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23 September 2012

HPB HELPS CAREGIVERS OF THE ELDERLY CARE FOR THEMSELVES

To address the emotional and social stresses of caring for elderly loved ones with dementia, the Health Promotion Board is equipping caregivers with a set of self-help solutions.

Singapore, 23 September 2012: According to a focus group study by the Health Promotion Board (HPB), caregivers assuming responsibility for an elderly family member or friend with dementia often struggle with poor emotional health themselves.

2. Caregiver burnout may be due to a lack of respite from the care-giving routine, with the National Health Survey (NHS) 2010 indicating that about 20 per cent of caregivers spend more than 12 hours daily attending to persons with chronic medical conditions such as dementia. Three quarters of caregivers also have jobs.
3. Caregiver depression may set in if caregivers feel hopeless, isolated, resentful and angry at the perceived lack of support from other family members and friends, colleagues and the community.
4. To alleviate the social and emotional issues facing caregivers of persons with dementia, HPB's Dementia Public Education Plan this year focuses on helping caregivers enhance their own coping mechanisms and access available sources of support.
5. Themed 'Living Together', the campaign's launch at Toa Payoh Hub Atrium and Auditorium today aims to get Singaporeans thinking about what it means to 'live together' with dementia – from living with the condition to living with those suffering from the condition and giving support to caregivers living within one's community.

6. There are about 22,000 people with dementia in Singapore, and this number is expected to rise to 80,000 by 2030. At the same time, there are also about 220,000 family caregivers – 60 per cent of them between 40 and 59 years old, 50 per cent who are caring for their parents, and a number who can't afford to give up their full-time jobs, which means they have little time for rest or social activities.

7. Said Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Health: "With a rapidly ageing population, the number of people with dementia is expected to increase in tandem. It is therefore important that we ensure that those suffering from dementia can continue to live with dignity and grace in their own homes or communities, looked after by people who know and love them. It can be overwhelming looking after a dementia patient and I am glad that HPB's Dementia Public Education Plan this year focuses on providing caregivers with coping mechanisms and means to access sources of support."

8. Said Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer, HPB: "It is not enough to teach caregivers how to be good caregivers; we also need to ensure they have the proper rest and resources to deal with the physical strain and emotional stress that comes from the daily routine of caring for someone with dementia. To help caregivers care for themselves while caring for those they love, HPB has developed a set of self-care tools. These include a resource pack developed with clinicians, mental health professionals and experienced caregivers to ease beginner caregivers into their roles by providing practical tips and pointing them to sources of aid such as support groups, counselling, and caregiver workshops and training grants. In addition, HPB is also offering an e-learning course to help long-term caregivers manage their stress and strengthen their coping mechanisms."

9. In partnership with Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), a special roving home modification exhibit is constructed to teach caregivers how to improve home settings for dementia patients. TTSH will be giving guided tours around the house exhibit. At the same time, the public can also seek more information on dementia and tips on how to cope with the condition from TTSH's nurses and allied health professionals at the various educational and games booths at the event.

10. HPB is also collaborating with the National Arts Council (NAC) to develop and implement an innovative 'Arts for Mental Well-being' project for seniors. Deepening participation in the arts is part of the Council's efforts to provide a continuum for life-long arts engagement by different communities. The transformative power of the arts is also evident

from research that shows engaging in creative expression and social interaction results in better physical and mental health.

11. HPB aims to distribute 20,000 sets of the resource pack for beginner caregivers to grassroots community partners, hospitals and clinics by 2013. It is also targeting to reach all 87 constituencies through the Arts for Mental Well-being initiative by 2015.

12. As part of the launch of HPB's Dementia Public Education Plan, about 80 seniors will compete in the final round of Singapore's first National Rummy-O Competition, after five qualifying rounds conducted earlier this month. A table game that requires focus, memory skills and reasoning, Rummy-O has become a favourite pastime of local seniors since it was introduced at HPB's Mental First Aid Programme last September.

Issued by Health Promotion Board