

Pilot scheme to check on caregivers' emotional well-being

TTSH programme will identify those at high risk, teach skills to deal with stress, burden of role

Rosalind Ang

Madam Janet Ong, a 78-year-old housewife, spent five years caring for her husband after he was stricken by dementia.

"My late husband got lost quite a few times while he was out - I often worried about where he was and sometimes I cried at night out of stress. But I didn't ask people to help me," she said.

The burden on caregivers can affect their well-being, with the risk of depression quite high.

They will soon get more help on coping with their role emotionally.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) will be rolling out a screening tool that will assess caregiver mastery - how in control the caregiver feels of his life situation - and other variables to identify those at risk of poor health outcomes.

It will also introduce two training courses that will teach caregivers practical skills such as problem solving and communication, as well as guide them on processing emotional responses and give them a greater sense of capability.

The training courses are based on programmes by Canada's Sinai Health System, and will be localised and delivered by TTSH staff and community partners.

From 2015 to 2017, 274 pairs of family caregivers and elderly patients were surveyed, and it was found that about one in three family caregivers was at risk of depression, with high anxiety and a poor quality of life.

This is the first programme to focus on the caregiver's emotional well-being. The screening tool is also the first to take caregiver mastery into consideration.

During hospitalisation of their loved ones, caregivers will be screened as part of the patients' discharge planning, so that high-risk caregivers can be identified and have their needs assessed.

The screening takes five to eight minutes to complete and categorises caregivers into low, intermediate and high risk.

Depending on their needs and risk levels, caregivers will be referred to training programmes, where they will be trained on resourcefulness and how to solve problems instead of reacting emotionally to them.

The pilot programme will start by the end of this year in a hospital setting, with around 300 to 500 caregivers to be assessed. All are looking after dementia patients.

The final cost and details of the programme are still being worked out, but participants in the pilot will incur no cost. TTSH is looking to work together with community partners to execute the initiative.

"With the increasingly ageing population in Singapore, we hope to boost the mastery levels of caregivers, so that they are able to continue providing sustained care for their loved ones in the long run without succumbing to ill health themselves," said Dr Chan Ee Yuae, assistant director of nursing at TTSH.

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1 in 3

Ratio of family caregivers at risk of depression, with high anxiety and a poor quality of life, in a 2015-2017 survey of 274 pairs of family caregivers and elderly patients.

History of labour movement on display

The ReUnion exhibition at the Glass Atrium of the National Museum of Singapore runs until Nov 10. Admission is free.

The exhibition, presented by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), covers the history of the labour movement from the 1940s onwards and commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Trade Union Seminar on "Modernisation of the Labour Movement".

Here are some of the artefacts on display at the exhibition, which was opened by President Halimah Yacob yesterday.



From left: NTUC secretary-general Ng Chee Meng, former union leader and former NTUC vice-president Tan Soon Yam, Singapore National Employers Federation president Robert Yap (behind Ms Mary Liew), NTUC president Mary Liew, President Halimah Yacob, NTUC deputy secretary-general Koh Poh Koon (who is also Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry), and Mr Kevin Tan, content curator for the ReUnion exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore. ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN



A pair of watches that belonged to founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew and Mrs Lee, who were presented with them by the Singapore Union of Postal and Telecommunications Workers. Mr Lee had successfully represented the union in an arbitration case over a wage dispute in 1953, resulting in nearly 1,000 clerks receiving 28 months' back pay. He had started representing a large number of unions from 1952 for a nominal fee. The watches had been in separate collections and are on display together for the first time.



Vintage badges from the various unions that existed in Singapore during the post-war years.



Left: Replicas of pamphlets about the modernisation seminar that NTUC published in February 1970.



Left below: NTUC FairPrice membership cards over the years. The first card bears the NTUC Welcome logo. That was the original name of the cooperative, set up in 1973. The idea to set up co-ops was conceived at the seminar.

• A digital exhibition can also be viewed at ms50.ntuc.org.sg



Retired union leader Tan Soon Yam believes unions are just as important today in protecting workers' rights and improving their lives as they were in the 1960s, when the labour situation was chaotic. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Unions had to find ways to help achieve Singapore's survival

Joanna Seow
Manpower Correspondent

As a young union leader in the late 1960s, the first concern for Mr Tan

Soon Yam was employment security for workers, and how to improve their working conditions and wages.

In those times, it could take six months to two years to get a new

job, he said. Many were laid off as a result of the pullout of the British armed forces after Singapore's independence.

The labour situation in the preceding years was also very chaotic,

with a lot of strikes, he said.

Mr Tan, 79, was then a storekeeper in the Malayan Refrigerating Company and the general secretary of the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers Union, a position he held for nearly four decades until 2005.

He represented workers in hotels and food factories in negotiations with employers, and fought with other unions for the right to represent workers in various hotels.

He went into the National Trades Union Congress' modernisation seminar in 1969 hoping that it would set the tone to assure workers and improve the economy.

"The seminar was a start towards achieving Singapore's success and survival," he said.

"We had to find ways and means to harmonise the industrial scene."

At the seminar held from Nov 16 to Nov 19 at the Singapore Conference Hall, union leaders decided on a new approach for labour in Singapore - going from confrontation to cooperation at the workplace and setting up cooperatives to provide affordable essential goods and services for Singaporeans.

Now, 50 years later, Mr Ng believes unions are just as important in protecting workers' rights and improving their lives.

"If there are no trade unions, employers would be at liberty to hire and fire. Do you think conditions would be as good as they are now?"

He sees Singapore's tremendous progress as proof of the modernisation seminar's success.

"I feel relieved. I have done my responsibility, I'm part of the team that's done the job," he said.

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Fewer HDB resale flats sold in June; prices up 0.1%

Fewer Housing Board resale flats were sold last month compared with May, while prices inched up slightly.

Flash estimates from real estate portal SRX yesterday showed 1,895 HDB resale flats changed hands last month, an 8.7 per cent decrease from the 2,076 units in May.

The resale volume was also 4.8 per cent lower than the 1,991 units sold in the same month last year.

But resale prices increased by 0.1 per cent last month from the previous month. Prices of three-room, five-room and executive flats rose by 0.6 per cent, 0.3 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively.

But prices for four-roomers fell by 0.3 per cent.

In mature estates, the prices were up 0.4 per cent, while those in non-mature estates dipped 0.1 per cent compared with May.

Based on the SRX property price index, June's prices were down 0.8 per cent from the previous year, and 14.1 per cent lower than the peak in April 2013.

OrangeTee & Tie's head of research and consultancy Christine Sun noted that the resale volume drop was within expectations, as sales activities usually slow down during the school holidays.

She said sales volume is ex-

pected to remain robust in the coming months as more flats will be reaching the five-year minimum occupation period.

"We may also see some positive impact from the policy tweaks that allow some buyers to use more Central Provident Fund monies to buy older HDB flats," she said.

As for the 0.1 per cent increase in resale prices, Ms Sun said this was more likely a blip, and the year-on-year 0.8 per cent fall in prices would better reflect the broader price weakness observed on the ground.

The overall median transaction over X-value (TOX) was zero last month, an increase of \$1,000 from

the previous month.

The median TOX measures whether people are overpaying (positive TOX) or underpaying (negative TOX) relative to the SRX Property X-value estimated market value for flats.

Only four-room flats had a positive median TOX of \$1,000 last month. Three-room and executive flats saw a median TOX of negative \$3,000 and negative \$1,000 respectively, while that for five-room flats was zero.

Bishan saw the highest median TOX of \$18,000.

Ng Huiwen