

Humanising Mental Healthcare



THE unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic has brought mental health to the fore given the sudden and sporadic disruptions, changes, isolation, daily stressors and threats experienced by people of all ages, races and nations. Once a stigmatised subject, mental healthcare is now frequently talked about, with many seeking professional help. But with the inability to meet face to face, just how effective can therapy sessions be?

At Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC), counselling and psychology students are not only taught how to navigate this sensitive topic, but they also learn how to effectively connect and create impactful relations virtually.

For Low Chee Seong, programme leader of the Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) in Psychology run by TAR UC's Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (FSSH), psychology plays a vital role in safeguarding our mental health in periods of physical isolation as it improves our communications skills when interacting with others, managing stress experienced in our daily lives, maintaining healthy relationships and creating a better quality of life. He believes educators play a vital role in ensuring students are of sound mental state to deliver an effective teaching and learning process.

“One of the challenges educators face is ensuring students stay engaged during online learning sessions, as well as providing emotional assistance to those who need it. “Students could start becoming disengaged due to various external factors which may interrupt their cognitive processing, reduce cognitive functioning skills and disrupt emotional regulation. To bridge the virtual gap, we look out for verbal and non-verbal cues should they start exhibiting negative emotions such as stress and anxiety,” he said.

He added that various methods have been adopted to maintain a “human touch” during online teaching and therapy sessions. Aside from non-verbal cues and variation in voice and tone to ensure connectedness, various multimedia tools are used to retain attention and encourage discussions and responses to deepen the connection.

With the ambition of venturing into the field of industrial and organisational psychology, Lo Wei Chern’s interest in the field of psychology stems from observing human nature itself. Initially not knowing what field to continue his studies in, Lo applied for the Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) in Psychology programme for self-development. He is now passionate about how organisations and humans function, and how various factors can influence an organisation’s effectiveness. His goal is to be able to help people find fulfilment in their work. “Awareness of mental healthcare is steadily increasing, and I believe more people are starting to take care of their mental health,” he added.

For Chye Cheng Yi, not setting foot on campus due to online learning since the start of his programme has not been a problem. The second-year Diploma in Counselling student said his learning experience has been nothing short of fantastic and he looks forward to physical learning when the situation improves. “The initial stages of online learning were rocky but I adapted quickly. Furthermore, with open-book examinations it requires us to apply real-life examples and some answers can’t be found in books. “To simulate real-life counselling sessions, we are encouraged to turn on our webcams to maintain human connectedness during practical sessions. By doing so, we can compensate for the lack of human touch by maintaining eye contact when speaking to each other.

This made the learning experience just as effective as physical learning,” he added. He also said online counselling sessions can be just as effective as counsellors can identify relevant information to formulate suitable treatment.

The use of webcams enables counsellors to detect facial expressions and non-verbal cues. It is significant that virtual sessions allow people to speak their minds in the comfort of their own homes.

Agreeing that it is crucial that those in counselling and psychology take advantage of technology and adapt to new ways of communicating, Joyce Lum Ka Wei, a third-year Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) in Psychology student, said TAR UC’s undergraduate psychology syllabus emphasises gaining knowledge of psychological concepts and theories. With plans to pursue her postgraduate studies in counselling after graduation, Lum aspires to be a professional counsellor and lecturer. FSSH offers undergraduate and postgraduate counselling and psychology programmes under the Department of Social Science.

Applications for the June 2022 intake are open. Prospective students can apply online at www.tarc.edu.my. Attractive scholarships are also available based on academic merit along with sibling discounts for qualified students. For details on the social science and hospitality programmes offered by FSSH, visit www.tarc.edu.my/fssh/

