% AMONG SCHOOL-AGE YOUTHS (15 TO 24 YEARS) BETWEEN 2008 AND 2018**

**POSITIVE EMOTION**  “We can gain intrinsic rewards from caring for others, and from knowing that we are contributing to a good cause.”

**ENGAGEMENT**  “Engaging in the immediate tasks during volunteer work can create a state of ‘flow’ where time passes very quickly and we feel fully immersed in the activity.”

**YOUNG ONES, BIG PEOPLE**

BY WANDA TAN IN CONSULTATION WITH MS HUANG SHAN SENIOR CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST // PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE // KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL

08 JAN MAR 2020
HEARTS

Through their volunteer work with NHG, three youths have made caring for others an ingrained part of their lives.

RELATIONSHIPS “Volunteering offers the opportunity to build new social connections, deepen existing social networks, and also get to know the community better. This helps to stave off loneliness.”

MEANING “Volunteering provides a greater sense of meaning and purpose in our lives. It helps us to see beyond the trivial details in our own lives, and to appreciate the bigger picture.”

ACCOMPLISHMENTS “When we see how our actions have an impact on others or the community, we gain a sense of achievement. Volunteering also offers the opportunity to pick up skills and learn something new. This goes a long way in building confidence and promoting self-growth.”

What is lesser known is the growing research on how volunteering may be associated with better physical health outcomes. “Volunteering is also a good way to keep the mind active, to prevent cognitive decline, and can even help us live longer,” Ms Huang adds. Studies have found that volunteers generally report better physical health outcomes such as lower blood pressure over their lifespan, compared to non-volunteers.

Of course, this is not to imply that one should volunteer with the expectation of being rewarded. That was certainly not the case for the following three teenagers. Reaping the benefits was the furthest thing from their minds when they first got involved in the National Healthcare Group (NHG)’s youth-friendly community service programmes. Yet all three affirm that volunteering has made them better, healthier people.
A SERVING OF COMPASSION

LIKE MANY, THARNOSH’S INTRODUCTION TO VOLUNTEERING occurred at school. Two years ago, he was a Secondary 2 student at Woodlands Secondary School when he heard that his class would be taking part in Share a Pot® under the Values in Action (VIA) programme. “At first, I was nervous that I wouldn’t be able to communicate with the elderly residents, most of whom were Chinese, because I can’t speak Mandarin. As group leader, I also had to take on extra responsibilities and manage my members,” says Tharnosh, now in Secondary 4. His cohort was assigned to set up and run Share a Pot® for elderly residents living around Block 180C Marsiling Road. The students came up with recreational activities for the residents such as clay-making and colouring pictures. The students also helped to conduct baseline assessments and guided the residents through simple exercises. In addition, they had to source for ingredients to prepare nutritious soup for the elderly. Tharnosh’s early interactions with the residents were “awkward”, even though one of his friends helped out as a translator. As time passed, however, he realised that verbal communication was not the only way to bond with people: “Despite the language barrier, I discovered that I could connect with the residents through hand gestures and by paying attention to their body language. If they smiled and participated eagerly in the activities, it was a sign that they were happy and enjoying themselves.” Those jovial faces are in fact what he treasures most — knowing he had played a part in their happiness is a reward on its own. “Sometimes seniors will thank me for planning these activities and give me a big hug. Whenever this happens, I feel proud that we are able to bring joy and fun to them. It shows that they are appreciative and that the time spent was worthwhile,” explains Tharnosh.

Last year, Tharnosh became a VIA Youth Ambassador and took part in Share a Pot® again, this time to mentor his juniors. His responsibilities included motivating those who were unenthusiastic about the project. For Tharnosh, volunteering has laid a foundation for his intended career in nursing.

“\nYou don’t have to be rich to serve; all you need is heart.

THARNOSH JAYASHANKAR, 16
PARTICIPANT-TURNED-MENTOR OF SHARE A POT®

WHAT IS SHARE A POT®?

A community-based project by Yishun Health and Woodlands Health Campus in collaboration with community partners to improve the nutrition and fitness of community-dwelling seniors to reduce, delay, or prevent physical, mental, and social frailty. Seniors meet at centres within their own community for weekly sessions to do simple exercises and to enjoy a bowl of nutritious soup together. Participating seniors’ fitness levels and progress are tracked through physical, functional, and psycho-social assessments. Any decline can be picked up for early intervention.

For more information, visit www.shareapot.sg
Ling Yi always looks forward to Saturday mornings — not because she gets to sleep in, but because she gets to catch up with the friends she has made at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). This has been her routine since she started volunteering with Matchsticks of IMH in 2017.

“My interest in mental health gradually grew as the topic received coverage in the media and as more public figures spoke up about it. Some of my peers were also going through difficult times, yet mental health was never brought up in conversation,” says Ling Yi, who is in Year 6 at Raffles Institution. “I wanted to try something new and do something meaningful. I had hoped to learn more about mental health and fight the stigma against it.” Thus began her search for organisations dedicated to the cause, which led her to Matchsticks.

When Ling Yi’s father found out she had joined Matchsticks, he initially had some reservations. “While I supported her decision to do volunteer work, I was a bit concerned that Ling Yi might be in over her head in dealing with residents with serious mental health conditions,” says Mr Goh Peck San, a lawyer. “However, the fact that she was volunteering formally with an established group put me at ease. I knew she was in safe hands.”

Being relatively new to Matchsticks, Ling Yi interacts with residents in the recovery care wards. Her chats with them are not all that different from those with her classmates, although she is careful to avoid topics that could risk upsetting them. Most of the time, they talk about what they have done over the weekend.

“I told them not to think of it as a school requirement but as a chance to spread joy and happiness, gain new skills, and learn more about themselves. In my case, Share a Pot taught me how to care for the elderly and be patient with them, which will be useful in the future as my ambition is to be a nurse,” he shares. “You don’t have to be rich to serve; all you need is heart. As Winston Churchill said, ‘You make a living by what you get; you make a life by what you give.’”

Mdm Khairunnisa Binte Zulkifli, Teacher-in-Charge of the VIA programme for Secondary 2 at Woodlands Secondary School, noticed a change in Tharnosh. “Through Share a Pot, Tharnosh became more vocal and is now more willing to take the initiative,” she says. “VIA provides an opportunity for students to give back to society and develop empathy for others. I hope they will continue to volunteer and contribute to society even after they leave school.”

In a 2017 study on the long-term effects of youth volunteering, American researchers found that youth volunteering was associated with improved psychological well-being in early adulthood — but only among those not mandated to perform community service.
past week. “My strategy is simply to be present, listen and be patient. That’s all you need to establish rapport,” she says.

Ling Yi also stresses that ‘labelling them as ‘patients’ reinforces the perception that they are ill. We want to convey the message that people with mental health conditions are not incapable of doing everyday things. They are not ‘scary’ or ‘unapproachable’ but are actually very sweet people.”

For example, she recounts her experience organising an outing to East Coast Park last year. Her concerns about the residents disliking the activities were allayed when they told her how happy and grateful they were just to be able to leave the hospital and breathe in the fresh sea breeze.

From them, she has learned to appreciate little things in life and remain upbeat through hardships. It has also opened her eyes to the importance of self-care. “Mental health problems can happen to anyone, so it’s important to take care of ourselves,” says Ling Yi, who plays the piano in her free time. Another stress reliever? Those Saturday mornings. “Spending time with the residents after a long week of school is therapeutic and calms me. When I’m talking to them, I’m not thinking about school assignments or grades. During school examination periods, I take a break from volunteering, which makes me miss them a lot!”

DON’T BE FOOLGED BY HIS AGE —
Miguel may be the youngest of the three volunteers, but he is also the longest-serving one. The Secondary 3 student at Orchid Park Secondary School was only five years old when he started accompanying his father, a stroke survivor, to the Singapore National Stroke Association’s premises on the weekends, to befriend fellow survivors and their families. With his mother at work then, Miguel’s parents had considered leaving him with a neighbour, but relented after Miguel expressed his wish to join his father.

“Back then, I didn’t know what volunteering meant; I just wanted to tag along with my dad and meet new people. I remember introducing myself to everyone as a young caregiver — helping my dad whenever he needed it, going to medical appointments with him, talking and playing with him if he felt sad, and making sure he was safe while walking,” says Miguel. “Looking back now, I think me being there showed them that family support can help patients recover faster.”

