

Understanding mental health problems

認識精神病

This booklet is for anyone who experiences a mental health problem, and your friends and family. It explains what mental health problems are, what may cause them, and the many different kinds of help, treatment and support that are available.

這本小冊子介紹了數種最常見的精神病、它們的成 因以及治療方法,供有精神病的人士以及他們的朋 友和家人參考。

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What are mental health problems?

甚麼是精神病?

Mental health problems can affect the way you think, feel and behave. They can range from common mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, to more rare problems such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. A mental health problem can feel just as bad, or worse, as any other physical illness – only you cannot see it.

There are a lot of different approaches to how mental health problems should be diagnosed, what causes them and which treatments are most effective. And, unfortunately, there is still widespread stigma and discrimination towards people with mental health problems, and misunderstanding about what different diagnoses mean.

However, despite these challenges, it is possible to recover from a mental health problem and live a productive and fulfilling life.

What kinds of mental health problems are there?

有其麼精神病?

There are many different mental health problems, and many symptoms are common to more than one diagnosis. So you may experience the symptoms of more than one mental health problem at once.

Depression

抑鬱症

Depression is a feeling of low mood that lasts for a long time and affects your everyday life. It can make you feel hopeless, despairing, guilty, worthless, unmotivated and exhausted. It can affect your self-esteem,

sleep, appetite, sex drive and, sometimes, your physical health. In its mildest form, depression doesn't stop you leading a normal life, but it makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can make you feel suicidal, and be life-threatening. There are also some common specific forms of depression, such as:

- postnatal depression (PND) depression that can develop from between two weeks to up to two years after becoming a parent. It's usually diagnosed in mothers, but can affect partners too.
- seasonal affective disorder (SAD) depression that is related to day length and usually (but not always) occurs in the winter.

"Depression feels like I am locked in a black room inside myself."

(See Mind's booklets Understanding depression, Understanding postnatal depression and Understanding seasonal affective disorder.)

Anxiety 焦慮症

Anxiety refers to strong feelings of unease, worry and fear. Because occasional anxiety is a normal human experience, it's sometimes hard to know when it's becoming a mental health problem – but if your feelings of anxiety are very strong, or last for a long time, they can be overwhelming. You might experience:

- constant worrying about things that are a regular part of everyday life, or about things that aren't likely to happen.
- unpleasant physical symptoms such as sleep problems, panicattacks, an increased heartbeat, an upset stomach, muscle tensionor feeling shaky.
- a specific anxiety disorder, such as generalised anxiety disorder(GAD), panic disorder, a phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder(OCD) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

(See Mind's booklet Understanding anxiety and panic attacks and Understanding post-traumatic stress disorder)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) 強迫症

OCD is a type of anxiety disorder. The term is often misused in daily conversation – for example, you might hear people talk about being'a bit OCD', if they like things to be neat and tidy. But the reality of this disorder is a lot more complex and serious.

OCD has two main parts:

- obsessions intrusive thoughts, ideas or urges that repeatedlyappear in your mind. For example, thinking that you have been contaminated by dirt and germs, or worrying that you might hurtsomeone.
- compulsions repetitive activities that you feel you have to do. This could be something like repeatedly washing something to makesure it's clean or repeating a specific phrase in your head to preventharm from coming to a loved one.

The aim of a compulsion is to relieve the intense anxiety caused by obsessive thoughts. However, the process of repeating these compulsions is often distressing in itself, and any relief you feel is often short-lived.

Phobias

恐懼症

A phobia is an extreme form of fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation (such as going outside) or object (such as spiders), even when there is no danger. A fear becomes a phobia if it lasts for more than six months, and has a significant impact on how you live your day-to-day life. For example, you may begin to organise your life around avoiding the thing that you fear.

Eating problems

進食失調

Eating problems aren't just about food. They can be about difficult things in your life and painful feelings, which you may be finding hard to express, face or resolve. Focusing on food can be a way of disguising these problems, even from yourself.

