

GPs step up to support those with mental health problems



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From excelling in a management position in a multinational corporation to bringing up two teenagers, Ms Lee has done it all.

But after clinching her hard-won successes, the high-flier found herself in a deep state of emotional and physical exhaustion amid a hectic work period in 2022.

Sleep and rest did not help.

"Everything started to feel heavy and I lost interest in things I used to love.

"I was like a functional wreck, still showing up, smiling and delivering results. But inside, I just constantly felt very disconnected and my mind was very foggy," said Ms Lee, who declined to use her full name, nor provide her age.

Overwhelmed, she decided to turn to family physician Lim Hong Shen at Bridgepoint Health, who had treated her and her family for minor illnesses over the years.

"I've developed that trust with him, and he was the first person who came to mind when I decided to seek help," said Ms Lee, adding that she had never thought of going

to a psychologist or counsellor because she was unfamiliar with mental health issues.

She was grateful that Adjunct Assistant Professor Lim took a slow and tactful approach in assessing her over a few consultations.

"He did not even mention a word about mental health, and I think that was helpful for me because the moment he did, I would have been taken aback," said Ms Lee.

It was only on her third visit that Prof Lim gently broached the topic and referred her to a private therapist to manage her anxiety symptoms.

He continued to stay in touch with Ms Lee through her therapy, even helping her find another therapist when she felt she could not click with the first.

In 2023, Ms Lee was discharged by Prof Lim after mastering coping strategies and feeling energised by a new zest for life.

Her experience inspired her to set up a women's help group in her company.

Her recovery would not have been possible without Prof Lim, she said.

"He didn't just send me to a therapist, he was there throughout the entire journey," said Ms Lee.

While the treatment of mental conditions has always been part of what general practitioners (GPs) can do, they are now being asked to play a greater role in the national effort to have patients diagnosed early and treated in the commun-



ity, rather than mainly in hospitals and specialist centres.

According to latest figures from the Ministry of Health (MOH),

more than 520 GPs had joined the Mental Health General Practitioner Partnership (MHGPP) as at December 2024. The initiative supports doctors in identifying, diagnosing and managing patients with mild to moderate mental health conditions.

GPs on the MHGPP programme, which began in 2012, benefit from access to lower-cost psychiatric medicine and support from hospital-based psychiatrist-led teams. About 450 joined in March 2024.

Prof Lim, who has been on the

programme since 2018, said the clinic's Everton Park branch sees about 30 patients a month who need help with mental health.

Most are regular patients of the clinic while others were previously seen at hospitals or by private specialists.

The patients come from different walks of life, from students facing school stress to young adults who have relationship or work struggles and elderly folks who face isolation.

Prof Lim believes that mental