It was a rare but pleasant surprise for the mainly older folks to see a father-son pair volunteering together, and Miguel in particular was a big hit with them. As word spread about the duo, hospitals soon came calling and invited them to visit
FROM ONE PARENT TO ANOTHER

MIGUEL’S FATHER, MR EUGENE ESCANAN, SHARES SOME TIPS TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG ONES TO VOLUNTEER:

- Don’t force your child into community service. Let them decide what activity they wish to do, and leave ample time for study and play.
- Introduce community service to your child in a fun way. Frame it as an “adventure” or a “mission”.

The Escanans now spend Sundays alternating between different hospitals. They continue to keep in touch with patients and their caregivers at KTPH and Tan Tock Seng Hospital, even after they have moved to rehabilitative care at Yishun Community Hospital or Ang Mo Kio – Thye Hua Kwan Hospital.

The true impact of Miguel’s actions eventually became clear to him when he was about nine years old. “My teacher shared with the class when he was about nine years old. “My teacher shared with the class that I was volunteering at hospitals and that by doing this, I was helping a lot of people. That’s when I realised that I was making a real difference in people’s lives,” he recalls. “What I love most about volunteering is that I feel like I am helping to brighten up someone else’s day. It has inspired me to want a career in the healthcare sector, maybe as a Medical Social Worker.”

Occasionally, Miguel’s father — who suffered a stroke at the age of 37, when Miguel was an infant — feels guilty about the fact that he has not had a “normal” childhood. “Instead of playing with kids his age, Miguel spends a lot of time in hospitals and with adults like me,” says Mr Eugene Escanan, a civil engineer. However, not once has he forced Miguel to volunteer with him. On the contrary, Miguel is the one who reminds his father which hospitals they are going to during weekends.

Both father and son believe that volunteering has benefitted Miguel enormously. “Compared to his peers, Miguel is more mature, confident, and approachable. Being out and about also helps Miguel stay physically active. Sometimes at KTPH, he’ll run around chasing butterflies!” says Mr Escanan with a laugh. Miguel adds that the quality time spent with his father has strengthened their relationship: “Every time we go out on Sundays, we feel like we are on a mission together — to lift the spirits of patients and caregivers, and help them adopt a positive mindset.”

“Don’t force children into community service. Let them decide what activity they wish to do, and leave ample time for study and play.”

Mr Eugene Escanan, Miguel’s father

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

THE RANGE OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE FOR YOUTHS ACROSS NHG INSTITUTIONS IS NOT LIMITED TO THOSE CARRIED OUT BY THARNOSH, LING YI, AND MIGUEL. HERE ARE SOME OTHER VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES.

CONTACT US:

- Teddy Bear Hospital
  Students from NTU Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) can take part in this project, which aims to alleviate children’s fear of hospitals by familiarising them with common medical treatments. Guide children through a simulated hospital environment and facilitate role-play, where children act as doctors and examine their “patients” (stuffed teddy bears).
  www.lkcmedsoc.com/teddy-bear-hospital

- NHG-LKC CommHealth
  This programme is also for LKCMedicine students, who can assist NHG in multiple ways. Help out at (i) Community Health Screenings, where mainly elderly residents are checked for risk factors for chronic diseases; (ii) Community Health Posts, where residents receive counselling or advice on healthy lifestyle habits and chronic disease prevention; or (iii) diabetes prevention and weight-loss workshops.
  www.lkcmedsoc.com/nhg-lkc-commhealth

- Guiding Hands Volunteer Programme
  Run by National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), this programme encourages volunteers of all ages to assist and guide patients as they navigate through the various service points and use the self-help systems at the polyclinics. Serve as a Fall Prevention Advocate to share tips for preventing or reducing falls with the elderly; or as a Health Advocate to encourage positive health behaviours, including regular screening, exercise, and nutrition.
  www.nhgp.com.sg/Be_A_Volunteer

- Be a CHAT Ambassador
  The Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT) is a national outreach and mental health check programme under the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). CHAT Ambassadors represent the voices of young people on mental health matters, including developing and executing ideas to promote awareness of mental health concerns among youths and participating in outreach activities. For more information on how to become a CHAT Ambassador, email chat@mentalhealth.sg.
  www.chat.mentalhealth.sg

Mr Eugene Escanan, Miguel’s father

Miguel (right), then a young boy, volunteering with his father (left).
Very Child Goes Through Puberty — a period when the body matures and becomes capable of sexual reproduction — at dissimilar times and different rates. For boys, the first signs of puberty usually kick in between the ages of nine and 14. It starts in girls between eight and 13 years old. However, some children may come to puberty earlier than the norm, while others do so later.

The puberty process is kickstarted when the brain produces a hormone called the Gonadotropin-Releasing Hormone (GnRH). When GnRH reaches the pituitary gland at the base of the brain, it releases two pubertal hormones, the Follicle Stimulating Hormone and the Luteinising Hormone. These signal the male and female sex organs (testes and ovaries) to begin releasing the sex hormones, testosterone and oestrogen, respectively. It is these hormones which cause the pubertal development of the body.

But what happens when a child goes through this phase too early or too late?

Puberty that occurs before eight years (for a girl) or nine (for a boy) is considered to be precocious (early) puberty, says Dr Cindy Ho, Consultant at the Division of Paediatric Endocrinology at Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute, National University Hospital (NUH). “Conversely, a child is said to have delayed (late) puberty when there is no sign of pubertal development by the age of 13 in girls, and 14 in boys,” she explains. According to Dr Ho, precocious puberty is more common in girls, and delayed puberty in boys.

One of Dr Ho’s youngest cases was that of a three-year-old girl with a slow-growing brain tumour. At an age when most toddlers are still figuring out their ABCs and 123s, the child and her family had to deal with the physical and emotional changes of puberty.

“It caused the family, who was already dealing with the treatment of the brain tumour, a lot of distress. Through medication, the girl’s puberty was blocked from progressing; she was way too young to be undergoing puberty or to cope with menstruation,” says Dr Ho.

Dr Ho has also treated a boy who, at 16, was still not showing any signs of puberty because his body was lacking the required hormones. He had to undergo hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

Too Early, Too Late

Puberty is a normal part of growing up, but complications can occur if it happens too soon or is delayed.
Teenagers want to be accepted and to fit in with their peers, so early or delayed changes to their bodies can cause great distress.

**DR CINDY HO, CONSULTANT, DIVISION OF PAEDIATRIC ENDOCRINOLOGY, KHOO TECK PUAT – NATIONAL UNIVERSITY CHILDREN’S MEDICAL INSTITUTE, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL**

Delayed puberty may occur in children who are extremely active, undernourished, or have chronic illnesses such as heart or kidney disease. Weight loss as a result of chronic illness or eating disorders can disrupt the normal process of puberty, leading to late menarche. Other causes include lack of pubertal hormones, ovarian, and testicular failure due to cancer treatment such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy, and chromosomal disorders like Turner syndrome. Delayed puberty can also occur if a child has a growth disorder. Girls who get their periods early may also find it harder to come to terms with menstruation, and this may then lead to hygiene issues. The effects can be emotional as well. A child may feel embarrassed or confused about the changes (or lack of) in his or her body, and may be teased or bullied in school. “Early or late puberty can affect self-esteem and confidence. Teenagers want to be accepted and to fit in with their peers, so early or delayed changes to their bodies can cause great distress,” says Dr Ho.

“Younger children who have precocious puberty may not be mature enough to handle some of the mood changes. And they may act up more when they are unable to cope with these mood swings.” Treatment for either condition varies. For example, central precocious puberty can be treated with GnRH agonist injections, which maintain the hormone at a constant level in the body, while HRT may be used in delayed puberty. Not all cases of precocious or late puberty need medical care, but Dr Ho advises parents to be more aware of their children’s growth development.

A doctor should be consulted if there are issues. “Some causes can be sinister, for example, precocious puberty could be triggered by a brain tumour,” she says. “After finding out the cause, parents can then discuss with their doctor as to whether or not, intervention is required, or to let nature take its course.”

**WHY THE HASTE AND DELAY?**

Children may enter puberty early due to what medical experts refer to as central or peripheral causes.

Central precocious puberty tends to be more common in girls and occurs when the brain releases GnRH before the child turns eight. “In rare instances, health conditions that disrupt brain activities, such as a brain tumour, brain infection, or brain bleed, can also cause precocious puberty,” says Dr Ho.

