



Healthy

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The Stigma Against Mental Illness

by Damion Basdeo (HHI Chairperson) and Simma Ali-Bhaggan (HHI Member)



Mental illness is becoming more and more noticed, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic but society has not stopped the stigmatization against those with mental illness. Questions we may ask are. Is Mental Illness now being acknowledged as it should be? Was it being ignored before? Are we as a society allowing persons to express themselves? Are persons afraid because of the stigma?

The mental stability of an individual is crucial to function efficiently in society. If a member of a community is able to reach out for help and feels comfortable to do so, this is beneficial to the individual and the wider society. This allows persons to obtain the treatment needed and there is a higher chance of overcoming or dealing with the mental illness. In recent years we saw that a lack of social interaction was linked to an increase in mental illness. Mental illness has always been there and as a result of the pandemic more attention may be given to this very important topic.

Some may say that mental illness is something that has been ignored in the past. This statement may not be entirely true. It may be, that it is not

expressed freely by the individuals due to societal stigma. Sadly, if someone is known to suffer from a mental illness, our society might classify them as “**weak**” or “**mad**”. Both being very negative connotations which will prevent anyone from expressing their true mental state or to be afraid to seek help. As a result of keeping to themselves, a mental illness can develop and significantly affect their function in society. Without professional help, there is also a high chance of deterioration and in some extreme cases, self-harm and suicide. It is paramount that we change the societal culture which stigmatize against mental health. We should instead encourage people to express themselves and reach out for help. After reaching out, it is necessary to redirect the individuals to professional help which can be life-saving.

There are numerous resources available through several institutions. At the Eastern Regional Health Authority, there is the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Center and at the North-West Regional Health Authority there is the St. Ann’s Psychiatric Hospital. Contact information from institutions linked to Ministry of Health and Non-Governmental Organisations can be found in the following link:

[https://health.gov.tt/sites/default/files/2021-12/FindcareTT%20OFFICIAL%20VERSION%](https://health.gov.tt/sites/default/files/2021-12/FindcareTT%20OFFICIAL%20VERSION%202021-12.pdf)

The Impact of Exercise on Lifestyle Diseases

by Damion Basdeo (HHI Chairperson) and Simma Ali-Bhaggan (HHI Member)

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Exercise is defined as the “**physical activity you do to make your body strong or healthy**”. This is according to the Cambridge Dictionary. From the definition, you can see the immediate indication of health benefit. But how does this benefit health? Why should we exercise?

The reason for exercising can be summarised as a necessity for our body to function well. It is required to keep our organs healthy. It helps us rid our bodies of excess energy which may be in the form of sugars and fats to decrease our chances of developing chronic diseases. Simultaneous chemicals are released in the body which makes someone “**feel better**”. The medical name for these are endorphins and enkephalins. They are hormones that helps the body to feel relaxed. These are some benefits that may be derived from exercise.

What about without exercise? What do we expect to happen? Without exercise energy storage will take place and fat deposited on various parts of the body. Other than the psychological impact, where someone develops a sense of insecurity and lower self-esteem, the stored energy makes the person prone to chronic diseases. This is done in several ways. Firstly, because of the lack of exercise, fat and sugars will not burn. Secondly, the psychological effect on the individual may lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms or “**bad habits**”. These include eating “fast food”, alcohol use, smoking and further decrease in physical activity. This can further contribute to the development of chronic or lifestyle diseases.

These chronic or lifestyle diseases include High Cholesterol, Diabetes Mellitus and High Blood Pressure. They are called chronic because they occur and remain with an individual usually for the rest of their lives and are as a result of lifestyle habits, for example, poor diet and lack of exercise. This is unlike an infection, which usually occurs for a short period of time and if treated appropriately goes away in days or weeks.

These chronic or lifestyle diseases have harmful effects on the blood vessels or circulatory system which carries the blood around the body. All of the organs in the body are dependent on this. When the blood supply is affected, organs can be deprived of blood and endure injury which can be permanent. This can result in a stroke or heart attack. It can contribute to poor circulation to the feet which results in poor wound healing, progression of infections and sadly for some, amputations.

We see the consequences and possible outcomes from a lack of exercise. We have sedentary lifestyles aided by technology. The invention of elevators, cars and remote controls decrease the need for physical activity. It is important that we keep in mind that our body still requires exercise and it is necessary to fit it into our busy schedules for a healthier and productive life.



The Environment and Our Health

by Simma Ali-Bhaggan (HHI Member), Onika Andrews (HHI Vice-Chairperson) and Damion Basdeo (HHI Chairperson)

The Healthy Hospital Initiative is aimed at linking three very important aspects of life. These are our physical, mental and environmental health. But how is the environmental health linked to our physical and mental health?

The environment is the reason we are able to breathe and survive. We have a duty to protect it. We depend on the trees to produce Oxygen for us. Other than that we are drawn to the peaceful nature, that, we still have available in the Eastern part of Trinidad. This is one of the attractions of Trinidad and Tobago for tourists- the flora and fauna. There is the psychological and mental relaxation we enjoy from the rivers, trees and the animals which all co-exist in harmony. Other than the Oxygen which is necessary for life, there is also the physical benefits of safely exploring and relaxing via hikes through these wonders of mother-earth.



The Healthy Hospital Initiative was able to arrange a number of hikes to reap the mental and physical benefits from our lovely environment.

The first hike under the Healthy Hospital Initiative banner was on 19th November, 2023 to the Turure Watersteps in Valencia. There were over thirty (30) participants and everyone enjoyed the hike, learning about the environment, enjoying the scenery and exercising all at the same time. This was the first of hopefully many hikes. On 28th January, 2024 the group visited the scenic Rio Seco Waterfall in Salybia where they enjoyed the wonders of nature. This activity assisted in building camaraderie. The next adventure and hopefully not the last for 2024, was on 24th March 2024. It was at Matura River Circuit which included the Mermaid Pool. These hikes were done with the assistance of the Sangre Grande Conservation Awareness Group which provided tour guides, background, historical and environmental information and last but not least a safe and comfortable hiking experience.

We encourage all to participate in these hikes. It is healthy for our bodies and minds. The team also try their best to do clean-up exercises to preserve the environment. We have these natural wonders around us to protect and admire.

Healthy Hospital Initiative Team in collaboration with T&TMA East Branch

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