The most common eating problems are:

- anorexia not allowing yourself to eat enough food to get the energy and nutrition you need to stay physically healthy. Sometimes people assume that anorexia is about slimming and dieting, but it is often connected to very low self-esteem, negative self-image and feelings of intense distress.
- bulimia finding that you eat large amounts of food all in one go, often because you are feeling upset or worried (this is called bingeing); then feeling deeply guilty or ashamed, and taking steps to get rid of the food you have eaten (this is called purging).
- binge eating disorder feeling that you can't stop yourself from eating, even when you want to. This is sometimes described as having a food addiction or compulsive eating.
- eating disorder not otherwise specified (EDNOS) this diagnosis means you meet some of the criteria for one of the above disorders, but not all of them.

Bipolar disorder

躁鬱症(狂躁抑鬱症/雙向情緒病)

Bipolar disorder (previously called manic depression) mainly affects your mood. With this diagnosis you are likely to have times when you experience:

- manic or hypomanic episodes (feeling high)
- depressive episodes (feeling low)
- potentially some psychotic symptoms during manic or depressed
- episodes.

Everyone has variations in their mood, but in bipolar disorder these changes can be very distressing and have a big impact on your life. You may feel that your high and low moods are extreme, and that swings in your mood are overwhelming. In between, you might have stable times where you experience fewer symptoms.

"[At first it's] loss of interest in doing anything. I have to force myself to do tasks. Then it's as though I'm in catch up. Mind full of ideas, feel fantastic, doing three things at once."

Schizophrenia

精神分裂症

You may receive a diagnosis of schizophrenia if you have symptoms such as:

- psychotic experiences, for example hallucinations or delusions
- disorganised thinking
- a lack of interest in things
- feeling disconnected from your feelings
- wanting to avoid people.

This diagnosis can be controversial as not all people who experience such things agree that they have a mental health problem, or that the term 'schizophrenia'is the best way to describe their experiences.

Personality disorders

人格障礙

Personality disorders are a type of mental health problem where your attitudes, beliefs and behaviours cause you longstanding problems in your life. There are several different types of personality disorder, but the two most commonly diagnosed ones are:

borderline personality disorder (BPD) – you might be given
this diagnosis if you experience things like intense, changeable
moods, an overwhelming fear of abandonment, an unstable sense
of identity and impulsive, risky behaviour. Some people prefer the
term 'emotionally unstable personality disorder' (EUPD) to BPD, as
they feel it's a more accurate description of the symptoms.

antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) – you might be given
this diagnosis if you experience things like disregard for the feelings
and needs of others, manipulating others for your own gain,
difficulty maintaining relationships, feeling little guilt for your actions
and feeling easily bored or aggressive.

"Having BPD is like the emotional version of being a burn victim. Everything in the world hurts more than it seems to for everyone else and any 'thick skin' you are supposed to have just isn't there."

If you're given a diagnosis of a personality disorder, it's understandable to feel like you're being told that who you are is 'wrong'. But a personality disorder does not mean that you're a bad person, or that you have a bad personality.

Other symptoms, feelings and behaviours 常見的病徵、情緒和行為

In addition to the diagnoses listed above, these are some common symptoms, feelings and behaviours which are often associated with mental health problems.

Panic attacks 驚恐發作

Panic attacks are an exaggeration of your body's normal response to fear, stress or excitement. These are bouts of intense, often very frightening symptoms, usually lasting between 5 and 20 minutes. You may experience overwhelming physical sensations, such as:

- a pounding heartbeat or chest pains
- sweating and nausea (feeling sick)
- feeling faint and unable to breathe
- shaky limbs, or feeling like your legs are turning to jelly.

It's easy to mistake these for the signs of a heart attack or another serious medical problem.

"I'd hyperventilate and cry with panic as the feeling that I was going to fall unconscious was so convincing."

Self-harm 自殘

Self-harm is a way of expressing very deep distress, where you take actions to cause yourself physical pain. You may not know why you self harm,

but it can be a means of expressing feelings that you can't put into words or think clearly about. After self-harming you may feel a short-term sense of release, but the cause of your distress is unlikely to have gone away.

Suicidal feelings

自殺念頭

Many people experience suicidal thoughts and feelings as part of a mental health problem. They can be unpleasant, intrusive and frightening, but having thoughts about suicide doesn't necessarily mean that you intend to act on them. Lots of people think about suicide, and don't ever go on to attempt to take their own lives.