Peripheral precocious puberty is caused by the early production of oestrogen or testosterone due to tumours in the ovaries or testicles.

Factors such as a family history of precocious puberty and obesity may also contribute to early puberty. Doctors are unclear why obesity causes children to physically mature faster, but the thinking is that hormones released from excess fat cells may play a role.

While currently unproven, some research studies have linked early puberty to environmental factors, such as extreme stress experienced by the child. According to Dr Ho, “Childhood sexual abuse, for example, has been associated with earlier maturation and earlier menarche (the first menstrual bleed).”

**CHEMICALLY SPEAKING...**

Long-term exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals has been linked to premature pubertal changes. These chemicals, which can mimic hormones in the body, can be found in:

- Consumer items, such as some personal care products, processed food, soy-based products and plastic products containing Bisphenol A (BPA).
- By-products of industrial processes, such as smelting and waste incineration. Agricultural pesticides.
- Fish, shellfish, dairy products and meat from animals that may have fed on dioxin-contaminated feed.
We live in an increasingly image-conscious world, where an attractive smile can influence social life, relationships and careers. Aesthetics aside, poor dietary or lifestyle choices in childhood and the teenage years can lead to adverse and irreversible general health damage in the twenties and beyond. What then are the oral health concerns that parents of young children and teenagers should be concerned with?

Bracing for Braces
Fake braces with catchy colours and bracket designs are a trend among teenagers, who wear them as a fashion statement rather than a corrective measure. This is a cause for concern as young people could be buying them from dubious sources, or worse, going the DIY route. They may make them out of metals that may be toxic and lead to infection, or using glue that can cause discolouration and tooth decay.

Braces should be worn only when an orthodontist confirms that there is a need for them: to straighten crooked teeth, close unsightly gaps, or help improve one’s bite. The orthodontist then has to regularly check and adjust their placement as teeth gradually shift into position.

The ideal age for wearing braces is dependent on a child’s oral health condition and stage of development. But treatments can be started as early as eight years old. Some orthodontists prefer to wait until the child is around 12, when permanent teeth have fully erupted.

Wearing braces is not just for vanity’s sake. Crooked teeth can suggest that the jaw is not developing properly, and this could affect a child’s facial development, breathing and posture. In youngsters, misaligned teeth may be due to:

- The shape and size of the jaw, leading to crowding, overlapping, or protruding teeth.
- Tooth decay that causes baby teeth to fall out early.
- Poor myofunctional habits like thumb-sucking and mouth breathing.
- Previous trauma to the jaw region causing adult teeth to lose position.
- Extra or missing teeth.

Popular braces options include metal, self-ligating, ceramic, and Invisalign (clear and removable braces). As for which braces suits your child best, factors such as the patient’s diagnosis, treatment and aesthetic needs, cost, and comfort have to be considered.

Opting for Oral Piercings
Body modifications such as piercings, tattoos, and the less-intrusive tooth jewellery trend give youths a sense of control over their bodies. Oral piercings can however interfere with speech, chewing, and swallowing. But more worryingly, oral piercings can lead to:

- Allergic reactions to the metal used.
- Lingual nerve damage that can cause paresthesia (numbness and loss of sensitivity).
- Chipped or fractured teeth, requiring extraction or a root canal.
- Receding gums.
- Endocarditis, where bacteria from infected piercing travel through the bloodstream and infect the heart.
- Transmission of diseases such as HIV and hepatitis due to unsanitary piercings.
- On rare occasions, choking and blockage of airway due to infection and swelling.

Oral piercings carry more health risks than body piercings. Dr Priscilla Chao, a dental surgeon at Hougang Polyclinic, explains that “the oral cavity is lined by mucosa which is more prone to injury than skin, [and which has] an abundance of bacteria that makes it an ideal environment for plaque formation.” Besides, many blood vessels are situated...
on the floor of one’s mouth and tongue, and these areas carry a higher risk of excessive bleeding, swelling, and infections. The healing process for an oral piercing can take a few weeks to a year. Thus, maintaining good oral hygiene and avoiding bad habits like repeatedly clicking it against teeth are essential. There are also long-term consequences to note. “Excessive growth of tissue can occur around the piercing site, predisposing one to gum disease, increased sensitivity to hot and cold food or drink, or in some cases, imbedding of piercing jewellery,” warns Dr Chao. Any procedure that involves cutting and puncturing skin is invasive, resulting in an open wound for bacteria to infect. Hence it should be done by a properly-trained professional in sterile conditions. Even so, infection can occur, and Dr Chao advises those with oral piercings to watch out for signs of infection and seek prompt treatment.

WISE-ING UP ON WISDOM TEETH
Wisdom teeth are the third permanent molars to develop and typically emerge at the back of the mouth between the ages of 17 and 25. Some people do not have wisdom teeth, and only have the first and second molars. It used to be standard procedure to extract wisdom teeth when they erupt. However, the thinking now is that they need not be extracted if they do not pose problems for the individual. Consult your dentist for advice. Reasons for removing them include:

- **Inflamed gums** The wisdom tooth may grow out at an awkward angle, making it hard to clean; tissue around the area becomes infected and swells, resulting in pain and bad odour.
- **Damage to other teeth** Wisdom teeth can predispose neighbouring teeth to decay, as well as gum disease, due to difficulty of cleaning teeth and food trapped between teeth.

Regular dental visits are important, to monitor wisdom teeth through examination, diagnosis, and radiographic investigations. Age is a factor. “Our body’s regenerative abilities are better when we are younger, so removing wisdom teeth at an earlier age (19 to 25 years old) is likely to carry less risks of complications during the healing process. The procedure is also easier in younger patients, as they have better bone plasticity,” says Dr Chao. LW
HERITAGE SPECIAL

Without the past, we cannot appreciate the present or forge the future. As we usher in the New Year, Lifewise revisits the rich heritage of care across NHG.

BY DANIELLE GOH, NHG GROUP CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

THE INSTITUTIONS UNDER the National Healthcare Group (NHG) and the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) — of which NHG is the primary clinical training partner — have helped shape and contribute to Singapore’s healthcare landscape across various times in history, while remaining true to their foundational values. Here are seven compelling fun facts that might surprise you.

A COLONIAL BUILDING STILL STANDS TODAY AT NOVENA. While LKCMedicine was founded in 2010, its ties to healthcare education extend back to the colonial period. In 1923, this historical building housed medical students from Malaya, and was subsequently used as a hostel for Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) nurses in 1957. Today, it is part of the LKCMedicine campus at Novena, where future doctors are trained.

1

A TIME CAPSULE ON HEALTHCARE EDUCATION IS STORED AT THE LKCMEDICINE HERITAGE CENTRE. The capsule contains objects significant to the formation of the medical school, such as a phone containing the text message to then-Provost of Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Professor Bertil Andersson, that led to the genesis of LKCMedicine. Another centrepiece is an evolving timeline that chronicles key events, such as the convocation ceremony of the first graduate cohort of the Medical School in 2018. The time capsule will be opened in 2060.

2

HERITAGE SPECIAL

COLOURFUL HERITAGE STORIES

THE STRAINS Settlements Hostel at 7 Mandalay Road.*

LKMEDICINE

Timeless Treasures

OTHER ARTICLES STORED IN THE CAPSULE:

- Collaboration Agreement between Nanyang Technological University and Imperial College London.
- Team-Based Learning flashcards used in the LKCMedicine MBBS programme.

* Photo: From the Alumni Perspective: Centenary of Tertiary Education 1905-2005, Thence-Now-Hence, published by Alumni Association
**IMH WAS ONCE KNOWN BY TWO OTHER NAMES.**
The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) was first named The Mental Hospital when it was completed in 1928 on a site off Yio Chu Kang Road. In 1951, the hospital was renamed 'Woodbridge Hospital' after a wooden bridge in the vicinity. After it moved to its present 23-hectare site in Hougang in 1993, the name 'Institute of Mental Health' was added to reflect its expanded functions, including research and education. Gone are the days when the public was warded off by the hospital's fenced-up corridors and grilled gates. Today, IMH has various initiatives to lift public stigma and correct misperceptions on mental health, such as the national anti-stigma campaign Beyond the Label. It also has active volunteer groups from diverse backgrounds, including domestic helpers, churches, and even therapy dogs.

