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20,000 SINGAPORE RESIDENTS ARE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

The Health Promotion Board launches Mental First Aid Kit to help reduce risk of dementia

Today, 20,000 Singapore residents aged 60 and above are living with dementia in Singapore. This number is projected to increase to about 53,000 by 2020. In response to these worrying figures, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) is launching its Mental First Aid Kit to encourage seniors to take the first step in reducing their risk of dementia. The Mental First Aid Kit will also include information on the warning signs of dementia to help seniors and caregivers detect dementia early for better management.

2 Marine Parade residents will be the first to benefit from the programme. The constituency was chosen for its greying population, with one in five residents aged 65 and above. The Mental First Aid Kit is in response to the recently completed first phase of a five-year pilot study on the needs of the elderly residing in Marine Parade, which showed that 7.8 per cent of residents there are at risk of dementia, higher than the current national average of 5.2 per cent.

3 “Dementia is a silent disease that sees the gradual loss of memory, intellectual capacity and self control. It is a debilitating illness that changes the life of the elderly. As the symptoms worsen, the condition also impacts his family, causing a ripple effect on the community and the nation. But the strain is not just emotional; it is also financial. People may have to leave the workforce to become fulltime caregivers or send their loved ones for special care,” said Mr Ang Hak Seng, CEO, HPB.

4 Thirty-nine year old Ms Koh Siew Hong, caregiver to her late father, shared, “We realised, much later, that my late father had dementia when his behaviour changed. He was a completely different person. He became suspicious and started to forget how to do simple things like answering phone calls. As the disease progressed, he became more difficult to

manage. He started to urinate all around the house. It was a heartbreaking sight. I eventually had to leave my job to take care of him fulltime. Looking back, it would have helped if I knew the warning signs of dementia beforehand.”

5 “To be launched in November 2011, the Mental First Aid Kit, developed for seniors 50 years and above, is a mental wellbeing programme that comprises a series of workshops and activities, with a module on cognitive skills training. The Mental First Aid Kit is a structured, modular programme, conducted over 12 weeks. The programme includes socially engaging, mentally stimulating and fun activities using art, drama and games, as well as cognitive skills training sessions which include learning, speed of processing, memory and reasoning,” explained Mr Ang.

6 “Studies have shown that brain function starts to decline with age but dementia is not a normal part of ageing. This is where the Mental First Aid Kit comes in. For instance, during drama and role-play sessions, seniors are required to create a storyline and put up a group skit. This will boost their memory and enhance their social connectedness as well as provide fun and entertainment,” Mr Ang elaborated.

7 During the cognitive skills training sessions, seniors will be taught simple steps to sharpen their memory. One method is through association with items that are meaningful to them. For example, to help seniors remember to take their medication after mealtimes, a simple yet effective method is to coach them to repeat this Chinese idiom: “吃 (chī), 喝 (hē), 丸 (玩) (wán), 乐 (lè)”, which means, ‘Eat’, ‘Drink,’ ‘Medicine/Pills (play)’, ‘Happy’. (Please refer to Annex – Mental First Aid Kit Programme).

8 Mr Ang added, “An important component of the Mental First Aid Kit, is our Senior Health Ambassadors, who will be playing an active role in guiding their peers in leading a healthy lifestyle, physically and mentally. Having seniors engage with their peers is crucial as they are more likely to be persuaded through peer influence and word-of-mouth. These Senior Health Ambassadors will play an active role in facilitating workshops such as finger-printing art and mentoring.”

Holistic Health and Community Partnership

9 To kick off the programme, HPB will be partnering the Marine Parade Family Service Centre and the Grassroots Organisations to target 2,500 seniors to sign up for the Mental First Aid Kit. Moving forward, HPB intends to expand the Mental First Aid Kit to improve the

overall mental health of about 6,000 residents above 60 residing there. HPB will set up a Healthy Lifestyle Corner at the Marine Parade Community Club as a one-stop hub for health related information or resources. Additionally, a healthy lifestyle programme for seniors which includes components of physical activity and nutrition will also be rolled out to complement the Mental First Aid Kit. Seniors will also be encouraged to join Health Qigong and Brisk Walking Interest Groups.

10 Following the introduction of the Mental First Aid Kit in Marine Parade, it will be rolled out to 87 other community locations in Singapore within three years.

Memory Walk 2011

11 This year, HPB has partnered the Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA) Singapore to organise the annual Memory Walk at East Coast Park. The Memory Walk is a key annual event to commemorate World Alzheimer's Day by Alzheimer's Associations across the globe, to raise awareness and literacy on early signs of dementia. Graced by the Minister for Health, Mr Gan Kim Yong, the 2 km Memory Walk will include several pit-stops which highlight the warning signs of dementia. More than 4,000 participants have signed up for the walk in Singapore.

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MENTAL FIRST AID KIT PROGRAMME

- I. Objectives:
 - Build cognitive reserves with mental stimulation
 - Inoculate against depression and dementia
 - Reduce risk of dementia through a healthy lifestyle
 - Detect illness early and encourage help-seeking behaviour

2. This will be a 10 session programme (which can be conducted over 10 to 12 weeks) comprising 2 modules:

MODULE 1

Psycho-social education

- 3 workshops and 2 mental stimulation game sessions

- Comprises 3 interactive workshops building on the five domains of the mental wellbeing scale (Self Esteem, Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, Resilience and Cognitive Efficacy). These workshops are HPB's ongoing Nurture Your Mind (NYM) programme

- Focus on the protective factors derived from the mental wellbeing domains to build resistance to stress and mental illnesses such as depression and dementia

- Interactive workshops/sessions including fingerprint art, role plays, group activities and discussions, videos and lectures

- Knowledge of Depression and Dementia – signs and symptoms; triggers and healthy lifestyle tips to reduce risk; early detection

- Mind-stimulating games (A-Million board game, Rummy-O, Find Your Buddy) which encourage social interaction and bonding

MODULE 2

Cognitive Skills Training

- 6 cognitive skills training sessions conducted twice weekly

- Structure of training programme:
 - Understanding ageing and the brain
 - 3 cognitive skill sets (2 sessions each)
 - **Memory**
 - **Speed of Processing and**
 - **Reasoning**
 - Demonstration and teaching of skills
 - Learning is incorporated into all sessions i.e. learning new skills and techniques to boost their cognitive functioning
 - Transferability to everyday life (How to use these skills in daily activities/routine)
 - Homework and review

Memory	<p>Techniques taught and demonstrated to help seniors remember better and reduce the frustration experienced in forgetfulness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Making items meaningful to you to help you to remember▪ By Association and Mnemonics	<p>Help seniors remember to carry out routine but important tasks such as taking daily medication or remembering where they have kept their personal items</p>
Reasoning	<p>This impacts ability to plan and make decisions, hence affecting a senior's ability to live independently.</p> <p>Techniques demonstrated will help them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ See relationships among items i.e. similar versus different categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Locating items in the supermarket by category e.g. Coffee, tea, Milo found in the aisle for Beverages;▪ Understanding transport timetables and planning a

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sequence items by time, order, cost. ▪ Some simple mental arithmetic 	<p>trip with transfers between MRT and bus services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Calculating money – mental sums when making purchases
Speed of Processing	<p>This is the ability to process increasingly complex information in a briefer period of time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The longer a person takes to complete the task, the more difficult it becomes for him to carry out the actions of daily life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Picking out exact change from a group of coins when buying things (in a crowded and urgent situation) ▪ Finding items on a crowded shelf easily and quickly