

BE A MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS ADVOCATE #MYMHEC2019

WOMEN ENGINEERS SECTION

reported by



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It was an honour for Women Engineers Section to be invited to support Malaysia’s 1st Mental Health Experiential Conference (#MYMHEC2019) on June 18-20, organised by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with Emerging Journey Asia, with a special focus on Mental Hazard @ Work.



Malaysia lags behind in tackling mental health issues due to a lack of resources especially in terms of facilities and practitioners. Currently, there is no insurance coverage for mental healthcare and treatment in Malaysia although coverage is provided in Singapore for five types of mental illness, including depression.

Neglecting mental health in the workplace is not only detrimental to the individual worker but it also directly affects productivity, efficiency and output of the organisation. Accidents at workplaces can be caused not only by poor work safety practices but also by mental health issues. More needs to be done to reduce societal stigma and to encourage people suffering from mental health challenges to seek help.

“We must, as a community, address mental health challenges and the stigma that haunts those who experience it daily,” said Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad in his keynote address. In his special address, the chairman of National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) said the neglect of mental health in the workplace is not only detrimental to the individual worker but also directly affects productivity, efficiency and output of any organisation. Accidents at workplaces can be caused not only by poor work safety practices but also by mental health issues. The normal psychiatrist to population ratio is one per 10, 000 but in Malaysia, the ratio is 1 to 100,000.

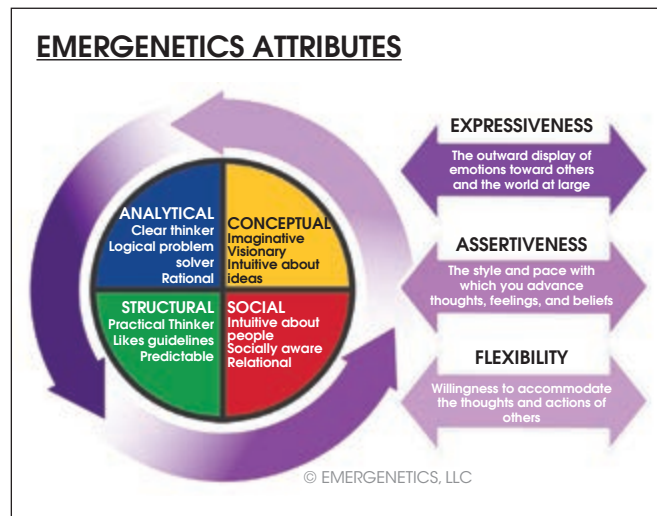
The conference started with a welcome speech by Dr Sangeeta Kaur, CEO of Emerging Journey Asia (EJA) and Puan Noraini, CEO of MySihat. Subsequently, after the talk by Dr Gurmit Dhillon on The Consequences of Neglecting Mental Health Issues, participants were requested to try the Online Mental Health Assessment.

Later that morning, in her Experiential Workshop, Dr

Sangeeta Kaur talked about understanding a participant’s thinking and behaviour preference in addressing the right approach on mental health wellness. She explained the four emergentics group in detail, namely analytical, structural, conceptual and social. Emergenetics is the pattern of thinking and behaving that emerges from our genetic blueprint and life’s experiences.

There are three attributes to these emergentics groups: Expressiveness, assertiveness and flexibility. Expressiveness is the outward display of emotions toward others and the world at large. Assertiveness is the style and pace with which you advance thoughts, feelings and beliefs while flexibility is the willingness to accommodate the thoughts and actions of others.

The conference was then launched by Datuk Seri Dr Haji Dzulkefly Ahmad, who gave a keynote address on Government Policy & Initiatives in Handling Mental Health Issues in the Workforce. Day 1 concluded with a panel discussion on the topic, The Fear Factor: Are You a Walking Time Bomb? by 3 panellists – Capt. Nasaruddin A. Bakar from Malaysia Airlines Academy, Dr Saravanan S.R. Sundaramurthy from MICHMA and Dato’ Azlin Ahmad Shaharbi, President of Peniagawati. The moderator was Ms. Hanie Razaif-Bohlendar, General Manager of Dragonfire Corporate Solutions Sdn. Bhd.



