

Event WAD

Laughter, chatter, excitement, presentations, open discussions, dancing and oh! laughter again, are the words that come to mind as I recall the World Arthritis Day (WAD) celebrated on 18th October 2014, at the Swan Convention Centre, Sunway Medical Centre. People came from far and near, some regulars and some first-timers. Regardless, they all went back with greater awareness and skills to manage arthritis better. Some of those who attended even vowed never to miss a WAD event!

The session began with an opening address by Dr. Amir Azlan Zain, President of AFM. This was followed by a talk on "Osteoarthritis and Falls in Older People" by Assoc. Prof Dr. Tan Maw Pin. She cautioned, that even after joint replacement surgery, one was still prone to falls. But she

recommended exercise intervention as a means to improve balance and to reduce the likelihood of falls. According to her, "The key to reducing falls is to improve balance. So while exercises such as strength training, walking, running, cycling were all beneficial, Tai chi was shown to improve balance quite significantly."

Enthusiastic participants led through a stretching session.



An overview of the participants at WAD 2014.



Chu Ai Reen, Occupational therapist showing-off some arthritis-friendly aids.



PRACTICAL TIPS TO MANAGING ARTHRITIS SYMPTOMS

The afternoon sessions literally rocked with merriment and even dancing! It began on a high note with Chu Ai Reen, Occupational Therapist, Hospital Tuanku Jaafar Seremban. With her presentation, "Achieving Functional Independence through Occupational Therapy", and her cheerful manner, she kept the audience engaged and entertained. Her take home message was while "doctors save your life, physiotherapists help you walk, occupational therapists give you more; teach you to dance and perform on the stage of life!" She shared very practical tips with the audience, "Respect your pain. Divide your load, divide your tasks. While carrying a bag, hang it on your shoulder as opposed to using a hook grasp with your fingers which might put added

strain on your finger joints. Ensure it is not too heavy. While cooking, place all the ingredients that you need nearby so that you don't have to keep walking up and down the kitchen. And sit and cook if necessary!"

She also had the audience in splits as she displayed several aids that she recommended to her patients to help their everyday lives. Even if they didn't get any of them, she urged them to consider getting at least, "A non-slip mat as it is very handy and could help prevent falls in the bathroom. Utensils too could be placed on it in the kitchen, to ensure that they don't run away."

BLOOD PRESSURE AND FALLS

Dr. Tan discussed the relationship between blood pressure and falls. She said that a drop in blood pressure could be responsible for falls and this is one of the lesser known risk factors of blood pressure medication. "Blood pressure medication is a double-edged sword. While it is certainly needed to reduce the risk of having a stroke, it must be constantly monitored. One of the major side-effects of blood pressure medication is the risk of blood pressure dropping. This is also why we are in the process of educating general practitioners to take blood pressure readings standing up. If it is low, there is a greater likelihood of falling".

Another very interesting question that came up was an enquiry into which muscles were weak as a result of which the falls occur. Dr. Tan elaborated that, "It was the limb-girdle muscles that connected the hip joints to the rest of the body that needed to be strengthened. Exercise routines for that included standing up and sitting on a chair as well as stepping up and down on the stairs."

ROLE OF A MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKER

This was followed by a talk by Puan Nor Anida Nawawi on "Psychosocial Issues in Managing Arthritis: The Role of a Medical Social Worker". In her calm and gentle manner, she first educated the audience on what the role of a medical social worker was as most people had no clue. She explained that it was a sub-discipline of social work and their objective was to "help patients solve problems which directly or indirectly affect their medical condition while in hospital. The emotional impact of Arthritis pain survey conducted in UK found that 3 in 5 people with Arthritis were depressed. 50% of the respondents feel helpless and 85% of respondents feel people close to them don't understand their pain."

They also sought to reduce the financial burden to the patient and their family as sometimes patients default treatment and stop taking medication due to lack of money. So they offer counseling and stress management techniques, financial aid on a case-by-case basis, do home visits, refer to other NGO's; in short everything required to provide them with tools and the confidence to improve their quality of life. Thus at the end of the session, the audience realized the key role of medical social workers and were left with a deep appreciation for the work that they do.

Puan Nor Anida Nawawi explaining the role of a medical social worker.



ASK FOR EVIDENCE, DON'T BE DUPED

The session, "Arthritis Matters", by Dr. Amir Azlan Zain and Dr. Sargunan Sockalingam would surely rank as one of the most memorable sessions. It was hilarious with the duo doing something akin to an impromptu stand-up comedy act. They had the audience rolling with laughter as they kidded each other on stage but yet managed to discuss and clear some seriously ingrained misconceptions. They cautioned the audience about going to untried and untested treatments that is advertised on the internet or just recommended by friends.

They also explained the stringent regulations that western drugs had to go through before they could gain US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) clearance. Explained Dr. Amir, "it takes close to some 15 years and millions of dollars before they get approval. Strength of evidence is vital!" They also cautioned people going for the buzz words in today's line of treatment like stem cell treatment. Dr. Amir asked the audience, "Did you know that your immune system would be completely wiped out? That new immunity would be injected?" He then elaborated the down sides of the treatment, which includes, "30% chance of succumbing to infection, picking up new diseases, uncertainty regarding the source of stem cells, the high cost of the treatment." He made his case stating, "I don't understand why you have to pay so much for experimental treatment?"

Dr. Sargunan wound up the session on a philosophical note saying that, "Disease is a part and parcel of life. We have to prepare ourselves with a very positive attitude. Tell yourself, 'I can deal with it'"

Dr. Amir Azlan Zain, President AFM emphasizing a point.



"You should have good evidence that it works. Anecdotal evidence or word-of-mouth is just not enough. When people tell you something, don't just believe it! We don't want you to be duped. If something is too good to be true, it probably is!"
~ Dr. Amir warned

Mr. C. Shivanandha, Chairman, Arthritis Fund.

