

IN FOCUS



Health Seminar: Managing Burnout & Anxiety with Professor Craig Hassed

VOICES



SHBC 2023 - Communication in Healthcare: Voices and Perspectives

FACE-TO-FACE



Finding Your Niche While Climbing The Mountain

HAPPENINGS



The Season of Appreciation



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MERRY CHRISTMAS



Health Seminar: Managing Burnout & Anxiety with Professor Craig Hassed



Prof Hassed leading participants through a mindfulness meditation session

"Your self-care is not an optional extra, or a luxury that you don't have time for," said Professor Craig Hassed (Centre for Consciousness and Contemplative Studies, Monash University, Melbourne Australia) to the 350 participants during the Health Seminar: Managing Burnout & Anxiety, co-organised by National Healthcare Group Education, Brahm Centre, and the Nanyang Technological University Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, on 23 June 2023.

"Your self-care is important for its own sake, but it's also vitally important for the people that you (healthcare professionals) are caring for."

"So, the investment in your own self-care is also the investment involving the patients that you are looking after," he stressed. "Caring for ourselves helps us to care for our patients."



**“
Your self-care
is not an optional
extra, or a luxury
that you don't
have time for.”**

- PROF CRAIG HASSED

EMPATHIC DISTRESS OR COMPASSION

Healthcare and caregiving are demanding jobs that take a toll on an individual's physical and emotional well-being. And this is particularly evident in the last few years with COVID-19, said Prof Hassed. He noticed many of his colleagues experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and even distress, due to the increase in people seeking treatment at the clinics and hospitals during the pandemic.

And one considerable source of distress that healthcare professionals (HCP) experience relates to empathy (for the patient), shared Prof Hassed.

"And empathy goes one of two ways.

"If it goes into empathic distress, then the stress circuits in the brain fire off," he said.

Empathic distress is described as the negative emotional experience of one in response to another's (usually difficult emotional) suffering.

"We (HCPs) lose focus of the person (patient) in front of us. We focus and become self-conscious and aware of our own distress," he added, elaborating that with this shift in focus, our actions often focus on wanting to make ourselves feel better by attempting to "fix this person (patient) quickly", which may not be what the person needs.

"With compassion, there might be an awareness of someone's distress... The attention stays on the other person, full attention out to the other person, and also into the brain associated with positive emotional distress and positive emotion," Prof Hassed added.

He noted that even during the state of distress, it is possible to consciously choose which step to take (empathic distress or compassion), if the individual is "mindful and aware enough".

Prof Hassed believes that developing mindfulness, cultivating compassion, and learning to prevent empathic distress, are vital skills that HCPs require. These skills will help them navigate and "dissociate" with the distress that they may be experiencing on a daily basis in complex clinical environments.

MINDFUL OR MIND-FULL?

However, Prof Hassed also shared that the many misconceptions about mindfulness may inhibit individuals from beginning their self-care journey.

Some of the more prominent remarks that he received during a 10 to 15 minute mindfulness meditation practice he conducted include:

"I feel like I couldn't relax at all, I just want to get out of the chair to do things..."

"I'm sitting here wasting my time, or I don't want to practice mindfulness because that's just a relaxation exercise, and I can't afford to relax as I've got too much to do."

Feeling more relaxed or calm are "side effects" of mindfulness practice, not the main purpose of it, Prof Hassed noted.

"Mindfulness is an exercise in awareness."

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

It is like a workout for the brain's attention circuits, described Prof Hassed. It is about tuning in to the 'now', paying attention to the present moment, and noticing that. "It is about re-engaging with life," he said.

When the attention drifts or the mind is distracted, there is a disengagement with the task or activity that is happening in the present moment. Prof Hassed described it as the brain going into "default mode". Worry, rumination, negative self-talk, are some of the different forms of "default modes", that if left running on its own unchecked, may become detrimental to one's mental health, he cautioned.

Mindfulness makes the individual more aware of things, brings to attention things that he/she might not have noticed previously, and the things that might "impair our decision making in the moment", said Prof Hassed.

Mindfulness can be broadly practised in two ways: formal and informal.

Formal mindfulness practice can be defined as meditative practice such as sitting down and doing mindfulness meditation.

