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## More support for the mentally ill

Two schemes involve home visits, keeping tabs on discharged patients

By Linette Lai

THOSE struggling with mental illness often need further care, but may not know where to find it.

The Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) hopes two new community programmes will give such people more support.

The first involves home visits to people it deems are at risk of developing mental health issues, helping them and their caregivers cope.

The service is free and clients will be referred by grassroots and other agencies. Not all have been clinically diagnosed as mentally ill - those who are facing life crises or have deep-seated worries are also eligible.

The other keeps tabs on former patients discharged from one of the charity's residential facilities in Bukit Gombak to make sure they are integrating well into society. Many are well enough to work, but may have no homes to go back to or have problems relating to their family members.

Case workers from SAMH help these patients work through their issues so they can avoid being re-admitted.

"Hospitalisation is only one part of the treatment," said SAMH president Daniel Fung during the programmes' launch yesterday at the association's Jurong East branch. "What we really need to do is provide services across a spectrum of care."

The programmes will target mainly the Jurong area, but will try to reach as wide an area as manpower allows.

SAMH also plans to carry out activities at its premises involving both people with mental health issues and other residents. These could be courses, talks or even karaoke sessions.

The 2011 Singapore Mental Health Study found only a third of those with mental illnesses have access to the services they need.

Yuhua MP Grace Fu, who was guest of honour at the launch, applauded SAMH's efforts to plug this gap in her constituency.

Residents with mental health issues have come to her at Meet-the-People Sessions. "They felt that things were not moving in the way they wanted, and they felt a loss of hope," she said.

"We are not trained professionally, so at those times we would really appreciate someone within the community who could offer more immediate care."

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