**PATIENTS AT THE OLD WOODBRIDGE HOSPITAL GREW CROPS ON ITS GROUNDS.** In the past, many patients had families who farmed for a living, so these hobbies translated to activities at Woodbridge Hospital. Patients grew edibles such as kangkong, maize, and brinjal. Today, patients at IMH still grow plants and vegetables as part of their rehabilitation.

**NURSES CROSSED RIVERS IN SAMPANS AND TRUDGED MUDDY GROUND TO OFFER PRIMARY CARE SERVICES.** After World War II, the spread of infectious diseases such as smallpox, cholera, and polio were rampant. Maternal and Child Health Services were rolled out to offer primary care to rural areas and deliver vaccinations. In the 1950s, nurses made home visits to kampungs to check on newborns and their mothers. A mass smallpox vaccination exercise in 1959 protected 1.1 million people against the disease. When the National Family Planning Programme was launched in 1966 to address rapid population growth and concerns over housing and food shortages, nurses provided advice on family planning.
A ‘LION’ ONCE GUARDED THE OLD CDC. The Communicable Disease Centre (CDC), previously known as Middleton Hospital, was better known to locals as ‘orh sai’ or ‘black lion’ because of a black lion sculpture that stood at its entrance. The CDC was instrumental in treating and controlling major episodes of infectious diseases — from cholera, pneumonia, and malaria during the colonial period to the 2003 SARS outbreak in modern times.

The black lion sculpture and other relics, including a cholera bed with a hole and a bucket underneath for patients suffering from severe diarrhoea and vomiting, are displayed at the TTSH Heritage Museum.

ON HIS WATCH
Veteran Museum Curator, Mr Dennis Yeoh, shares his passion on making the history of TTSH relevant and meaningful.

I HAVE MANAGED THE TTSH HERITAGE MUSEUM SINCE ITS OFFICIAL OPENING ON 25 JULY 2001. It is a joy to share our heritage with others through visits and educational tours. Besides the general public and students, we host VIP visitors and international delegates. One of the most memorable visits that I had the privilege to conduct was for Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand in 2007. She asked many interesting questions and was well-versed on historical facts. The Heritage Museum tour is included as part of TTSH’s orientation programme and helps inculcate in new staff an understanding of the hospital’s beginnings, the enduring values and beliefs of our founder, and the hospital’s ethos which still guides us in all that we do today.

I HAVE BEEN MUSEUM CURATOR FOR OVER 18 YEARS. I take my job very seriously and I continue to read about TTSH, its heritage, and its developments, as well as seek new ways to make every visitor experience better than the last. When visitors leave the tour feeling happy and enriched with new knowledge, I feel a sense of pride and satisfaction knowing that I have done my best to deliver an informative and engaging presentation on behalf of TTSH. This passion to want to give my best drives me. In the words of Steve Jobs, ‘The only way to do great work is to love what you do.’

THE MOST ICONIC ARTEFACT IN THE HERITAGE MUSEUM IS THE MARBLE STONE SLAB. It was inscribed by our founder and philanthropist, Mr Tan Tock Seng, in 1845. It expresses his vision to build the hospital for the poor and underserved.”

DO YOU KNOW?
The Communicable Disease Centre has been replaced by the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), which officially opened in September 2019.

Photo: Roots.sg, courtesy of the National Heritage Board

Above: The Middleton Hospital entrance. Right: The black lion sculpture that once guarded Middleton Hospital’s entrance.
The first time I talked to the mother of a patient who had killed himself, I was frightened. I had had no intimation of his suicide. The patient, a young man with a serious mental illness, had been distressed over his inability to continue with his studies, but when I last saw him, about a couple of weeks before his death, he seemed to have come to terms with that, and we discussed looking for a job in the interim.

After his funeral, I’d arranged to meet his mother, who was a single parent. I was frightened because I was expecting anger and inconsolable grief, and of my own sense of helplessness that was tinged with guilt.

But when we met, there was no anger — just despairing bewilderment. A painful halting conversation followed and neither of us had any answer for the other. He’d left no suicide note, no explanation, no apology, and no farewell. I couldn’t find any words to comfort her that did not sound trite and she held her palpable sadness tightly buckled up inside her.

I thought of this mother again when I read Ms Linda Collins’ recently published memoir of her 17-year-old daughter, Victoria, who leaped to her death from a condominium in Singapore — something that her mother had called “this most unnatural thing” and an “act of unimaginable fear and pain and loneliness”.

**Unresolvable and Unknowable**

According to the World Health Organization, suicide is the second-leading cause of death among those aged between 15 and 29. An analysis of suicides in the US by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that rates of suicide among young people jumped 56 per cent between 2007 and 2016. In 2018, there were 397 suicides in Singapore, of which 94 were aged between 10 and 29.

From the moment their children — who they would see as a sort of facsimiles of themselves — are born, most parents will believe in some profound inchoate way that they will know their offspring. Ms Collins’ book Loss Adjustment progressively and relentlessly disabuses any parent of this notion and reveals the awful truth that there is no “safe space” within which they can shield their children from suicide, and all that love may not be defence enough to stop them from taking their life.

Better support is needed for youths at risk of suicide.

**Let’s Talk About Suicide Among Young People**

Better support is needed for youths at risk of suicide.

**By Professor Chong Siow Ann**

Vice-Chairman, Medical Board (Research) // Institute of Mental Health

LET’S TALK ABOUT SUICIDE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Better support is needed for youths at risk of suicide.

**By Professor Chong Siow Ann**

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Most people feel awkward talking about suicide… but done right, it is more likely that they [suicidal persons] will feel relieved to be able to open up, and that might pull them back from that cliff edge of self-extinction.

Her book is a grieving mother’s attempt to understand and find expression for her daughter’s suicide. In certain parts, it resembles a psychological autopsy, where she embarked on this quest to question her daughter’s schoolmates, friends, teachers and school counsellor, and combed through Victoria’s diaries and computer, where she’d kept a journal — to answer that irresistible, “Why”. And that process of excavating and uncovering her daughter’s hidden doubts, emerging sexuality, despair, self-cutting, and suicidal thoughts was excoriating.

There were the inevitable recriminations and guilt: “How could we have been so blind to this? Why did Victoria not tell us?… We could have saved her,” wrote Ms Collins, who is a copy-editor with The Straits Times, of her much-loved daughter. She agonised about respecting Victoria’s privacy and not prying into her diaries which could have alerted her to her suicidal thoughts.

However, all parents must sail between what the British psychoanalyst Rozsika Parker called “the Scylla of intrusiveness and the Charybdis of neglect”, and it is only in hindsight that parents would know if they have navigated this course well enough with no calamitous mishaps.

Like so many adolescents, Victoria had contrived to maintain that outer shell to show her parents that things were fine despite that rolling inner turmoil. But she wrote in her journals about her concealed feeling of isolation, her heart-aching self-consciousness.

Adolescents are exquisitely sensitive to what other people think, and how they appear to others, all the while harbouring this terror of rejection; and they are less equipped as they have yet to accrue those experiences that would stand them in better stead to cope with life’s vicissitudes.

Studies have shown that it isn’t enough to simply be with people or even liked by them, we need to feel valued and have that assurance that we and what we do matter. We want approval and validation from others — something that is more acute in adolescence, that phase of life when we need to separate and individualise from our parents and form other relationships.

As they transit to adulthood, many young people might find themselves in the throes of that existential angst of trying to figure out questions like “Who am I?”, “What is my purpose in life?”, “What do I value?” and “What do I think others value?”

And some just can’t navigate their way out of this treacherous passage in their young life to reach safer harbours — impeded and dragged down by various things to the point where death seems to be the only way out.

There are the usual suspects: some adverse childhood events like abuse, genetics, academic stress, peer pressure, overprotective and meritocratic parenting, a punishing perfectionistic trait, bullying, drug use, the pernicious influence of social media, and mental illness. And suicide is probably the consequence of some of these various factors (and perhaps others) interacting conspiratorially and lethally with each other — although in Victoria’s case, she wrote in her diaries that “I have had nothing bad happen to me in my life”.

In some, the intent to kill oneself would be there for some time, brewing just under the surface; while in others, the urge seems to come on quite suddenly.

People who presented to the Emergency Departments after they tried to kill themselves, did so impulsively.

In another US study, a quarter of survivors of near-lethal suicide attempts (defined as any attempt that would have
been fatal without timely medical intervention, or any attempt involving a gun) reported that they considered their actions for less than five minutes.

