

Woman's Guide

Mind Your Body, The Straits Times (Thursday, 8 January 2009)

By Zureena Habib



-- PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Dr Chee is married to a doctor, 36, and they have two children aged two and seven. Psychiatry is very satisfying but also emotionally draining, she says.

I decided to specialise in women's emotional health because...

A woman's mind is fascinating as every woman is unique in her attitude and response to stress. There are issues that affect just women and there are issues that affect all but are coloured by the experience of being a woman.

I come across all types of cases from...

Women who are depressed or anxious during and after pregnancy, premenstrually and perimenopausally; women with gynaecological cancers and breast cancer; women with subfertility or pregnancy loss; women having difficulties with their significant relationships to women experiencing abuse.

If I were to give an analogy for what I do, I'd be a...

Good guidebook in a foreign land. I can help make sense of where you are and offer opinions on what to do, but where you end up going would ultimately be your choice.

A typical day for me would be...

To see patients as part of our Women's Emotional Health Service, which sees women from all walks of life, as well as to supervise psychiatric trainees.

Patients who get my goat are...

Those who refuse to see that they may be having a part to play in the problem at hand.

One little known fact about psychiatry is...

It can be extremely satisfying but also draining emotionally. So good psychiatrists have to be excellent practitioners at looking after their own mental health too.

Things that put a smile on my face are...

When a patient comes back reporting that she is feeling much better and that it is showing in all her interactions with important people in her life.

It breaks my heart when...

Children suffer when their mother is depressed or when a marriage is strained. Depression can have a profound effect on parent-child bonding and emotional development.

I often see adults who had difficult childhoods that have contributed to their current difficulties. This often makes me wish that I could have intervened earlier and helped their mothers when my patients were still young rather than try to repair the damage many years down the road.

Of course fathers and the extended families are crucial as well. However, in our society, mothers are still by and large the primary caregivers.

I wouldn't trade places for the world because...

It is extremely rewarding being able to make a difference to my patients' lives. I have never had a boring day.

My best tip...

Ask yourself: 'What have I done for myself today to help me feel and act my best?'