Whereas informal mindfulness practice can be described as being in a mindful, aware, and present state when doing daily tasks – outside of meditation. For example, driving – when you focus your attention on the road, or seeing a patient - when you are actively listening to the patient, etc.

Prof Hassed shared that research have shown that when individuals mindfully switch off the "default mode" on a regular basis – i.e. consciously bringing attention back whenever the mind wanders off, the area of the brain associated with self-monitoring and cognitive controls switch on much quicker, and allows the mindful practitioner to be more responsive, aware, and chooses what he/she wants to give his/her attention to.

"I'm noticing how much more often, and quickly, when my mind wanders off when I am studying," Prof Hassed quoted a medical student who underwent his six-week mindfulness curriculum.

The student added that, "I never realised how much my mind was out the window. Now I'm finding it easy to bring my attention back to what I'm doing. I'm feeling less anxious, but I'm also getting a lot more work done."

BEING REALISTIC IN MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Prof Hassed emphasised that when embarking on mindfulness practice, it is normal for practitioners to feel emotions, such as anxiety, anger, frustration, or even fear.

"It is not like we're doing something wrong, we are humans," he said.

But to be aware that these emotions can still arise, and not be pulled into suppressing them, fighting them or hating them, Prof Hassed explained.

"It is the ability to take a step or two back from them, rather than trying to control them... (and to) not be so controlled by them."



Prof Craig Hassed joined by guest of honour, Prof Kenneth Mak, MOH Director-General of Health (third from left), and the event organisers



Residency Leadership Talk Part 1: Finding Your Niche While Climbing The Mountain



Adj Prof Lee Bee Wah (second row, middle), flanked by fellow guest speakers, A/Prof Yong Keng Kwang (left) and Emeritus Prof Rajendran Kanagasuntheram

Thirty-nine Chief Residents (CR) were inducted into their new leadership role during the National Healthcare Group (NHG) Residency Chief Resident Induction Programme, held in July 2023. These young new leaders nominated by their peers and juniors, will represent them as their voice (to the faculty, department and organisation), and will also oversee resident welfare, facilitate teaching activities, on top of their own training and clinical duties. Three distinguished speakers – Adjunct Professor Lee Bee Wah, Emeritus Professor Rajendran Kanagasuntheram, and Associate Professor Yong Keng Kwang – were invited to share their leadership experiences and perspectives with these budding young leaders as they kick-start their leadership journeys.

In the first of a three-part series, guest speaker, Adjunct Professor Lee Bee Wah (from The Child and Allergy Clinic, Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre) shared with our CRs, her perspective working in private practice, why they should build their careers in the public sector, and her thoughts on work-life balance as young leaders.

PRIVATE OR PUBLIC CLINICAL PRACTICE?

While the common perception of private clinical practice may be synonymous with viewing healthcare as a business, monetary-driven, etc., Prof Lee shared that there are also positives such as a flatter hierarchy, and a more close-knit relationship between peers and patients.

"There is really a different perspective that you will experience, unless you try private practice," she said.

"But I don't encourage you to go to private practice tomorrow," she quipped, to laughter in the room.

Prof Lee urged the CRs to remain in the public sector in their current juncture of their careers, due to the myriad of things that they can learn, avenues to explore, and for them to discover and build that "niche" (talent or interest in specific areas) where they are good at.

"You will discover what you want to do, while in the public sector," she said. "(And) you will only learn about it after you practise (for a while) and experience, although sometimes in the beginning you might say I do not want to do it at all... your perspective changes."

BUILDING ONE'S CAREER

Prof Lee likened building one's career to scaling a mountain. "It's challenging and tiring, sometimes you wonder why and if you should continue to climb," she said.

"But it's rewarding, when you progress to a higher level in your career, you are able to see more, and pay it back (or forward)".

As a young clinician, "you are like a sponge, you absorb everything" from those who published, your patients, and seniors, said Prof Lee.

"(But) I think you learn most from a patient, and certain patients remind you (about what you learn from him/her) decades later... they not only taught you clinical diagnosis, but they taught you the perspective of life."