And even if this suicidal intent had been present for some time, many who eventually killed themselves had kept their thoughts and plans from others. And in many cases, the actual cause would forever remain unresolvable and unknowable.

Perhaps that’s why the Chinese American writer Yiyun Li, whose 17-year-old son killed himself, had not tried to answer that question in the novella that she wrote after her son’s death.

In her book *Where Reasons End*, the unnamed mother/narrator enters into an on-off conversation with the ghost of the son, Nikolai, dead at 16 by suicide.

The mother accepts his suicide as an unexplained inescapable event. “I was a generic parent grieving a generic child lost to an inexplicable tragedy... But calling Nikolai’s action inexplicable was like calling a migrant bird ending on a new continent lost... Who can say the vagrant doesn’t have a reason to change the course of its flight?”

And the mother wonders: “Is it a fatal condition... for some people just being themselves?”

That implied pessimistic acceptance that suicide is an appropriate or even the only option is somewhat disquieting — even nihilistic — particularly to those of us who are mental health workers.

**TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE**

While it is unreasonable to expect that we can prevent all suicides, it would not be unreasonable for us to strive to do that; and there are things we can do.

For one, we need to improve our ability (and willingness) to identify and support adolescents and young people at risk, and make professional help more easily available. In the course of a research project on the perception and stigma of mental illness, my colleagues and I had a series of conversations with groups of university students, and it emerged that while most are not averse to seeking psychiatric help, they don’t want their parents to know about it. That, however, meant that we must explore other ways of making treatments more acceptable and accessible for young people — even allowing for the option of not informing or involving their parents; a potential path is the online delivery of interventions.

And we certainly need more local research on suicide — the findings of which would not only inform intervention and policy, but also initiate conversations about suicide at as many levels and places as possible.

Most people feel awkward talking about suicide and it is difficult to strike the right tone and in a way that will help. There is that common notion that, if you ask someone about thoughts of suicide, you might actually plant that idea in their head; but done right, it is more likely that they will feel relieved to be able to open up and talk about it, and that might pull them back from that cliff edge of self-extinction.

Ms Collins’ sorrowing chronicle should make all parents realise that they need to talk to their children about suicide, even though that in itself is no guarantee of prevention. And yes, it is tough to do so, and the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide (a non-profit organisation founded in 2005 in the US by two friends who lost teenage children to suicide) advises parents to openly acknowledge this discomfort as that would also give the child permission to acknowledge his/her discomfort as well. It also advises parents to prepare ahead on what they would want to say, not to overreact (which would shut off the child), and to pick the right time to have that talk, such as in the wake of a media report of a suicide.
TODAY, IT IS RARE TO FIND HEALTHCARE models or medical disciplines around the world untouched by technology. Spinal injections are now more accurate and less painful, thanks to a new ultrasound-guided, real-time imaging procedure. Nutritious and visually-appealing food can be produced using a 3D food printer.

The advent of telemedicine and home monitoring allows for the provision of clinical services and self-management of medical conditions in the comfort of patients’ homes and in remote areas. These innovations, among myriad others, were aptly featured at the 17th Singapore Health and Biomedical Congress (SHBC), themed “Sustainable Healthcare through Innovation”. The melding of science and ingenuity is revolutionising healthcare — not just for the sake of novelty but to achieve better health outcomes and to ensure the continued efficacy, viability, and accessibility of the health system.

In his welcome remarks, Dr Jason Cheah, Deputy Group CEO (Transformation), NHG, and CEO, Woodlands Health Campus (WHC), expanded on the timeliness of the SHBC 2019 theme. “Change is necessary to tackle increasing healthcare utilisation and costs, arising from an ageing population, prevalence of frailty, a growing chronic disease burden, and manpower constraints,” Dr Cheah said. “If we want to have a sustainable healthcare system that keeps our population in good health, we must innovate further to transform our workforce, and redesign care and processes to optimise outcomes and value for our patients.”

NHG is in the midst of a care transformation to improve the health of Singapore’s population. Dr Cheah listed some initiatives that have been successfully implemented, including the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics’ (NHGP) “teamlet” care model to tackle chronic diseases; greater
If we want to have a sustainable healthcare system that keeps our population in good health, we must innovate further.

Dr Jason Cheah, Deputy Group CEO (Transformation), NHG, and CEO, Woodlands Health Campus

nursing outreach in the community; and leveraging on data analytics and predictive modelling to enable early intervention and prevention.

Guest-of-Honour Mr Edwin Tong, Senior Minister of State for Law and Health, pointed out in his opening address that technology offers tremendous opportunities not only to innovate healthcare and look after the ill, but also to look after those who are well through "upstream innovations in health promotion". For example, several public hospitals including Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) and the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) have a Tele-Consult service for patients to speak with care providers from the comfort of their homes. The Health Promotion Board (HPB) taps on wearable technology to help people track their fitness, as part of a national movement to spur the population to be more physically active.

To further foster healthy lifestyle habits, Mr Tong announced that the Ministry of Health (MOH) will soon introduce mandatory front-of-pack nutrient-summary labels for less healthy pre-packaged sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), as well as advertising prohibitions for the least healthy SSBs on all local mass media channels. These measures — which are part of the "War on Diabetes" campaign — will hopefully "encourage Singaporeans to make a more informed, healthier product choice and accelerate the industry reformulation efforts to reduce sugar content in SSBs," he said.

The SHBC 2019 Opening Ceremony saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NHG and Nanyang Technological University's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) to establish a Joint Programme for Translational Research. Under the MOU, LKCMedicine researchers and NHG clinicians collaborate to drive bench-to-bedside research and improve health outcomes in six key areas — ageing/rehabilitation, dermatology, infectious diseases, mental health, metabolic-vascular diseases, and population health.
ALL ABOARD!

MOH’s ‘Beyond Hospital to Community’ Paradigm Shift Received a Boost at SHBC 2019.

where Mr Tong and Professor Lim Tock Han, Deputy Group CEO (Education and Research), NHG, officiated the launch of National Healthcare Group Diagnostics’ (NHGD) second Mammobus and second Mobile Bone Mineral Densitometry service. The expansion of these services in the community will make screening for breast cancer and osteoporosis more accessible and convenient for residents. Both mobile diagnostics buses are equipped with enhanced design and technology to improve the patient experience during screening.

Results of the annual SHBC Scientific Competition were also revealed: 611 submissions were received from institutions across healthcare clusters and community partners in 2019, out of which awards were given to 53 winners across 16 categories.

FOCUS ON POPULATION HEALTH

An exciting line-up of prominent local and overseas experts held court during the SHBC 2019 opening day. Their presentations were organised into three symposiums, which were aligned with MOH’s ‘3 Beyonds’ strategy for healthcare in Singapore: (i) Value Creation in Healthcare (Beyond Quality to Value); (ii) Transforming Current Models of Care (Beyond Hospital to Community); and (iii) Empowerment through Digital Technology (Beyond Healthcare to Health).

The keynote address was delivered by Professor Gabriel Leung, Dean, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, The University of Hong Kong. In his presentation titled “Sustainable Healthcare through Innovation by the ‘3 Beyonds’”, Prof Leung elaborated on Hong Kong’s efforts to improve working to change the way we are rewarded at Montefiore and moving to value-based care.

The case for value

Montefiore Medicine, a vertically-integrated academic health system based in New York, US, is similar to NHG in several respects. Both comprise an integrated network of hospitals, primary and specialty care clinics, and academic institutions that seamlessly address physical as well as psychosocial needs. There is emphasis on community partnership and the need for equitable healthcare. Perhaps most importantly, both organisations are constantly evolving to transform care by championing value creation and sustainability.

Dr Steven Safyer, President and CEO of Montefiore Medicine, spoke about these issues in his presentation at the “Value Creation in Healthcare” symposium, as well as in an exclusive interview with Lifewise.

What is fundamentally wrong with the “fee-for-service” healthcare model?

It has always struck me as odd that, as clinicians, we get paid more to do more, even if that means performing unnecessary procedures. It’s better to be paid for doing the right thing and getting the right outcomes. I have spent more than 25 years working to change the way we are rewarded at Montefiore and moving to value-based care.
population health over the past decade. Most of it has centred on controlling and preventing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases, hypertension, and diabetes. As for Singapore, Prof Leung cited areas that warranted a closer look. For one, "the government needs to figure out how to care for the growing ageing population, without falling into the "identity politics" trap. E.g., many healthcare staff are foreigners — how big of an issue will this pose? Should Singapore focus on training its local workforce to mitigate the impact?"

