

Mental Health Special Interest Group

By Dr Sally Ho, Fellowship Trainee

Dr Tan Yew Seng, Chairman, Mental Health Special Interest Group, chaired an insightful session on psychotherapy on 6 Apr 2004.



Dr Helen Leong, FCFP,
Assistant Director,
Professional Standards &
Audit, NHGP

Dr Helen Leong presented a case of an 18-year-old student (TG) who presented with recurrent episodes of vomiting for 2 months.

to explore the student's circumstances and realized she was facing tremendous stress from the upcoming 'A' level examinations.

TG had problems coping with Physics and Mathematics. She believed the only way for her to have a good life was to make it to university. She was close to her older sister and her older brother. They helped her in her studies and she considered doing well in the examinations an obligation so as not to let them down. She was so fearful of failure that at one stage, she harboured thoughts of skipping the examinations. Having "sized up" the situation and developed a case formulation, Dr Leong scheduled a series of 10 consultations over a period of 5 months from the time of initial presentation to completion of the 'A' level examinations.

Dr Leong's management of TG involved:

1) Helping TG to recognize the symptoms of stress.

2) Teaching her to use behavioural techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and visualization technique to relieve stress.

3) Modifying her belief system by providing a safe environment for her to explore alternative thoughts, perceptions, interpretations and beliefs.

Specific techniques such as the use of a Dysfunctional Thought Record Chart, the challenge of automatic negative thoughts, the exploration of the worst outcome, etc were also employed during the consultations. She shared practical tips on preparing for the individual papers in the 'A' level examinations and emphasized the importance of having regular meals and exercise.

Having developed good rapport with TG and gained her trust, Dr Leong obtained her permission to engage her family members and close friends in the discussions. TG learned that her family would not have minded even if she did not do well. Along the way, she changed her goal from doing well for entrance into the university to that of just doing her best for the examinations. Eventually, TG was able to control her anxious thoughts and emotions adequately for her to do fairly well in her exams.

The above case illustrated the use of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), a form of psychotherapy, in the management of a patient with an anxiety state as a result of having to prepare for examinations.

Dr Leong proceeded to give a comprehensive outline of cognitive models, cognitive distortions and interventions, behavioural therapy, patient selection and the necessary physician attributes for successful CBT. A lively discussion with interested family physician participants wrapped up the 2nd Mental Health SIG meeting.

NB. Case history and initials of the patient had been modified to maintain patient confidentiality.

Mental Health Special
Interest Group

"Understanding Family Dysfunctions: Implications
for Assessment, Case Consultation & Referral"

Chairman:

Dr Tan Yew Seng
Chairman, Mental Health Special
Interest Group CFPs

Speaker:

Dr Kit Ng
Kean University,
New Jersey

27 July 2004 (Tuesday)
5:15pm - 6:45pm
College Lecture Room

Outline:

Family dysfunctions threatens the well-being of the individual, and can even lead to physical illness. Conversely, ill-health can be the stressor that triggers or aggravates dysfunctional patterns in the family. And all these issues may well be covert, except perhaps for the fact that the patient's illness remains persistent or recurrent. It is therefore invaluable that the GP has a framework to understand or approach family dysfunction. But how can we, in the short span of a consultation, identify and assess potential cases of dysfunction? When do we need to refer? And to who? How can the family physician be helpful (and when is he not so)? To answer these questions and more, we shall have the pleasure of Dr Kit Ng to enlighten us.

About the Speaker:

Kit S. Ng, PhD, is a Graduate Faculty member and Director of the Post-Graduate Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and Master's in Psychological Services programs in the Psychology Department at Kean University, Union, New Jersey. He has taught courses in Marital Therapy, Family Psychology, Child Psychology, Clinical Supervision, Counseling Internship, Marriage and Family Practicum/ Internship, Counseling Strategies and Techniques, Adult Psychology, Interpersonal Relationship, and Human Sexuality.