However, if you start to feel you may act on suicidal feelings and become unable to keep yourself safe then this a mental health emergency. It's important to treat it as seriously as you would any physical health emergency, and seek urgent help.

(See Mind's booklets How to cope with suicidal feelings and How to support someone who feels suicidal.)

Psychotic experiences

Psychotic experiences or episodes (also called psychosis) are when you perceive or interpret events very differently from people around you. This could include:

- · hallucinations, such as hearing voices or having visions
- delusions, such as paranoia or delusions of grandeur.

You may experience psychosis as part of a diagnosed mental health problem, but it's also possible to have a psychotic experience without meeting the criteria for any particular diagnosis.

Could I be going mad? 我是否瘋了?

Experiencing a mental health problem is often upsetting and frightening, particularly at first. If you become unwell, you may feel that it's a sign of weakness, or that you are'losing your mind', and that it's only going to get worse. You may be scared of being seen as 'mad' by other people in your life. You may also be afraid of being locked up in an institution.

These fears are often reinforced by the negative (and often unrealistic) way that people experiencing mental health problems are shown on TV, in films and by the media. These fears may stop you from talking about your problems, or seeking help. This, in turn, is likely to increase your distress and sense of isolation.

However, in reality, mental health problems are a common human experience. Most people know someone who has experienced a mental health problem. They can happen to anyone, at any time. And it's likely that, when you find a combination of self-care, treatment and support that works for you, you will get better.

What causes mental health problems?

甚麼導致精神病?

Mental health problems can have a wide range of causes. In most cases, no one is sure precisely what the cause of a particular problem is. It's likely that for many people there is a combination of factors, although some people may be more deeply affected by certain things than others. The following factors could potentially trigger a period of poor mental health:

- childhood abuse, trauma, or neglect
- social isolation or loneliness
- experiencing discrimination and stigma
- the death of someone close to you
- severe or long-term stress
- unemployment or losing your job
- · social disadvantage, poverty or debt
- · homelessness or poor housing
- caring for a family member or friend
- a long-term physical health condition
- drug and alcohol misuse
- domestic violence or other abuse as an adult
- significant trauma as an adult, such as military combat, being involved in a serious accident or being the victim of a violent crime
- physical causes for example, a head injury or a condition such as epilepsy can have an impact on behaviour and mood (it is important to rule out causes such as this before seeking further treatment for a mental health problem)
- genetic factors researchers are currently investigating whether there might be a genetic cause of various mental health problems but there is no clear proof yet.

How are mental health problems diagnosed?

怎樣診斷精神病?

To diagnose a mental health problem, doctors will look at:

- what symptoms you're experiencing (groupings of certain symptoms suggest different diagnoses)
- · how long you've been experiencing these symptoms
- the impact they're having on your life.

To do this they may ask you questions about your mood, thoughts and behaviours – sometimes by using questionnaires or forms. They will base your diagnosis on what you describe. For example, if you tell your doctor you've been experiencing low mood, low energy and a lack of interest in usual activities for more than two weeks, this may lead to a diagnosis of depression. If your symptoms change you might find you are given different diagnoses over time.

Who can diagnose me? 了解精神問題的不同方法

For common problems such as depression and anxiety, your GP may be able to give you a diagnosis after one or two appointments. For less common problems you'll need to be referred to a mental health specialist (such as a psychiatrist), and they may want to see you over a longer period of time before making a diagnosis.

"After overcoming the initial shock of the diagnosis, it is actually a blessing because now I know what I need to do to get better"

What if I don't find my diagnosis helpful? 標籤?

Receiving a diagnosis can be a positive experience. You might feel relieved that you can put a name to what's wrong, and it can help you and your doctor discuss what kind of treatment might work best for you.

However, a lot of people, including some doctors, feel the medical model of diagnosis and treatment is not enough. For example, you might feel that the diagnosis you're given doesn't fully fit your experiences, or that it's simplistic and puts you in a box. Other factors – such as your background, lifestyle and other personal circumstances – may be just as important in understanding what you're experiencing and working out how best to help you feel better.

A diagnosis does not have to shape your entire life, and may come to be a relatively minor part of your identity

Are people with mental health problems dangerous? 精神病患者是否帶有危險性?