"That's why you want to build your career (in the public sector)... learn from all the experiences of your colleagues around you, and build that niche you think you are good at," she added.

CAREER CROSSROADS

All residents and CRs will find themselves at the crossroads at a certain juncture of their medical careers. This is so especially at the point when they graduate from residency, where "that part of their careers and specialties are probably set in stone" and would "unlikely switch (specialty) tracks", said Prof Lee.

"Do I stay here? Do I want to have an academic career? Do I want to venture into administration?", she said, elaborating that this is the point where one needs to decide how and where they would like to take their careers next.

"Sometimes it's an opportunity that comes along

during that time. Sometimes it is something you really feel that you are good at," she adds, sharing that the opportunity to join National University of Singapore (NUS) Paediatrics came when she was at her crossroads.

"(Even though) it was a difficult route, I feel like I have developed a niche there," said Prof Lee.

"(So) If you have found your calling, then you need to pursue it. That's what I felt for myself."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

On the topic of work-life balance, Prof Lee laughingly acknowledged that she came from a different generation, with a different perspective on work and life.

"I belong to the generation that work came first, and then you try to fit in your life," she shared. "But I think now at least the plan is that I need to plan for my life too."

Prof Lee feels that as young leaders, the CRs would be "quite career minded". However, needing to balance residency training, clinical work, family commitments, and new leadership roles can be challenging.

"I feel that you need to make some sacrifices... you only have this amount of time, and you try to work very hard, and try to enjoy very much of your life too," she said.

"(But) You've got no time to do everything... so which way you want to live your career and life is something you need to decide."

"Sometimes you wish you could have been there (for your children and loved ones), but you need to focus on your career... It's a dilemma."

Looking back, Prof Lee shared that she made some sacrifices (personal time and family time) in the earlier part of her career such as travelling overseas for work, focusing on her research, building her career, etc.

"We did not have social media and camera calls, but you do have the advantage of that these days," she said.

Prof Lee urged the CRs to remember that "it takes a whole team to build your career".

"You need a lot of support", she said, elaborating that those who are able to tap on family and close relative(s) support tend to be more willing to sacrifice their personal and family time, and "go a bit more" for their careers.



Adj Prof Lee Bee Wah

Communication in Healthcare: Voices and Perspectives

by Mr Shaik Muhammad Amin



Moderator Dr Paul Victor Patinadan (left) in a photo opportunity with the panelists

The Communication in Healthcare: Voices and Perspective track at the 2023 Singapore Health and Biomedical Congress hosted a diverse panel of experts from healthcare, education, academia, and drama, who came together to discuss one of the key drivers of success in today's healthcare: communication.

DEFINING "EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION"

The session kickstarted with a discussion on "Effective Communication", a key concept in healthcare. Ms Thurga Rajendran, Lecturer (Nursing Education), Ngee Ann Polytechnic, defined this type of communication as a two-way conversation that requires healthcare professionals (HCP) to provide patients with accurate information, and helping patients understand that information.

Mr Rethinavel Shanmugam, Lecturer (Visual and Performing Arts), National Institute of Education, added that effective communication depends on not just the provision of information, but how the information is provided. He touched on the role of non-verbal communication patterns and related that a conversation can only be deemed effective when both verbal and non-verbal components of a dialogue are processed by the recipient.

Assistant Professor Michelle Chiang, Lecturer (English and Medical Humanities), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), elaborated on how communication can only be effective when it is seen as a process of exchange and interpretation. She explained that too often, we (as individuals) do not leave enough time and space for interpretation and exchange, resulting in one party walking away feeling unsatisfied because they feel that their views are not heard.

Associate Professor Andy Ho, Head of Psychology at NTU, added that aside from having an emotional component and an exchange to convey information, effective communication needs to have a common ground between the parties involved.

While HCPs may define effective communication (with patients) as having patients comply with treatment recommendations, patients may consider communication to be effective when HCPs demonstrate an understanding of who they are as people and not just their conditions, A/Prof Ho said.

