

Championing Care for Persons With Intellectual Disabilities: A Collaborative Approach

Mount Alvernia Hospital participated in the recent IDHealth Health Fair to offer Persons With Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs) and their caregivers a much-needed health screening.

Healthcare professionals and volunteers came together to help individuals with intellectual disabilities and their caregivers at the IDHealth Health Fair, an event organised by IDHealth, an integrated healthcare team started by Happee Hearts Movement, a charity dedicated to serving adult PWIDs and their caregivers.

Held on 19 August 2023 at the Lee Kong Chian Gardens School – Singapore's first permanent school for intellectually-disabled children – the event made participants more aware about the healthcare needs of PWIDs and their caregivers and allow volunteers and healthcare partners a chance to meet PWIDs and understand their needs better in a guided setting.

Most importantly, health screenings and education were made available to families of PWIDs and their caregivers who may not otherwise have had this opportunity, by various volunteer healthcare teams consisting of doctors, dentists, dermatologists, dieticians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and podiatrists who set up stations at the event.

The Mount Alvernia Hospital (MAH) Outreach Team was also present at the event to introduce attendees to the services and subsidies offered to PWIDs at the Mount Alvernia Outreach Medical and Dental Clinics.

Complimentary Pre-Event Health Screenings

Prior to the event, the MAH Outreach Team offered complimentary health checks to PWIDs aged 21 and above from three partner organisations – SUNDAC, MINDS Youth Group, and Christian Outreach to the Handicapped (COH) – as well as one caregiver per PWID. All three partners are social service agencies dedicated to serving individuals with disabilities. These health screening sessions were held either at the Mount Alvernia Outreach Medical Clinic (MAOMC) or at the partner's own premises.

87 PWIDs and caregivers took part in this exercise which included a basic health screening and blood tests covering chronic illnesses such as high



Ms Low Kar Yin (left), Ms Clara Teo, Ms Anthea Neo (second right) and Mr Koo Hoong Mun from the MAH Outreach Team, with Dr Chen Shiling (centre). Photos: Mount Alvernia Hospital.

blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity. The screening and test results were reviewed by volunteer doctors from IDHealth and MAOMC, and the subsequent reports assessed by Dr Chen Shiling, IDHealth's founder, who made the final recommendations for subsequent follow-ups at MAOMC if needed.

Comfort and familiarity during screenings

Ms R Sharmila Shay, a COH social worker, was grateful for the health screening arrangement. "For PWIDs, accessing healthcare services can be challenging due to their discomfort with unfamiliar environments and interacting with unfamiliar people," she said. "The availability of these services on our own premises in the presence of our own staff whom our PWID clients are familiar with facilitated successful blood tests for our clients."

Echoing Ms Shay's sentiments was Mr Sawaran Singh, father and caregiver

to COH client Harpal. "Having the COH teachers and social workers at the health screening reduced a lot of anxiety for Harpal," he said, recalling that it took the MAH Outreach Team several attempts before they managed to obtain a sample of Harpal's blood with the help and encouragement from the COH team.

Fostering the power of collaborations

Sharing the motivation behind organising the IDHealth Health Fair, Dr Chen explained that she had always believed in the power of collaboration. "When like-minded individuals and organisations come together, we can tap on one another's strengths and support each other's limitations," she said. "This allows our impact and reach to go way beyond what an individual or single organisation can do."

"The MAH Outreach Team complements IDHealth very well in their provision of health screenings, acute and chronic care of less complex patients and



Dr Chen (R) engaging in a conversation with a caregiver.

dental services," she added. "We are able to discharge or co-manage some of our stable patients with them, and take on more complex patients whilst being assured that they are all well cared for." □

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; 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.

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 IDHealth.



A volunteer doctor from IDHealth attending to PWID Mr Wong Jun Xiang (R).



From left: Mr Koo Hoong Mun and Ms Low Kar Yin from the MAH Outreach Team, with a smiling Harpal, his father Mr Sawaran Singh, and Ms R Sharmila Shay from COH.