Some people think that there is an automatic link between mental health problems and being a danger to others. This is an idea that is largely reinforced by sensationalised stories in the media. However, the most common mental health problems have no significant link to violent behaviour. The proportion of people living with a mental health problem who commit a violent crime is extremely small.

There are lots of reasons someone might commit a violent crime, and factors like drug and alcohol misuse are far more likely to be the cause of violent behaviour. But many people are still worried about talking about how they're feeling, or seeking help, because of the fear and stigma of being seen as dangerous.

It's important to remember that experiencing difficult thoughts, feelings and behaviours when you're unwell is common, and it's extremely unlikely to mean you may harm another person.

How can I help myself?

我可以怎樣幫助自己?

Self-care techniques and general lifestyle changes can help manage the symptoms of many mental health problems, and may also help to prevent some problems from developing or getting worse. If they work well for you then you may find you don't need any formal treatment.

However, it's important to remember that there is unlikely to be an instant solution. Recovering from a mental health problem is likely to take time, energy and work. Here are some tips for looking after yourself that you might find helpful.

Nourish your social life 維持你的社交生活

Feeling connected to other people is important. It can help you to feel valued and confident about yourself, and can give you a different perspective on things. If you can, try to spend more time with your friends and family – even a phone call can make a difference.

If you don't have supportive friends and family around you and are feeling isolated, there are other ways you can make connections. For example, you could try joining a group like a book club or local community group to meet new people.

"I try to have a friendly conversation every day, even if it is online with distant friends."

Try Peer Support 同行互助

When you experience a mental health problem it can feel like no one understands. Peer support brings together people who've had similar experiences to support each other. This can offer many benefits, such as:

- feeling accepted for who you are
- increased self-confidence
- meeting new people and using your experiences to help others
- finding out new information and places for support
- challenging stigma and discrimination.

Make time for therapeutic activities 走進綠化環境

There are various techniques and therapies you can safely practise on your own. For example:

- relaxation you may already know what helps you relax, like having a bath, listening to music or taking your dog for a walk. If you know that a certain activity helps you feel more relaxed, make sure you set aside time to do it. (See Mind's online booklet Exploring relaxation for more tips.)
- mindfulness mindfulness is a therapeutic technique that involves being more aware of the present moment. This can mean both outside, in the world around you, and inside, in your feelings and thoughts. Practising mindfulness can help you become more aware of your own moods and reactions.
- ecotherapy getting out into a green environment, such as the park or the countryside, is especially helpful.

These activities can be particularly valuable if you don't want to try medication or talking treatments.

"I really have to remember to be kind to myself and actually try to function when I'm unwell. Otherwise things spiral even faster."

Look after your physical health 保持健康的生活

Taking steps to look after your physical health can help you manage your mental health too.

- get enough sleep this can help you have the energy to cope with difficult feelings and experiences. (See Mind's booklet How to cope with sleep problems for more tips.)
- eat healthily what you eat, and when you eat, can make a big difference to how well you feel. (See Mind's booklet Exploring food and mood for more tips.)
- keep physically active doing regular exercise can be very effective in lifting your mood and increasing your energy levels. It doesn't have to be very strenuous or sporty to be effective to start with you could try gentle exercise like going for a short walk, yoga or swimming. The important thing is to pick something you enjoy doing, so you're more likely to stick with it. If you are physically disabled, you may want to contact a local disability group for information about exercises you might be able to do. Alternatively, ask your doctor for advice. (See Mind's booklet How to improve your wellbeing through physical activity and sport for more tips.)
- look after yourself when you're experiencing a mental health problem, it's easy for personal care to not feel like a priority. But small things, like taking a shower and getting fully dressed, whether or not you're going out of the house, can make a big difference to how you feel.
- avoid drugs and alcohol while you might want to use drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings, in the long run they can make you feel a lot worse.

"Exercise is hugely beneficial, in whatever shape or form. Keep on moving"

Challenge stigma and discrimination 靜觀訓練

Unfortunately, not everyone understands mental health problems. You might find that that some people hold misconceptions about you based on your diagnosis, or use language you find offensive or hurtful. This can be very upsetting, especially if someone who feels this way is a friend, colleague, family member or a health care professional. But it's important to remember that you aren't alone, and you don't have to put up with people treating you badly.