As a practicing physician, Dr Celestine Lim, Associate Consultant (Department of Geriatric Medicine), Tan Tock Seng Hospital, shared that the word "effective" does provide her with an element of stress as it suggests that there is an agenda that needs to be met, for example, at the end of a conversation with a patient or caregiver. Thus, she proposed adopting a "Person-centred communication" as a way of understanding the values,

beliefs and preferences of patients and their families. Dr Lim explained that this form of communication does not force them (doctors) to think about the end goal but to acknowledge the patient as a person, and not a disease to be treated.

Ms Thurga proposed "Integrated and Holistic Communication". This form of communication seeks to encompass and support interprofessional collaborative communications between HCPs. She mentioned that this definition will allow multidisciplinary teams to work together and not separately, fostering camaraderie amongst HCPs.

Dr Chiang proposed "Relational Communication" which she defined as an approach to capture the essence of communication: where there is a mutual exchange between the parties involved.



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Having compassion is the ability for healthcare professionals to... see the world through the patients' eyes and understanding what they are going through such as their fears, concerns, and worries.”

- A/PROF ANDY HO

COMPASSION AND DEEP LISTENING

A/Prof Ho highlighted a common underlying trait that he noticed across all the proposed communication approaches - compassion. He explained that having compassion is the ability for HCPs to be able to place the patient in the centre of the treatment, instead of seeing themselves as saviours to patients with the disease. This entails seeing the world through the patients' eyes and understanding what they are going through such as their fears, concerns, and worries.

With a compassionate approach, HCPs can better engage with patients in a way where they feel affirmed, said A/Prof Ho. Practicing "Compassionate Communication" allows HCPs to meet their goals by simply paying attention to patients, making them feel respected, and empowering them towards a collaborative patient-HCP partnership.



A/Prof Andy Ho looks on as Mr Rethinavel Shanmugam shared the concept of deep listening

Mr Shanmugam shared the need for communication approaches to incorporate deep listening. Deep listening is a concept in drama studies where one listens without rushing to an end goal. As a family caregiver, he finds this to be lacking when he accompanies his ageing mother to her medical appointments. Although he finds the delivery of medical diagnosis and conditions to be accurate, he does not find the doctor-patient experience to be relational. He acknowledges that relational (in-depth) communication requires time, and it may not be possible due to the high volume of patients.

Dr Lim concurred that time at the clinics is limited. She shared that even though she wants to take the time to listen to her patients and better understand them, she is also cognisant of the many patients waiting to consult her. Dr Lim feels that it is about striking that balance in making patients feel heard, and allocating enough time and energy to other patients.

Dr Chiang, however, argued that time alone should not be a barrier for deep listening. She cited her recent experience with her general practitioner for a bacterial respiratory tract infection, as a brief yet "comforting" consult.

"I shared how I had been coughing and feeling terrible because I only had 3 hours of sleep, all he (the doctor) did was look into my eyes and say, 'Aw... man...!' And that was all it took for me to feel good and heard," said Dr Chiang. "It is about how and what was said."

Echoing Dr Chiang, A/Prof Ho argued that time is a matter of perspective. He explained that the one thing that allows compassion to shine is for individuals to be fully mindful, aware, and present, which does not take a lot of time.

Mr Shanmugam proposed that perhaps deep listening can be communicated through performativity - in the way healthcare professionals sit, act, and present themselves. He elaborated on the idea of adjusting one's physical projection to the situation, and to be mindfully present. Acknowledging that the process will require significant emotional investment from HCPs, Mr Shanmugam shared that it may present an even greater burden on the HCPs, resulting in them feeling burnt out and frustrated.

Sharing the same sentiment, A/Prof Ho said that the demands placed on the healthcare profession can often result in individuals feeling stretched in many different directions. However, he explained that compassion can simply be for the HCP to take notice - of the suffering that is happening. And once they do, there will be this innate pro-social motivation to alleviate suffering.

A/Prof Ho added that this practice will allow HCPs to reconnect with the purpose of their profession, and develop a deeper understanding of their profession, which is to help people (patients) get better.

