

SPECIALISTFOCUS



Aged Psychiatry Community Assessment & Treatment Service (APCATS)

**Dr Joshua Kua, Consultant Psychiatrist & Programme Director
Institute of Mental Health**

Community mental health services for older people are listed as integral component of services in the technical consensus statement on 'Organisation of Care in Psychiatry of the Elderly' by WHO and World Psychiatric Association (1997). **APCATS** started in January 2006 as the first community psychogeriatric service in Singapore that provides psychiatric assessment and treatment for frail elderly in their own home if they are unable to access standard clinic-based services.

Now called **APCATS Clinical Service**, it aims to allow the elderly to remain in their home and community longer and prevent premature institutionalisation or unnecessary hospitalisation. In addition, **APCATS** provides education and support for patients and caregivers, as well as liaising with other service providers to coordinate patient care. In the first two years, it received 282 referrals, of which 162 were accepted. Thirty-three percent of the referrals came from outside IMH. Comparing the six months pre and post **APCATS** enrollment of the first year cohort, the total number of hospitalisation of patients was reduced from 33 to four. The total length of stay (LOS) of hospitalisation was reduced from 790 to 131 days, with a reduction of mean LOS by 14.3 days.

One of the initiatives under the National Mental Health Blueprint is to improve the provision and coordination of mental health services for the elderly. The strategy adopted is the implementation of the 'Area Community Psychogeriatric Service Framework'. Under this framework, three community psychogeriatric teams will be developed to provide services in the East, Central and West region of Singapore. In addition to providing clinical services for the frail elderly, these services will also develop and enhance collaboration with eldercare agencies in the community. In line with this, **APCATS** will be launching the **APCATS-Regional Eldercare Agencies Partnership Programme (APCATS-REAP) in 2008**.

The **APCATS** team will engage community eldercare agencies (such as SACs, Neighbourhood Links, Day Centres, etc) in the Central CDC region to:

- a) provide training, education, consultation and support to the eldercare agencies so as to strengthen their capability in early detection and management of psychogeriatric problems in the community

- b) assist in the coordination of services for the elderly to improve the continuity of care for the elderly with mental illnesses

Under **APCATS-REAP**, staff of participating agencies will be trained to use rating scales to screen for depression and dementia for their clients. **APCATS** staff will provide assistance to triage clients to receive the appropriate treatment. This includes referring clients to primary care physicians. Hence there is also a need to establish a network with GPs and OPDs in the region to facilitate and coordinate referral and care.

The **APCATS** multidisciplinary team comprises medical officer, psychiatric nurses, medical social worker, occupational therapists and psychologist under the supervision of a consultant psychiatrist from the Department of Geriatric Psychiatry. Clinical case management model is used to coordinate patient care.

More information on **APCATS** as well as referral form for Clinical Service can be found at IMH website (www.imh.com.sg).

The referral form should be faxed to **6385 1051** or emailed to us. **APCATS** will notify the referring person on the outcome of the referral. **For enquiries, contact us at Tel: 6389 2175 or apcats@imh.com.sg**

In conclusion, preliminary data validates the clinical utility and effectiveness of **APCATS Clinical Service** in reducing hospitalisation. Going forward, the successful implementation of the 'Area Community Psychogeriatric Service Framework' will strengthen the capabilities of community eldercare agencies and primary care doctors in the early detection and management of psychogeriatric disorders.