Here are some options for you to think about:

- show people Mind's information to help them understand more about what your diagnosis really means.
- know your rights
- contact an advocate an advocate is someone who can support your choices and help you make your voice heard. (See Mind's online booklet The Mind guide to advocacy.)

What treatments are available? 有其麼治療方法?

The two most common forms of treatment are talking treatments and medication. There are also alternative treatments available, which you may wish to try.

Talking treatments 心理治療

Talking treatments provide a regular time and space for you to talk about your thoughts and experiences and explore difficult feelings with a trained professional. This could help you to:

- · deal with a specific problem
- · cope with upsetting memories or experiences
- improve your relationships
- develop more helpful ways of living day-to-day.

You may hear various terms used to describe talking treatments, including counselling, psychotherapy, therapy, talking therapy or psychological therapy. These terms are all used to describe the same general style of treatment. There are many different types of therapy available and it's important to find a style and a therapist that you feel comfortable with. For example, you may be offered cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This is a relatively short-term treatment that focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and behaviour, and aims to teach you practical skills for dealing with your problems

"Talking things through with a counsellor or therapist really helps me to see things more rationally and make connections between reality and inside my head."

Medication 藥物治療

The most common type of treatment available is prescription medication.

These drugs don't cure mental health problems, but they can ease many symptoms. Which type of drug you are offered will depend on your diagnosis. For example:

- antidepressants these are mostly prescribed for people experiencing depression, though you might also be offered an antidepressant if you're experiencing anxiety, OCD, eating problems, or depression as part of another mental health problem.
- minor tranquillisers or sleeping pills these can help you sleep, or calm you down if you experience anxiety (sometimes called antianxiety medication).
- mood stabilisers these help stabilise your mood when you experience extreme mood swings, for example if you have a diagnosis of bipolar disorder.
- antipsychotics these reduce distressing symptoms of psychosis, but are sometimes also prescribed for people experiencing bipolar disorder as they can help control mania.

Many people find these drugs helpful, as they can lessen your symptoms and allow you to cope at work and at home. However, drugs can have unpleasant side effects that may make you feel worse rather than better. They can also be difficult to withdraw from, or cause you physical harm if taken in too high a dose.

Before prescribing you any medication, your doctor should explain to you what the medication is for, and discuss any possible side effects and alternative treatment options.

Antidepressants helped once I found the right ones."

Arts therapies

藝術治療

Arts therapies are a way of using the arts – music, painting, dance or drama – to express and understand yourself in a therapeutic environment with a trained therapist. Arts therapies can be especially helpful if you find it difficult to talk about your problems and how you are feeling.

Complementary and alternative therapies

另類治療

Some people find complementary and alternative therapies helpful to manage stress and other common symptoms of mental health problems.

These can include:

- hypnotherapy
- massage
- · acupuncture.

The clinical evidence for these therapies is not as robust as it is for other treatments, but you may find they work for you.

What should I say to my doctor?

When you talk to your doctor it can be helpful to:

- be honest and open
- focus on how you feel, rather than what diagnosis you might meet
- try to explain how you've been feeling over the past few months or weeks, and anything that has changed
- use words and descriptions that feel natural to you you don't have to say specific things to get help
- try not to worry that your problem is too small or unimportant –everyone deserves help and your doctor is there to support you.

Be aware that doctor's appointments are often short, so it's a good idea to prepare in advance. You could write down what you want to say, and take your notes in

with you. Using short bullet points rather than long paragraphs can help ensure you cover all the points you want to. highlight or print out any information you've found that helps you explain how you're feeling Think about taking someone with you to support you, like a close friend or family member.

"The first time I went to my GP about my depression, I was completely terrified. I had suffered in silence for six months, and was so ashamed that I couldn't 'fix' it myself. Thankfully my GP was lovely and really seemed to care.

Will I recover?

我可以康復嗎?

It is possible to recover from mental health problems and many people do – especially after accessing support. Your symptoms may return from time to time, but when you've discovered which self-care techniques and treatments work best for you, you're more likely to feel confident in managing them.