The plenary speakers and other experts shared their insights across a total of 19 tracks, covering the entirety of NHG’s ‘River of Life’ framework of population health (from ‘Living Well’ to ‘Leaving Well’).

**EMPOWERING PATIENTS**

Here are some of the many tech-based healthcare innovations that were showcased at SHBC 2019:

- **NHG HEALTHAPPS**
  This digital platform houses a suite of health and wellness apps to encourage health ownership among users. Features include tracking of dietary intake, vital signs, and physical activity; educational tools on disease management; and elements to facilitate personalised care. The multi-app platform is currently being piloted among NHG staff, and would subsequently be rolled out to patients and the broader population in Singapore’s Central Region.

- **DEEP PHENOTYPING**
  This refers to "the analysis of observations contained in patients’ electronic medical records," said Professor Robert Morris, Chief Technology Strategist, MOH Office for Healthcare Transformation (MOHT), at the “Empowerment through Digital Technology” symposium. "By layering this with artificial intelligence, we can predict the progression of chronic diseases for individuals as well as groups, and design more effective public health programmes, resulting in better care."

**DIGITAL PHENOTYPING**

This emerging tool leverages on the wealth of digital breadcrumbs left behind when people go online. "Digital phenotyping enables behavioural tracking, which can help us detect or monitor mental health conditions," said Prof Morris. MOHT has partnered IMH to develop a digital phenotyping platform. Consisting of a wrist device and a smartphone, the platform can collect seven categories of data (e.g., sleep patterns, time away from home, sociability) to predict and prevent the relapse of serious mental illnesses, create self-awareness of mood disorders, and other potential uses.

The aim of these technologies is to empower patients to manage their conditions. This point was reiterated by Ms Janet Campbell, Vice President, R&D Relations, Epic, US, another speaker at the symposium. Epic is a leading provider of electronic health records (EHRs), which cover clinical documentation in hospitals as well as patient self-service capabilities. "Patients can use EHRs to schedule their own appointments and document their clinical information," said Ms Campbell, who likened digitally-engaged patients to "the most engaged employees you’ll ever hire."

She added that digitalisation of workflows brings about greater transparency: “With digital technology, patients will be more empowered and attuned to their care plan and journey. A fully digital system provides comprehensive information, such as the doctor’s electronic progress notes, upcoming orders and procedures, and brief biographies of the doctors, thus making the healthcare experience less daunting for them.”
At work or at play, Senior Staff Nurse and martial arts practitioner Tham Juncheng adopts the same philosophy — to keep an open mind in every new situation.
As with any sport, there is an element of risk involved when practising martial arts. However, a lot of it comes down to the precautions you take and how far you push yourself.”

Senior Staff Nurse Tham Juncheng

“I ENTERED HEALTHCARE BECAUSE OF MY MOTHER’S INFLUENCE. She is a radiographer, so growing up, I was a frequent visitor to her former workplace at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. I remember doing my homework and studying there. Spending so much time in a hospital greatly influenced my decision to go into healthcare. I initially considered becoming a radiographer or a physiotherapist, but eventually chose the nursing degree offered by the National University of Singapore (NUS).

SEEING A PATIENT IMPROVE GIVES ME GREAT JOB SATISFACTION. I am part of a team that looks after patients in Yishun Community Hospital (YCH)’s stroke rehabilitation ward. There was a patient who was a motivational speaker before he had a stroke. During his time in the ward, he was depressed as he had lost the ability to talk. Thankfully, his condition improved and he was discharged. He visited the ward recently and we all went ‘wow!’ because he is now speaking normally. It is very heartening to see patients get better, and to start walking and talking again.

MY JOB ALSO INVOLVES PROVIDING CAREGIVERS WITH BASIC HOMECARE SKILLS. Some caregivers are unable to provide adequate support in this area, as they may not fully understand the importance of their role. That is why my colleagues and I take time to educate and equip them with the needed skills so that they can facilitate the patient’s recovery.

I ENJOY MENTORING STUDENTS AND NEW NURSES. As a preceptor in YCH, I serve as a mentor to new colleagues, to help them familiarise with their work environment. I recently mentored my first batch of eight Nursing Diploma students from Nanyang Polytechnic. Besides imparting knowledge and skills, I enjoy sharing my views and experience on career-related matters, such as why I chose to work in a community hospital.

WORKING IN A COMMUNITY HOSPITAL HAS ENABLED ME TO INTERACT AND CONNECT WITH PATIENTS ON A DEEPER LEVEL. Patients in a community hospital need more time to recover through rehabilitation, and they usually stay about two to four weeks, which is longer as compared to those in acute wards. This lets me forge more meaningful relationships with them. I like interacting with patients, and learning about their daily habits, preferences, and personalities. It adds a human touch to my job.

GETTING INTO THE ACTION

Tham Juncheng shares five things to take note of when learning martial arts:

- **Your real reason.** Are you doing it for self-defence, leisure or fitness? If it’s for self-defence, choose a martial art that is less rigid on form, such as Krav Maga that teaches you how to react in real-life scenarios, such as disarming an attacker. To improve your fitness? Consider Muay Thai or judo.

- **You are never too old.** If you have a pre-existing medical condition, seek a doctor’s advice before starting any new physical activity.

- **Practice makes perfect.** You need to practice regularly so that the moves you have learnt become ‘muscle memory’, enabling you to automatically perform them in emergency situations.

- **Know your body and fitness level, as well as that of your sparring partner.** If you are doing martial arts for recreational reasons, do not practise with a partner who is there to learn to fight.

- **Safety first.** Adhere to safety protocols set in place by your instructor to prevent injuries.
SINCE I AM A TRAINED NURSE, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO UTILISE MY SKILLS BEYOND THE WORKPLACE. I volunteer with HealthServe and the Civil Defence Auxiliary Unit, Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF). People sometimes ask me: ‘Aren’t you tired? Why are you doing a 12-hour shift on your day off?’ To me, volunteering is a meaningful way to occupy my time since I do not have children or pets to care for at the moment.

I TRY TO SEPARATE MY PROFESSIONAL WORK LIFE FROM MY PERSONAL LIFE. Nurses have a caring nature and are always happy to help their patients. But like all other jobs, we need to maintain a balance between our professional and personal life. The biggest challenge most nurses face is ensuring that our patients know that we are there for them in times of need; but more importantly, they must learn to resume their normal routines and live independently once they are discharged. Many times, we have to remind ourselves that there are other channels that may better support them once they return to the community.

I PRACTISE MARTIAL ARTS AS A FORM OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. To toughen me up, my father enrolled me in taekwondo class when I was in primary school. I now have a black belt and am a registered coach. I have also picked up various other martial art forms, such as karate during my university days, and jiu jitsu in 2016. Two years ago, I picked up historical European martial arts, and learnt sword fighting techniques adapted from the 14th to 17th centuries. The skills honed during martial arts training, such as discipline, respect, and the ability to ‘roll with the punches’, are crucial life skills. On a lighter note, I guess you could say I am now ‘apocalypse-ready’!

WHEN IT COMES TO CAREER OPPORTUNITIES, IT MAY BE GOOD TO ‘ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES’, TOO. When I was a nursing student, I wanted to work in the accident and emergency department. But when opportunities to join YCH and take an Advanced Diploma in Nursing (Gerontology) came up in 2015, I took them.

While I have an end goal of pursuing a Master’s degree in the future, I welcome opportunities that present along the way. One should always be open to learning new things and not be blind to opportunities at work. This is also something I always tell the students I mentor.”
Milk has long been associated with good bone and muscle health. Now researchers from St Andrews University in Scotland have added another merit to its list of health benefits — skimmed milk does a better job than water at keeping a person hydrated for longer. This is because skimmed milk contains a little fat, some protein and lactose (sugar), all of which help to slow the emptying of fluid from the stomach and sustain hydration over a longer period of time. Milk also has sodium, which binds to water in the body, resulting in less urine produced.
Know what you are signing up for to make co-living a more pleasant experience.

Mental Health (IMH), explains, “Human beings are interdependent. We need to be able to have some privacy for ourselves but also to connect and build meaningful relationships with others.”

Learning to embrace diversity in living and personal choices is an opportunity co-living can offer. “A close-knit community in a co-living situation could help to provide a driving force in one’s work or social cause, and also psychological support when needed,” Dr Soo adds.

Hmlet targets mainly millennials, and offers community activities such as block parties and group yoga exercise classes. “Similar to the concept of having staff encourage one another during corporate team challenges, such as the Singapore National Steps Challenge, taking part in group exercises and events could improve one’s physical and mental health,” says Dr Soo.

THE FLIPSIDE OF COMMUNAL LIVING

Co-living arrangement, however, can be stressful, too. “Conflicts can arise due to differences in opinions, expectations, lifestyles, and personal

Human beings are interdependent. We need to be able to have some privacy for ourselves but also to connect and build meaningful relationships with others.

Dr Grace Soo, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Institute of Mental Health
needs,” says Dr Soo. Her advice? View such friction as a challenge to learn new ways of doing things and to appreciate other perspectives.

There are no specific rules in most co-living establishments; instead, residents are guided by unspoken social guidelines. In Mr Soo’s experience, it pays to be cordial to everyone, to “not sweat the small stuff” and to “live by example.” “When you contribute to the shared community by helping to clean up, and sharing food you’ve prepared, for example, your actions will shape the attitudes of people around you,” he says.

Effort, as Dr Soo puts it, “includes being a willing and responsible contributor to household chores, being respectful and following house rules, having the ability to remain civil in difficult times, being generous and accepting of the different ways of doing things, and being open and sincere when resolving conflicts.”

A BALANCING ACT

WHEN CO-LIVING, REMEMBER TO SET ASIDE SOME ‘ME-TIME’ EVERY DAY TO RESET AND RECHARGE. THIS WILL HELP YOU MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS OUTSIDE THE COMMUNE, AS WELL AS TIME AND SPACE TO PURSUE OTHER ENGAGEMENTS YOU VALUE.

FOR KYRA POH, 17, balancing the demands of school and sport can be hard, taking “a lot of planning and little to no procrastinating,” as the School of the Arts Singapore final-year student puts it. Kyra finished second in the solo freestyle open category at the 3rd Federation Aeronautique International (FAI) World Cup in France last April. She was the solo freestyle junior gold medallist in 2015 and 2017. Here’s how Kyra keeps going:

KEEP TRAINING

“Before a major competition, I train in the wind tunnel at iFly Singapore for an hour daily. Indoor skydiving is a physically strenuous sport. The wind in the indoor skydiving facility can go up to 290km/h — equivalent to the strength of some hurricanes. I break the training up into four 15-minute sessions, spread out over three hours. I also do a lot of gym work to strengthen my core and abs, jog to build my stamina, and practise yoga to train my balance.”

HAVE A HEALTHY DIET

“I eat as healthily as possible, except when I’m on holiday. That way, I feel in top shape and energised for the day’s training. Breakfast is usually avocado on toast or an acai smoothie. Lunch is either grilled salmon or chicken breast with asparagus. I try not to eat too much for dinner, as I usually train at night — it typically comprises just salmon sashimi or a bowl of salad.”

PRIORITISE MENTAL HEALTH

“I take time to organise my plans, as doing so helps me stay focused and be productive. When things get too stressful, I tell myself that whatever it is, it is only temporary and I can overcome it. To be a strong athlete, I need to have a strong mindset. Therefore, I try to stay positive, motivated, and inspired. It’s also important to make time to relax and connect with the people who bring joy to your life. I enjoy travelling with friends and participating in family activities. My family plays a crucial role in my sporting achievements; without them, this journey would be much more challenging.”
Do go easy on spicy food because it can get too hot to handle, health-wise.

SICHUAN, THE FAMED SOUTHWESTERN CHINESE PROVINCE, is home to giant pandas. It also has a famous culinary export, Mala (麻辣) sauce, which has found its way to our hearts — and stomachs — in an array of foods and beverages. This in turn can range from the familiar (mala hotpot) to the unusual (mala cocktails).

The addictive taste of mala is derived from a combination of Sichuan peppercorns, dried chillies and chilli powder, that delivers a double wallop of heat and sting to the nose, mouth, and stomach. Mala lovers like student Rachel Heng, 21, cannot get enough of it. "I love spicy food but most dishes aren’t spicy enough for me. Mala has a real kick to it.

With mala xiang guo (spicy stir-fry pot), I can even choose the level of spiciness,” Ms Heng says. She usually opts for “da la”, the maximum level.

Mala has also found a fan in Ms Florence Yeo, who regularly gathers colleagues for a mala xiang guo lunch. Ms Yeo loves the tingling sensation that mala leaves on the lips and tongue. Besides, “Sichuan peppercorn has floral notes, quite unlike other types of chilli,” says the 53-year-old operations head of a marketing agency.

Spice Of Life
While mala adds spice to your life (literally), is it detrimental to your health if you consume too much of this arguably, rather oily sauce? Sichuan peppercorn and dried chilli, the main ingredients in mala, give it its unique zing. “These are concentrated sources of fibre, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, but unless eaten in substantial amounts, may not be a significant source of these nutrients,” says Ms Seow Vi Vien, a dietitian from Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH).

Still, various studies investigating the effects of spices like chilli suggest there is a correlation between spice-heavy diets and longevity. A 2015 study by a group of researchers for China Kadoorie Biobank

Hot Stuff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF CHILLI (PER 100G)</th>
<th>CALORIES (KCAL)</th>
<th>FAT (G)</th>
<th>SODIUM (MG)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALA XIANG GUO SEASONING</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAO GAN MA CHILLI SAUCE WITH OIL</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIED SAMBAL WITH OIL</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>HIGH*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRESH-CUT CHILLI</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE
observed that spicy food consumption was inversely associated with the risks of death due to cancer, ischaemic heart diseases, and respiratory diseases. Another study in 2017 by the University of Vermont in the US found a 13 per cent lower risk of death among chilli lovers, and suggested that the compound capsaicin found in chilli may reduce inflammation in the body. It was noted that types of deaths related to the pepper group had the lowest numbers in medical conditions where inflammation plays a role, such as vascular disease, heart attack, and stroke.

Does this mean good news for mala lovers? Not quite. As Ms Seow explains, “Mala sauce is typically prepared by simmering the chillies with large quantities of seasonings such as sugar and salt in oil. Compared to chopped fresh chilli, the sauce can be high in fat and sodium. Consuming large quantities of mala sauce regularly may lead to excessive calorie intake.”

Indeed, the China Kadoorie Biobank study did a further comparison of fresh chilli and non-fresh chilli eaters and found that death due to cancer, heart disease, and diabetes was lower among the group who predominantly ate fresh chilli.

Feel The Burn
Gastrointestinal conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome or acid reflux are good reasons to go easy on mala — spicy foods could irritate the stomach and gut, and indirectly exacerbate the severity of symptoms in individuals with these conditions.

Research on chilli and its effect on the body is as yet, not conclusive. Ms Seow points out, “Evidence of the link between chilli consumption and digestive system issues, including stomach cancer, is conflicting. There is also insufficient evidence to show that chilli kills bacteria in the stomach or causes breakouts. More research needs to be done.” It is also wise to err on the side of caution if you have a sensitive gut.

HEALTHIER WAYS TO GET YOUR CHILLI FIX

» Use low-sodium soy sauce in moderation when pairing with freshly-cut chilli, or cut the condiment out completely to minimise sodium intake.

» Add freshly-cut chilli during cooking to enhance flavour, minimising the use of seasonings such as salt and sugar.

» Use mala spices in soup rather than as a sauce base with chilli oil.

» Opt for fresh onion, garlic, and ginger when making sambal paste, instead of sugar and salt to enhance the taste. Cook with a moderate amount of healthier oil (choose those with the Healthier Choice Symbol).

All Fired Up
Some research indicate that hot spices such as chilli may rev up metabolism and burn calories, but a definitive causal link has not been established. “Although there are qualitative reports suggesting that chilli and various spicy foods may boost metabolism and thus lead to weight loss, there are no quantities or specific food ingredients defined. The evidence to date is insufficient to warrant recommending eating spicy food to lose weight,” says Ms Seow.

Even if there is some evidence implying that eating spicy food may alter your metabolism, the effect will decrease after some time — the more spicy food you eat, the more you build up a tolerance and thus, the less of an effect such foods will have on your metabolism.
ALWAYS IN STEP AND MOVING WITH LIFE

She has led the dance department of Singapore Chinese Girls’ School for nearly 50 years, but at 83, Mrs Jean Chan shows no signs of slowing down.

