

Helping transnational couples cope with parenthood

Mount Alvernia Hospital's Parentcraft Centre collaborates with Care Corner Singapore to offer complimentary antenatal* workshops for first-time parents

(*antenatal – before birth or relating to pregnancy).

Starting a family is a challenge for any married couple. For transnational couples, where one spouse – often the wife – uproots from their homeland and moves to Singapore to be with his or her Singaporean spouse, there are additional hurdles such as cultural differences, unemployment, and the foreign spouse's stress of adapting to a new environment, without friends or family other than their spouses.

Some marriages may also have been arranged through marriage agencies, and the unfamiliarity with each other makes it even harder for the transnational couples to adapt.

To support these transnational couples in starting their families here, the Ministry of Social and Family Development and the Immigration and Checkpoint Authority refer them to Care Corner Singapore, a social service agency which runs marriage enhancement programmes that teach conflict management, financial management, and communication improvement, and also connects these couples to resources and social networks.

Supporting transnational couples with antenatal workshops

Mount Alvernia Hospital's (MAH) Outreach Team reaches out to these transnational families by collaborating with Care Corner Singapore's Family Support Services arm in activities such as fundraising, attending to medical requests faced by their members, and supporting them through MAH's Maternity Assistance Programme.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, MAH's Parentcraft Centre replaced its physical antenatal classes with three videos on labour, breastfeeding, and caring for newborns which were available to the public for a fee. These videos were also made available without charge to Care Corner Singapore, and even subtitled in Vietnamese, Bahasa Indonesia, and Chinese by Care Corner volunteers to help the transnational couples.

When Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, MAH resumed its physical antenatal workshops. This year, two *pro bono* sessions were conducted for Care Corner Singapore's beneficiaries by Parentcraft counsellors Ms Sharon Seet and Ms Richelle Tang and attended by 10 couples including expectant mothers, those who had just given birth, and those planning for pregnancies.



MAH and Care Corner staff with transnational couples from the PRC and Vietnam after the antenatal workshops held at MAH. Photos: Mount Alvernia Hospital.

Labour, breastfeeding and infant care

In the first session, the couples were taught what to expect during and after labour, including some breathing techniques to aid pain management. The Q&A segment with MAH's lactation consultant gave the nervous mums-to-be the perfect chance to ask all their questions about starting their breastfeeding journey.

In the second session, the parents learned more about how breastfeeding aids mother-child bonding, and received tips on caring for their infants, such as learning how to bathe them, and change their diapers.

Ms Grace Sng, a social worker from Care Corner Singapore, says the shared commitment of both organisations to provide compassionate care to all in need has greatly benefited the transnational couples. "Mount Alvernia Hospital's vision is to 'Serve all with Love'," she said, "and for Care Corner, we really want

to bring care to every corner in Singapore."

Dennis, who is Singaporean, and his wife, Yan Zhang, from the People's Republic of China, are grateful for the sessions. "The workshop was very helpful," said Dennis. "It taught us about pregnancy and delivery, which we had no knowledge of previously since this is our first child."

Through its collaboration with Care Corner Singapore, MAH hopes to help transnational couples as they navigate the cross-cultural challenges of giving birth in Singapore. Its antenatal workshops are open to the public for a fee and consist of one full-day session held daily from 11.30am to 5pm (with an hour-long lunch included). Those interested should contact the Parentcraft Centre at parentcraft@mtalvernia.sg or 6347 6641 to register. □

This article is contributed by the Mount Alvernia Hospital Community Outreach Department.

For more information, please contact outreach@mtalvernia.sg



Serve all with Love

About Mount Alvernia Hospital

Mount Alvernia Hospital (MAH) is an acute care tertiary hospital comprising two multi-disciplinary medical specialist centres and a newly opened 10-storey maternity and paediatric building – the St Anne Mother & Child Centre (SAMCC) – and supported by over 1,200 accredited doctors and 200 on-campus specialist doctors. As an acute care tertiary hospital, MAH is equipped with the expertise and equipment to offer specialised medical treatment and comprehensive care for a wide spectrum of acute and chronic illnesses, ranging from dengue to cancer treatment, from cataract to coronary artery bypass surgery.

As a private not-for-profit hospital, MAH gives back to the community by channeling its surpluses to support various community outreach programmes such as the above collaboration with Care Corner Singapore.



Parentcraft counsellor Ms Richelle Tang giving new parents tips on infant care at an MAH antenatal workshop.



Transnational couple Dennis and Yan Zhang experience hands-on learning at the antenatal workshops.