



Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean (centre) at a 4.8km walk to mark World Mental Health Day. WEE TECK HIAN

How the rat race plays on the mind

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LIFE in the fast lane is not without its pitfalls: As more Singaporeans get caught up in the rat race, medical practitioners have noticed that a significant number have developed mental illnesses typical to developed societies.

In fact, Dr Lee Cheng – vice-president of mental health advocacy group, the Silver Ribbon Project – estimates that at least “one in five people suffer the symptoms” commonly associated with depression or anxiety disorder.

A person suffering a major depressive episode experiences low moods and may also harbour feelings of worthlessness, regret or hopelessness.

“They may not be serious enough to affect a person’s work performance or social life but a lot of people have the symptoms (and) this is an increasing trend,” said Dr Cheng yesterday at Hougang Mall.

He was speaking at an event commemorating World Mental Health Day, which

was first observed on Oct 10 in 1992, and which is aimed at raising public awareness about mental health issues.

In keeping with this year’s theme of “making mental health a priority”, the event aims to combat the stigma of mental illness through increased awareness and understanding, so that early treatment can be encouraged.

Noting that more people in Singapore “die from suicides than road accidents every year”, Dr Cheng said the key to change is helping to nurture a caring society.

“People who suffer from mental illnesses may not be able to take care of themselves, but that does not mean they are dangerous – that is a misconception,” he said.

The guest of honour, Mr Teo Chee Hean, said getting the general public clued in on mental illnesses is crucial as “modern life brings a lot of stresses for Singaporeans”.

Said the Defence Minister: “It is only with a healthy mind and good mental health that we can enjoy living, so we can have a more satisfying life and better relationships with our families and (at the) workplace.”