GRANDMOTHER-OF-THREE MRS JEAN CHAN learnt ballet in the 1940s in India, where her family had taken refuge during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. There, she trained under professionals from the renowned UK-based Royal Academy of Dance (RAD).

When the war ended in 1945, Mrs Chan continued her classical ballet training in Singapore until she entered university. Upon graduation, she taught English and Literature at Raffles Girls’ School before moving to Singapore Chinese Girls’ School (SCGS) in the 1970s. There, Mrs Chan initially oversaw the English Literary, Drama and Debate Society, but given her ballet background, it was not long before she headed the school’s dance group. Under her tutelage, the group has grown to be 200-strong with three ballet teachers, two Chinese dance trainers and a tap-dancing instructor.

Pre-breakfast Workout Works Best

ENDOCRINOLOGY Researchers from the University of Bath in the UK found that exercising on an empty stomach in the morning burns fat faster than if you ate before you worked out. Their results, published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism, suggested that because insulin levels were lower after having fasted overnight, the body uses fat reserves to fuel exercise — resulting in more fat burnt.

THE RESEARCHERS ONLY WORKED WITH MALE SUBJECTS. MORE STUDIES WILL BE NEEDED TO SEE IF WOMEN, TOO, COULD BENEFIT FROM EXERCISING BEFORE BREAKFAST.
What’s your work commitment like these days?
I work four days a week — Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm. In the lead up to the girls’ RAD examinations, which can last up to six days, I’m in school till about 7.30pm for their rehearsals. However, these days I’m not involved in the training. With the help of two teachers and an assistant, I plan their schedule and performances, and make sure they are well-prepared.

How are you still so invested in SCGS’s dance department?
From Day One, I’ve been fortunate to be able to work with supportive principals, dedicated peers, and committed parents. The work can be hard, but it’s always fun and never boring. It fills me up with joy, so why stop?

It goes almost without saying then that being with young people helps you to stay active and feel young?
Definitely. Many of them, even the little ones in primary school, are talented and ambitious, and their energy can be quite infectious. They’ll tell you, however, that I can be strict. I reprimand them when they misbehave, but I see these girls as my own children and want them to succeed. It’s lovely to see a good number of them moving on to become professional dancers or dance instructors.

What are you up to when you’re not working?
I go to church and enjoy eating with my family, which includes my husband, two sons, and grandchildren (whenever they are in Singapore). I also visit friends who are not as well, and I love reading.

HOW MRS JEAN CHAN LIVES WELL
+ I AM ON MY FEET A LOT. I enjoy walking the stretch of the school’s huge compound and whenever the girls put on a performance, I’m backstage getting them ready. I’ve never sat down at a school function — there’s too much to get done!

+ I VALUE GREAT FRIENDSHIPS. Joyful connections are the key to my good health.

+ I WATCH WHAT I EAT. Breakfast is muesli with soy milk; lunch is something from the school tuckshop, such as chee cheong fun (rice noodle rolls) with two drumettes (the fleshy part of a chicken wing); while dinner is mainly porridge with an omelette.


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Our Community and NHG Give Thanks

Bringing festive cheer to healthcare staff, patients, and caregivers.

The National Healthcare Group (NHG) Community Friends and Group Corporate Communications (GCC) expressed gratitude to healthcare staff, patients, and caregivers at the annual NHG Thank You Concert. Held at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH)’s atrium on 29 November 2019, performers represented the diverse population NHG serves: music institution Rave Harps’ senior harpists; National Day Parade 2019 singers 11-year-old Jordin Tan and veteran musician Clement Chow; Ukrainian singer Helga Udovchenko, who is married to a Singaporean and sang in English and Chinese; jazz artiste Michelle Poh, daughter of TTSH pioneer volunteer Michael Poh; and NHG’s own talent, Danielle Goh.

Besides singing along to a medley of local songs and Christmas carols, the audience enjoyed balloon sculpting and a magic show, as well as arts and craft activities. They also received snacks, health booklets, and the NHG 2020 Calendar.

Opening Up on Mental Health

To provide a deeper understanding of mental health and the therapies involved in helping patients function better, the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) organised an open house on 26 October 2019. Held in conjunction with World Mental Health Day, the Mental Health Carnival 2019 attracted over 1,000 visitors, who had the opportunity to experience the various therapeutic and rehabilitative activities offered. IMH partnered EQUAL to introduce equine-assisted activities, where young and old could interact with therapy horses. Live performances by patients and volunteers, and a bazaar added to the carnival buzz.

Mental Health Carnival 2019 also saw the launch of Sedap Café, which offers local delights prepared by patients who have completed a Workforce Skills Qualification course in food hygiene and preparation.

The IMH Heritage Trail that chronicles the key milestones of the institution’s service development was unveiled as well.
Building a Community of Carers

The Singapore Patient Conference 2019 aimed to create meaningful conversations on what really matters to patients and caregivers.

Patients, caregivers, volunteers, and community partners, as well as health and social care professionals gathered at the Singapore Patient Conference (SPC) 2019 to share their stories and spark new ideas towards building a community of carers.

Held on 25 October 2019 at the Ng Teng Fong Centre for Healthcare Innovation (CHI), the event included the Singapore Patient Action Awards presentation. Nine individuals and eight groups were recognised for making a positive difference to the community through compassion, empathy, resilience, and generosity of spirit.

The National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) Guiding Hands Volunteer Programme won the Singapore Patient Support/Volunteer Group Award for helping those in need, and improving care delivery and services. The team helming the HUT at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) was given the Singapore Patient Engagement Initiative (Team Award). The HUT is a conducive space that encourages interaction between patients and the public.

"It is critical to empower carers in the community with the right resources, skills, and knowledge to support the growing ageing population, so that they can successfully age in place in the community and at home," said Guest-of-Honour and Mayor of Central Singapore District Ms Denise Phua.

Wellness in the Workplace

Singapore employers pledged to champion their staff’s mental well-being.

The 2016 Singapore Mental Health Study by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) revealed that one in seven adults in Singapore experiences a mental health condition in their lifetime, and four out of five do not seek help. This means part of the country’s workforce has to deal with mental health conditions while under employment.

To address the issue, 20 leaders, including Professor Chua Hong Choon, Deputy Group CEO (Clinical), National Healthcare Group (NHG), and CEO, IMH, signed a joint pledge on 17 October 2019 to champion mental well-being within their organisations and the wider Singapore workforce. The pledge was part of a dialogue on workplace well-being organised by the WorkWell Leaders Workgroup.

LKCMedicine Dean

bestowed top honour by Imperial College London.

Professor James Best, Dean of Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine), was presented with the prestigious Imperial College Medal, an award that honours individuals for their invaluable contributions to the college. The presentation took place on 16 October 2019 at the Royal Albert Hall in London, during Imperial College London’s Commemoration Day ceremony.

Prof Best is also a Board Director of the National Healthcare Group (NHG).
World Antibiotic Awareness Week

To engage the community about the proper use of antibiotics and the threat of antibiotic resistance, outreach events were held at two libraries during World Antibiotic Awareness Week.

- **Jurong Regional Library** (9 and 10 November 2019). Organised by the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore, the event saw the launch of *The Antibiotic Tales*, a comic that dispels myths and misconceptions about antibiotics, co-written by illustrator Sonny Liew and infectious disease expert Associate Professor Hsu Li Yang.

- **Woodlands Regional Library** (23 and 24 November 2019). Organised by the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), the event included community health talks, and activities that taught children about bacteria, antibiotics, and hand hygiene.

NCID Cares Biennial Charity Dinner

Held on 14 December 2019 at Sofitel Singapore City Centre, the event was graced by Guest-of-Honour, Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and Ministry of Health. It was attended by 300 guests including partners, stakeholders, and staff. The dinner raised funds for People Living with HIV, and was organised by NCID Cares, previously known as the Patient Care Centre (PCC). The funds will go towards a range of needs, including providing medication for low-income patients, laboratory testing, supporting needy patients through the Red Ribbon Project, and other patient support group programmes.

Left to right: A/Prof Lee Cheng Chuan (3rd from left), Chairman of NCID Cares Biennial Charity Dinner and Senior Consultant, NCID; Dr Amy Khor (middle); and Professor Leo Yee Sin (3rd from right), Executive Director, NCID.
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