If you're experiencing a more serious mental health problem, it's still very possible to find ways to manage your symptoms. For many people, getting better doesn't necessarily mean going back to how your life was before, but learning new ways to live your life the way you want to, and gaining control over areas of your life that might have felt out of your control before. However, it's important to remember that recovery is a journey, and it won't always be straightforward. You might find it more helpful to focus on learning more about yourself and developing ways to cope, rather than trying to get rid of every symptom of your mental health problem. What recovery means to you will be personal, but for most people, the most important thing is to find ways to live the kind of life you want. Further information about living with particular diagnoses is available in Mind's Understanding booklets.

"With time you do learn to cope... I have struggled for 15 years with [my mental health problem], but every year I seem to get stronger and better at coping with it!"

What can friends and family do to help? 朋友和家人可以做甚麼?

This section is for friends and family who would like to support someone who is experiencing a mental health problem.

It can be very difficult to see someone who you care about becoming distressed and unwell, but you don't need to be an expert on mental health to offer support. Often, small everyday actions can make the biggest difference.

Show your support 表達關懷

If you know someone has been unwell, don't be afraid to ask how they are. They might want to talk about it, or they might not. But just letting them know they don't have to avoid the issue with you is important. Spending time with your loved one lets them know you care, and can help you understand what they're going through. Sometimes all you need is a hug and for someone to tell you that you're going to get there.

Askhow you can help 主動詢問你可以如何幫忙

Everyone will want support at different times and in different ways, so ask how you can help. It might be useful to help keep track of medication, or give support at a doctor's appointment. If your friend wants to get more exercise, you could do this together, or if your partner is affected by lack of sleep, you could help them get into a regular sleeping pattern.

Be open-minded

Phrases like 'cheer up', 'I'm sure it'll pass' and 'pull yourself together' definitely don't help. Try to be non-judgemental and listen. Someone experiencing a mental health problem often knows best what's helpful for them.

"Leave out the 'cheer up' comments, they don't help and force my low moods lower as my condition is being made a joke of."

Don't just talk about mental health

Keep in mind that having a mental health problem is just one aspect of your friend or family member's life. Most people don't want to be defined by their mental health problem, so keep talking about the things you've always talked about together.

"For me, it is good to have them there to talk to me about other things, and take my mind off negative thoughts."

Show trust and respect

Trust and respect between you and your friend or family member are very important – they help to rebuild and maintain a sense of self-esteem, which a mental health problem can seriously damage. This can also help you to cope a bit better if you can see your support having a positive impact on the person you care about

Look after yourself 照顧自己

Supporting someone else can sometimes be stressful. Making sure that you look after your own wellbeing can mean that you have the energy, time and distance you need to be able to help. For example:

- Set boundaries and don't take too much on. If you become unwell yourself you won't be able to offer as much support.
- Share your caring role with others, if you can. It's often easier to support someone well if you're not doing it alone.
- Talk to someone about how you're feeling. You may want tobe careful about how much information you share about the person you're supporting, but talking about your own feelings with someone you trust can help you feel supported too.

Useful Contacts

有用資訊

The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong 香港心理衞生會

Tel: 2528 0196

Web: www.mhahk.org.hk

Amity Mutual Support Society 恆康亙助社

Tel: 2332 2759

Web: www.amss1996.org.hk

Suicide Prevention Services

Tel: 2382 0000

Web: www.sps.org.hk

United Centre of Emotional Health & Positive Living 聯合情緒健康教育中心

Tel: 2349 3212

Web: www.ucep.org.hk

The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 港撒瑪利亞防止自殺會

Tel: 2389 2222

Web: www.sbhk.org.hk

Institute of Mental Health Castle Peak Hospital 青山醫院精神健康學院

Tel: 2466 7350

Web: www3.ha.org.hk

Further Information

Mind HK was founded and is jointly supported by Mind UK and the Patient Care Foundation. At the moment Mind HK is limited to website support but with donations we hope to expand the work that is done. Volunteers welcome to contact: mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk

Mind Hong Kong 是由 Mind UK 及Patient Care Foundation Hong Kong 聯合協 辦的機構。在現階段我們只能提供有限度的網上支緩。假若有足夠的捐款,我 們會進一步擴大服務範圍。如有興趣參與義工團隊,

請聯絡: mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk