

WORKING HAND IN HAND FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE

By Agency for Integrated Care

Through the Mental Health GP Partnership Programme (MHGPP), General Practitioners (GPs) become part of an integrated healthcare network and are able to lean on community partners like Community Intervention Teams (COMIT) to provide support to patients with mental health needs, GP Dr Mark Yap from Cashew Medical & Surgery, and social worker Ms Lee Soo Chin from Montfort Care, share with us on their roles and how they work together to support clients in their recovery journey.



*Dr Mark Yap
from Cashew Medical & Surgery*



*Ms Lee Soo Chin
from Montfort Care*



What is the role of COMIT?

Soo Chin:

Our teams are made up of counsellors, occupational therapists, psychologists, nurses and programme coordinators. We provide counselling, psychotherapy, coordinate care and support caregivers of those with mental health conditions. In this way, we complement the care provided by GPs in managing clients with mild to moderate mental health needs so that they can continue to live well at home and in the community.



GPs are usually the first point of contact for many patients. How do you work together to manage a patient's condition?

Dr Yap:

I have been working with the community intervention teams since 2014. I see about four to eight clients a month who may have anxiety, depression and schizophrenia. If they need more support such as counselling, I will contact the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) via careinmind@aic.sg with the client's details, medical background and condition for referral to the community intervention team for their follow up.

Soo Chin:

While GPs are the first to identify the condition, our team provides social and emotional support for the clients and their caregivers to better manage their condition. For instance, if the client is confused about how to take their medication, we can explain it to them during our home visits. During such visits, we will also evaluate their condition and with their caregivers, develop or review their care plan.



How do you provide support for patients?

Dr Yap:

People usually feel more comfortable talking to their family doctor. As a GP in the Mental Health GP Partnership Programme, I can also assess and diagnose patients with mental health conditions. When my patients tell me how they feel unwell, I will also check if their symptoms may be due to an underlying mental health condition. If they are, I will refer them to the community intervention team for further support while I continue seeing them for the condition and provide medication if needed.

Soo Chin:

When AIC sends us information on the clients for follow up, we will go down to their homes to evaluate their condition and develop or review their care plan with their caregivers. We also educate the clients about their conditions so that they can better manage it. Besides partnering AIC, we also work with other community partners like grassroots organisations and hospitals to support their residents or patients with mental health needs.

Dr Yap:

As for me, I often keep in touch with the community intervention team to stay up to date with my patient's condition. If I notice that someone has not returned to my clinic for follow ups or medication, I will also contact the team to see if my patient is doing okay.

GP and COMIT in collaboration

Mdm A was diagnosed with anxiety after she experienced weight loss, high blood pressure and sleeping problems due to work stress. In August 2018, Dr Yap referred Mdm A to a community intervention team. Soo Chin's team took up her case. Over two to three sessions, Mdm A's condition improved.



How did both of you work together to help Mdm A manage her anxiety?

Soo Chin:

We provided counselling sessions at her home and taught her how to better understand and manage her condition. Now that she is better, we continue with home visits to help her manage her condition. For instance, we set different goals for each session such as supporting her in overcoming her daily anxieties.

Dr Yap:

Besides being more aware of her condition, the counselling sessions also made Mdm A realise that her health comes first. With medication and a break from work, she overcame her condition. Should the need arise again, she now knows who to turn to for support.



Why is it important for different partners to work together?

Soo Chin:

By working together, we can provide care in a more well-rounded manner to the client.

Dr Yap:

Their team and I will also share information as patients may tell different people different issues about themselves.