BEING HUMBLE AND RESPECTING DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS

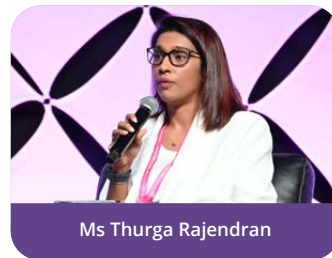
Dr Chiang offered the perspective of Cultural Humility - the humility to acknowledge that one does not know everything - as a way of communicating compassion in the healthcare profession. She added that the cultivation of Cultural Humility could be a precursor towards Cultural Competence - the skill to interact and engage with people from other cultures.



Dr Michelle Chiang

A/Prof Ho shared that the idea of humility requires HCPs to acknowledge that while they may be experts in the technical aspects of healthcare, they may not be experts in life (or life coaches). An important stance in communication would then be to have the humility to say "I don't know what you're going through. Tell me what you're going through, so that I can work with you to come up with the best plan for your care", he said.

Dr Chiang argues that cultural humility also applies to interprofessional interactions and intraprofessional interactions. She elaborated on the implications of hierarchical relationships within healthcare teams such as the power dynamics at work between junior and senior doctors, and how this influences effective communication within the teams. In her research with HCPs, she found that ineffective communication usually occurs when there is a misalignment of expectations. She also found that junior doctors or even nurses inevitably defer to the decisions made by senior superiors - usually senior doctors.



Ms Thurga Rajendran

Ms Thurga shared that in the presence of these power differentials, it becomes difficult for nurses to express their opinions. She added that because nurses are with their patients 24/7, they are in a unique position to provide vital information important to the treatment and care of patients. Ms Thurga suggested affirming

communicative practices that will allow nurses to build the confidence in expressing their opinions, suggestions and concerns.

Dr Lim concurred with Ms Thurga that the voices of other members in the multidisciplinary team are equally important in the care of the patient. She added that the doctors' perspectives are often focused on medical issues of the patient, and what is best for the patient cannot be decided by doctors alone.

A/Prof Ho added that this cultural limitation is widely present in the biomedical model of care, and a shift is required to recognise the experts in different areas of care for the patient. And it is equally important to align and respect the various voices, each representing a different area of expertise, in working together for patient-centred care.

The Season of Appreciation

Yishun Health Teachers' Appreciation Day 2023: Laying the Building Blocks for Better Education



Prof Yip Chee Chew, Education Director, YH, giving his opening address

On 18 October 2023, 50 Yishun Health (YH) clinicians, hospital wards, and departments were honoured at the YH Teachers' Appreciation Day, themed 'Laying the Building Blocks for Better Education'.

Organised by the YH Education Development Office, the annual event recognises clinical educators (CE) across all the different health professions for their commitment and efforts in educating and training undergraduates, postgraduates, and their peers.

In his address, Professor Yip Chee Chew, Education Director (YH) expressed his gratitude to the CEs and clinical education leads (CEL) for their excellent work in educating the next generation of healthcare professionals, and thanked the clinical heads of departments for their strong support.

Reflecting on the many changes and challenges in an ever-evolving healthcare landscape, Prof Yip urged the CEs and CELs to embrace digital technology such as "AI (artificial intelligence), digital health, and medical innovations" that would enable their learners and future healthcare professionals to "function optimally in new healthcare models"; and to also consider how training programmes can be more cost-effectively redesigned, while not compromising on the quality of education.



[See the full list of awardees](#)



Awards were presented to clinical educators across the different health professions to recognise their contributions towards clinical education

NUSMedACE 2023: Takes a Community to Nurture a Doctor

NUS MEDICINE
APPRECIATION FOR
CLINICAL EDUCATORS 2023
at
National Healthcare Group (NHG) Cluster
Monday, 6 November 2023
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm



Awardees of the 2023 NUSMedACE

Sixty-two doctors and clinical departments from the National Healthcare Group (NHG) were recognised for their commitment, dedication and excellence in training and mentoring students from the National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUSMedicine) at this year's NUSMedicine Appreciation for Clinical Educators (NUSMedACE), on 6 November 2023.

Held in-person for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, the award ceremony at the Institute of Mental Health saw a record number of 11 clinical departments lauded for good performance and outstanding teaching efforts.

NUSMedicine Vice-Dean (Education), Professor Lau Tang Ching, who was present at the event, commended NHG for being "a real powerhouse for education".

