



# Looking into the MENTAL HEALTH of SENIORS

Review by Dr Tina Tan, Deputy Editor

## Colours of Ageing

Author: Kua Ee Heok  
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When I received my copy of Prof Kua Ee Heok's latest book, *Colours of Ageing*, I expected a summary on "30 years of Research on the Mental Health of the Singapore Elderly" (which is precisely what the subtitle is) and I wasn't disappointed. Yet, far from a dry tome of research summaries and journal abstracts, the book highlights the singular goal of Prof Kua's cumulative years of research – to show that older folks, even those with mental health problems, can age with dignity and grace. In fact, that is the title of one of his other books, *Ageing with Dignity and Grace*, a two-volume collection which houses his well-known semi-fictional novel *Listening to Letter from America*. The latter, which I also highly recommend, reads like a book on World War II and is told through the collective perspective of several elderly folk in a day centre.

Back to *Colours of Ageing*; as I read through Prof Kua's description of his various research projects, I often wondered, "Well, why didn't I think of

that?" A research centre at a shopping mall and a therapeutic garden – these ideas came from someone who has wisdom to impart to the next generation, who has seen and experienced much, and therefore knows what he's talking about. Even the name of the shopping mall research centre, TaRA, resonated with me. I had to wonder whether the author and his team realised that Scarlett O'Hara's family home in *Gone with the Wind* was named Tara. The film itself is a grand age of 80 years now and watching it would probably serve as a great form of reminiscence therapy.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in caring for the elderly. There are nuggets of wisdom for doctors, researchers and caregivers alike. Personally, I took away three key things from this book, which I will be sharing with my elderly patients, or any older person who wants to know how to stave off memory problems and achieve a sense of wellbeing. The three key things are to listen to music (especially the oldies), take up gardening and play

lots of *mahjong*. Of course, now that I'm thinking of *Gone with the Wind*, I do wonder if I can add "watch old films" to that list. I'd probably have to do a research project on that, if someone else hasn't already thought of it. ♦

Dr Tan is an associate consultant at the Institute of Mental Health and has a special interest in geriatric psychiatry. She is also an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. Between work and family life, she squeezes time out for her favourite pastimes – reading a good (fiction) book and writing.

