

Ensuring the wellness of your mind, body and soul

By HCA Hospice Care

Cheery sounds of vibrant chatter filled the HCA Auditorium as the staff of HCA Hospice Care promptly took to their seats. A sense of anticipatory calm presiding over the auditorium as the audiences eagerly awaited for the morning proceedings to begin.

Mr. Andy Ho Hau Yan, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Nanyang Technological University introduced the topic of **Mindful Compassion Art Therapy** (MCAT) to the audiences. To date, it has reached more than 60 palliative care professionals.

"It is important to be present and feel for the patients, but it's also important to let go and take good care of ourselves," says a participant of the MCAT session. There is a need to recuperate, relieve the stress and emotions from the work that the staff of HCA Hospice Care are usually involve in.

What is Mindful Compassion Art Therapy (MCAT)?

MCAT targets hospice-based palliative care professionals along with terminally ill patients and their caregivers or families. It is a therapy that helps to reduce stress and burnout, promotes holistic wellness, builds internal resilience, and cultivates sustained compassion. It combines the practice of mindfulness and art therapy, which allows individuals to understand themselves better and get in touch with their inner emotions. It enables people to confront their sense of loss and grief and heal from their experiences by both offering and receiving support from others. Ultimately, it encourages people to find greater meaning and new perspectives for growth and transformation within their lives.

"Upon experiencing firsthand the immense stress and pressure Singaporean palliative care professionals go through on a daily basis and seeing that there is no formal and available means for self-care and support, I decided to embark on the MCAT project," says Professor Andy.

As the participants complete and pen down their thoughts regarding their respective art pieces, they are transported into a peaceful and calm state.

This process of creating art gives them personal time to focus on the present moment without fear of judgment and frees from debilitating thoughts that trouble them endlessly on a daily basis. It enables them to heal, find peace, attain new perspectives, and build inner strengths and resilience within the contentment of stillness. After a few introductory exercises, the staff found it easy to practice mindfulness with ease.

Professor Andy believes that the integration of mindful practices and art-therapy has immense potential to create a platform for self-care and support which could help cultivate sustained resilience, compassion and growth among those involved in the field of hospice and palliative care. Time and again, it has been proven that creativity and self-expression through art is the most natural and direct means of communication. Through the session, many staff of HCA Hospice Care found their hidden interest in art and realised they could express themselves through this medium.

Each of the staff present took turns to share their thoughts and feelings through the strokes and colours used in their artwork. At times, they were able to identify with colleagues who created similar images and paintings. They were also able to gain different perspectives from each another's creations.

"The process of creating art brings about feelings of relief and allows us with opportunities to reflect and gain a deeper understanding of each other. Most of all, it feels good to create art that is free from judgment," says a participant.

"The practice of mindfulness does not require an expensive gym membership. It only requires us to be present in the here, in the now, at this present moment." reiterates Professor Andy. "The creation of art is the purest form of communication and it enables us to explore and express our deepest thoughts and emotions".

As the session came to a close, a regained sense of joy and achievement fills the air as the audiences slowly make their way back to work. With such therapy and support networks made available, there is an assurance that we can minimise the issue of burnout and establish a healthy work environment for those engaged in the hospice and palliative industries. ♥



HCA Hospice Care staff from both clinical and non-clinical departments enjoying Art Therapy during the MCAT session.



To find out more, please feel free to contact Dr Andy Ho at NTU and look out for MCAT talks and brief workshops around your areas! Visit www.hca.org.sg or Like HCA Hospice Care on Facebook to find out more about our daily happenings! You may contact Serene Deng @ 6891 9539 for more information about HCA Hospice Care.