



NUS-IMH Public Forum on Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder 2019

According to the Singapore Mental Health Study 2016, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is one of the top three mental disorders in Singapore. With one in 28 people suffering from OCD in their lifetime (up from 1 in 33 in 2010), average treatment delays of 11 years (up from 9 years in 2010), and the majority of sufferers not receiving appropriate help, more awareness of the disorder is needed to better support and facilitate recovery for these individuals in our community.

With this objective in mind, the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and NUS Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), jointly organized the "Public Forum on OCD" on 23 February 2019 at Town Plaza's Utown Auditorium 1. More than 650 participants, including members from the public, mental health professionals, and NUS students and staff attended the event. The panel of speakers consisted of Clinical Psychologists and Psychiatrists with extensive expertise in treating OCD, as well as people with lived experience of OCD and caregivers.



Dr Oliver Sündermann giving a presentation on OCD and its prevalence in Singapore

The forum commenced with an introductory presentation by Dr Oliver Sündermann, Clinical Psychologist and Manager of the Clinical and Health Psychology Centre (CHPC), NUS Department of Psychology. His talk demystified OCD and addressed common misconceptions of the disorder; e.g. the term 'OCD' should not be used casually to refer to being neat and tidy. He also highlighted the worrying trend in Singapore of treatment delay, with individuals often battling OCD on their own in silence for many years before they seek professional treatment. Following the introduction, the Consultant Psychiatrists and Clinical Psychologists from IMH shared their expertise on the pharmacological and psychological treatment of OCD in young people and adults. The services and support networks available for clients and caregivers in Singapore were also being covered.

The second half of the forum was lined up with personal sharings by caregivers of individuals with OCD as well as patients-in-recovery. Their sharings encompassed themes of hope, resilience and perseverance for recovery in spite of their struggles with OCD. Also featured prominently in these personal narratives were the important roles of family and professional support. Families are often the ones who detect initial warning signs and refer individuals for professional help. Hence, they play a crucial role in the individuals' recovery process by supporting them in treatment and providing emotional support. Professionals such as psychiatrists and clinical psychologists help to ensure that individuals receive the best care tailored to their needs and condition severity. One of the patient-in-recovery speakers shared about how her supportive therapeutic relationship with her psychologist greatly facilitated her recovery.



Panel Discussion with Representatives from the Institute of Mental Health (IMH)

The forum concluded with a panel discussion, where the speakers addressed questions posed by the audience. Some of these questions included concerns about the harmful side effects of medication, how seeking treatment may adversely impact one's future prospects as well as the role of religion in the treatment of OCD. The speakers generously shared their views and knowledge and unanimously sent an important message to all, that is "Never lose hope. Recovery (from OCD) is definitely possible".

The Public Forum on OCD was jointly organized by IMH and NUS. We are grateful for generous funding from the NUS Department of Psychology, and for support from Clarity Singapore.

The **Clinical and Health Psychology Centre (CHPC)** is affiliated with the **Department of Psychology at the National University of Singapore (NUS)** and located on the NUS Kent Ridge campus. The CHPC is the training clinic for the NUS Master of Clinical Psychology programme, and is staffed by postgraduate clinical psychology interns who are under the supervision of doctoral-level clinical psychologists. The CHPC provides an array of specialised psychology services to the public, including specialized assessment and treatment for OCD as well as related disorders such as Body Dysmorphic Disorder. For an overview of CHPC see: [Clinical and Health Psychology Centre Website](#)