

Caregivers taught to manage mental, emotional stress

Madam Malar Singh used to get stressed and frustrated while caring for her 87-year-old mother-in-law, who suffers from dementia, has problems walking and needed to be cared for round the clock.

But she says things are different now, after attending a mindfulness course at the Brahm Centre at the Ren Ci Community Hospital.

She was taught meditation techniques, which helped her focus on positive thoughts and understand her emotions better.

The 61-year-old housewife said: "I realised I should not be getting so worked up over my mother-in-law. What was the point? I had to let my anger go."

Ren Ci and the Brahm Centre, a non-profit centre to educate people on healthy and happy living, yesterday launched a programme focused on helping caregivers like Madam Malar manage their stress.

Under the Mindful Caregiver programme, caregivers such as family members and domestic helpers can attend weekly workshops at Brahm Centre on mindfulness – a secular practice that has roots in ancient Buddhist meditation.

NOT MENTALLY PREPARED

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DR AMY KHOR, Senior Minister of State for Health and Environment and Water Resources.

The centre will also hold twice-weekly workshops for patients at Ren Ci's hospital wards to toughen their mental states and help them accept their conditions.

The programme also offers befriending services and support groups to caregivers and patients after the latter have been discharged.

Singapore faces an ageing population. Last year, there were 4.9 working-age citizens supporting each senior aged 65 and above. By 2030, this ratio will go down to 2.1.

"Increasingly, more people will be involved in the caregiving process for their loved ones. However, many are not mentally prepared to take on this role," Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for Health and Environment and Water Resources, said at the launch of the programme at Ren Ci yesterday.

Previously, the hospital taught caregivers only the physical and practical aspects of how to care for patients after they are discharged, such as how to transfer the patient and give medication, said clinical director of Ren Ci Lee Liang Tee.

"We have not looked into the psychological and emotional aspect of the caregiver," he said. Brahm Centre's idea of mindfulness caregiving "was the missing piece in the caregiving training", he added.

Ren Ci will refer caregivers to the centre under the programme, which is also open to the public. Over 400 participants have signed up. Four 1½-hour sessions cost \$65.

The programme is largely funded by the Tote Board, with private sector support from the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, the Wan Family and Lee Foundation.

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