"You can see how there are so many awards that have been won by so many people (in NHG). And this is a real testimony of how much commitment you (NHG) have to education," he said. "Not only to NUSMedicine... (but also) to all students from the different universities, certainly in the residency programmes and beyond."

"You can see how there are so many awards that have been won by so many people (in NHG)... a real powerhouse for education."

- PROF LAU TANG CHING

"It's really gratifying to see so many of you, both juniors and seniors winning awards... I'd like to applaud you all for that."

Echoing the same sentiment, NUSMedicine Dean, Professor Chong Yap Seng, expressed his appreciation to the awardees for choosing to be a part of the education community.

Referencing the saying that it takes a village to raise a child, Prof Chong highlighted the crucial roles that clinical educators, healthcare professionals, and administrators play in the training and nurturing of medical students outside of the medical school.

"The experience you have in real world healthcare settings is invaluable to the training of effective, empathetic doctors," he said, via a video message.

"On behalf of the school, I'd like to thank everyone and the education community for your commitment and dedication to bring out the best of our students every day."

NHG Cluster Education Director (Pre-Professional Education), Associate Professor Wong Teck Yee reminded the clinical educators about their duty to their patients and students in his address.

"You are role models for our students, guiding them with core professional values, allowing them to work with us as future colleagues. By training our students well, we can ensure that our students are ready to be professionals for tomorrow's healthcare," he said.

"And our patients will have the care that they deserve."



A/Prof Wong Teck Yee, Cluster Education Director (Pre-Professional Education), NHG giving his welcome address



NUSMedicine Vice-Dean (Education), Prof Lau Tang Ching, commended NHG for being a "real powerhouse in education"



See the full list of awardees

NTU LKCMedicine Special Recognition Awards 2023: Education Goes Beyond Medical Skills



Photo credit: NTU LKCMedicine

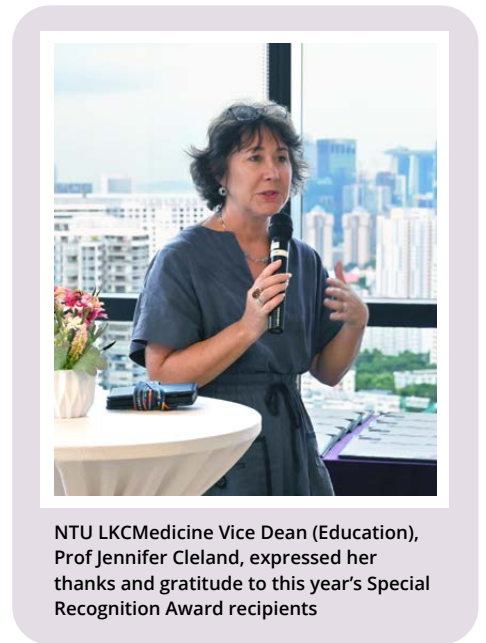
Eighteen NHG clinical educators and departments were recognised for their outstanding contributions to teaching, research supervision, and supporting Nanyang Technological University Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (NTU LKCMedicine) students' experience at the second NTU LKCMedicine Special Recognition Awards held on 22 November 2023.

In her opening address, Professor Jennifer Cleland, Vice Dean (Education), NTU LKCMedicine expressed her immense gratitude and appreciation to the award recipients. She said: "you inspire the students and teach them the technical and non-technical skills, you get them interested in following your footsteps, coming into your own specialties in the future, and you engage them in your hospitals and departments."

Prof Cleland highlighted that the role of educators goes beyond teaching students technical skills and taking patient history.

"We are teaching them (the students) to become doctors, so a lot of what you do is a 'hidden curriculum', the informal side of things, (and) they learn just by having you as mentors," she said.

"Thank you for supporting and nurturing our students, and helping them in their learning journey," said Associate Professor Koh Nien Yue, Assistant Dean (Year 3), NTU LKCMedicine, via a video message. "Thank you so much, and congratulations once again."



NTU LKCMedicine Vice Dean (Education), Prof Jennifer Cleland, expressed her thanks and gratitude to this year's Special Recognition Award recipients



[See the full list of awardees](#)

❄️ WISHING YOU A ❄️
Merry Christmas
filled with light,
peace and joy