The morning of Day 2 started with a panel discussion on Stop The Stigma!, moderated by Ms. Vinnie Raviraj, Senior Director of HR & Talent Acquisition, SRG. The 3 panellists were Dato' Aishah Mohammad, CEO of Auxiliary Police from Maju Holdings Sdn. Bhd., Datin Seri Sunita Rajakumar, Director of Surprise Voice Sdn. Bhd. and Dr Hazli Zakaria, Deputy Psychiatry from UKM Medical Centre.

Next was a focus group session. This small group discussion on mental health topics was facilitated by a qualified mental health practitioner. Participants were required to choose a focus group they were interested in, such as anxiety, depression, stress, suicide or sleep disorder. They shared personal experiences on the chosen topic and had discussions on how to overcome the issues.

In the afternoon, Tan Sri Datuk Seri Lee Lam Thye, Chairman of NIOSH, gave a special address on Addressing Mental Health Issues at Workplace, followed by a talk by Dr Gurmit Dhillon from IAPT Talking Therapies, Redbridge, NELFT, National Health Services, United Kingdom on Outcome of Mental Health Assessment. Day 2 ended with a special address on Mental Hazard @ Work: Are You at Risk? by Dato' Mahfuz Omar, Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Chairman of National Council for Occupational Safety and Health.

On Day 3, two panellists discussed Youth & Mental Health in Changing World. They were Ms. Mimie Rahman, Director of MINDA (Malaysian Youth Mental Health Initiatives) and Ms. Lim Su Lin, a Policy Analyst from Penang Institute. The panel discussion was moderated by Dr Sudeep Mohandas, Managing Director of I First International.

In the afternoon, the Deputy Chairman of The Befrienders KL, Mr. Victor Tan, gave a talk on Suicide Prevention: Learning To Talk About Suicide. During the talk by Prof. Dr Amer Siddiq on What Leaders Needs to Know: Addressing the Mental Health Challenges Amongst Generation Gap, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, Minister of Youth and Sports, made a surprise entrance and joined the event for about half an hour, answering some questions from the audience. Later, the organisers distributed Mental Health First Aid Kits to the participants. Dr Sangeeta Kaur explained the functions of the kit in her talk on Mental Health First Aid Kit Intervention.

The conference had inspired all participants to become advocates for mental health awareness. The concept of mental health advocacy is to promote the human rights of persons with mental disorders and to reduce stigma and discrimination. It consists of various actions aimed at changing the major structural and attitudinal barriers to achieving positive mental health outcomes in populations.

Advocacy is an important means of raising awareness on mental health issues and ensuring that mental health is on the national agenda of governments. Advocacy can lead to improvements in policy, legislation and service development. Please refer to this website by World Health Organisation:



Women engineers with Datin Seri Sunita Rajakumar

https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/services/1_advocacy_WEB_07.pdf

Among the participants at MYMHEC2019 were counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists and NGOs as well as Women Engineers (WE) from IEM who shared their experiences. Ir. Mah Siew Kien said: "We can all help to build communities which understand, respect and prioritise mental wellness. The way we communicate and react makes a big difference in encouraging people to reach out for help. The respect, acceptance and support that we show them can make all the difference in helping them cope and recover. We need to start talking about counselling in a positive manner. Practising mindfulness is a great way to improve our headspace. Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present and be aware of where we are and what we're doing, without judgement, but with curiosity, kindness and care."

Dr Habibah Haron said: "It's a lot of new information and an eye opener for me. I gained new knowledge from the presentations, forums and focus group discussions which provided me with a better understanding of mental health related issues. I now know that mental health does not mean mental illness. Statistics show an alarming increase in mental health issues in Malaysia; it is real and worrying. These lead to realising the importance of advocating mental health (or mental wellness) to diminish the main problem of stigma. It is our responsibility to educate society (and ourselves) about mental health and to promote the concept of Reaching Out, Speaking Up & Listening Well.

Women Engineers, be proud to be pioneers of the Advocacy for Mental Health Awareness! We should not overlook mental health challenges which are tragic reminders of another side of life in our quest to become a developed nation. ■

#PEDULI #SpeakOutReachOut #StopTheStigma #Let-TalkMy