

Cross Cultural Newsletter

1st October 2013

Dear Members

Last Tuesday was a memorable day. More than 36 of our Members braved driving wind and rain to come and listen to our speaker. Our organisers were more than moved.

The subject was on “**Promoting the Mental Health of Senior Asian Immigrants through Occupation**” The speaker was **Dr Shoba Nayar**, an Occupational Therapist, Senior Lecturer at AUT and the Associate Director of the Centre for Migrant and Refugees. She presented the findings from her recent research on the above topic. More importantly, she demonstrated how research data could be put into practice by the development of grounding construct (theory).

Shoba’s talk was divided into two parts: her research methods and findings, and how such findings could be put into practice. Rising Asian population of the older people has sparked off the needs for research into an area with a dearth of knowledge on how best to help them to maintain health. Unlike a few handfuls of previous research in this area which dealt mainly with negative factors, Shoba addressed the issues how the majority cope successfully with both aging and being migrants. By so doing Shoba expected to establish a grounding construct (theory) and from there to evolve practical ways to help the older people to find their feet.

She then described the methodology, recruitment of subjects, the demographics of these older people and the research findings. I shall not bother you with the details but suffice to say that the subjects included 74 older people between 60-83 with almost equal sex and ethnic distributions among three groups of Koreans, Chinese, and Indians. The data was collected through focus group discussions and subsequently subjected to an in-depth analysis. (Those interested in the details, please send for the DVD). In short, Shoba found that active community involvement is the key element that makes the subjects thrive.

More significantly, involvement does not only limit to their own communities but also includes contributions to mainstream society in activities such as volunteering, tree planting and participating in festivities and choir performances for others. These findings do seem to be in keeping with the theory that occupation contributes to mental health.

Next, Shoba turned her attention to the translation of research knowledge into

practice. She showed the audience an intermediate step that facilitates such a translation by the devise of a construct, or a theoretical framework to conceptualise and guide the implementation of a programme for the older population. From the analysis of how the research population adapt to migration and aging, Shoba established a core construct (theory) underlying these successful adjustments (or a schema in CBT terms) viz. the strengthening of community sense.

There are various components affecting the development of community sense viz by achieving community connectedness and contributing to society through development of community responsibilities and responsiveness. Having deliberated on these key factors, Shoba then discussed the strategies to realise and strengthen the penultimate community sense.

The strategies include resourcing community through resourcing oneself; uniting minds to work together as a group; and not least important, the laying of a foundation (or platform) from which the above strategies could be launched (i.e. Formal planning is more important than ad hoc practice.)

In the area of resourcing oneself (i.e. learning new skills to develop oneself), Shoba suggested the audience to ask older persons exploratory questions such as what actually would s/he like to participate in; what skills are necessary; and what activities has s/he previously been involved in? In the area of resourcing the community, the relevant exploratory questions would be what forum and how seniors might share their knowledge in their adjustment?

As to uniting minds (and people), Shoba suggested identifying people’s skills and personality structures to allow them to occupy various roles that are commensurate with their abilities. More importantly, one also needs to create suitable environments that would bring people together, especially outside the family. In this latter case, the most important one is to consider how the environment could be constructed as to allow older people to perform their differing skills and thus feel useful and belonged.

Lastly, Shoba emphasised the need for creation of a proverbial platform for the above strategies to be launched i.e. the formation of an orderly plan. Activities launched ad hoc often lack the cohesiveness of orderly planned ones.

In concluding, Shoba found in her research that a key ingredient of older migrants, mental health is through occupation (aka activities) from which they

could enhance their sense of belongingness (and connectedness) to the community (both their own ethnic ones and the wider one).

To turn the research findings into practice, Shoba suggested the forming of a core construct to guide the implementation of strategies to achieve community connectedness. In order to be successful, one must work together with the older population. Samples of exploratory questions to help the older person to develop strategies are as highlighted above.

Much appreciation was expressed by the audience to Shoba’s work. By her zealous presentation, despite the foul and chilly weather, Shoba had kindled fire in our hearts. I especially appreciate a remark that Shoba quoted from the Korean subjects “Working to re-pay New Zealand”. This fits in nicely with the East Asian virtue on the duty to “return the favour given to us by others.” I have invited Shoba to talk to our members at C’pa Day Centre for the Older People to help them to plan for next year’s activities.

I must stress that the above is my own limited understanding of the presentation. For a more accurate rendition of the presentation, please request the DVD from Diane Evans at dianee@adhb.govt.nz - please send a \$2 stamp to help cover costs.

HIGHLIGHT OF NEXT MEETING

We have a break for October and shall resume again on the last Thursday of November. Our invited speaker will be **Mr Bruce Fisher, Clinical Psychologist**. His topic will be on “**Critical Health Psychology**” recounting his experience working across cultures. Please look out for the flyer at end of October.

Lastly, thank you once again for turning up at our meeting last week despite the bad weather. Your zest is much appreciated!!

On behalf of the Cross Cultural Interest Group, I must also thank **Jannsen Cilag NZ** for providing us with such delicious food for the evening.

I look forward to seeing you all at our next meeting in November.

On behalf of the Cross Cultural Group
S Wong

**Preview of
next session**

Next Meeting:

“Critical Health Psychology”

NOVEMBER

Thursday 28th, 2013