

Like any other parent, Ms Tan Soek Keow feels a sense of relief, even joy, when the children recover and are well enough to return home and go back to school. Except that the children she talks about are not hers, but patients at the Sunrise Wing of the Institute of Mental Health (IMH).



of the window or pass it to other patients.

Soek Keow and her team moved the girl away from the window, and constantly reassured her that she was not eating too much. They observed her closely during meal times and after meals to make sure that she did not go to the toilet to forcibly throw up the food that she had taken. They also weighed her every day, and checked to make sure she did not hide any objects in her pocket that could add to the weight.

Their patience paid off. Slowly, the girl started eating better and regaining her weight. After three months, she was well enough to be discharged and go back to school.

Besides working with patients, another important aspect of Soek Keow's role is to work with parents and other caregivers. A mother herself, she understands their fears and the emotional turmoil that they are going through.

"Parents place a lot of hope and aspirations in their children and when the children are admitted, sometimes they feel that their hopes are dashed."

To allay their anxiety, she would have regular meetings with the parents, giving them feedback on their children's progress and encouraging

Think positively

Soek Keow is a Nurse Clinician at the Child and Adolescent Unit, which treats patients aged between nine and 18 years.

The majority of these patients suffer from emotional or behavioural problems that require professional medical help. "It may be a relationship problem, defiance, aggressiveness or stress, but those are often a manifestation of a deeper problem," she says. "It is a cry for help."

Soek Keow started working with children and adolescents about 17 years ago, and what began as "just another posting" soon grew into a deep love for the job.

In the course of her work, she comes across different patients, different personalities, and different challenges.

Soek Keow recalls the case of a 15-year-old girl who was suffering from anorexia. During meal times, the patient would either throw her food out

them to continue to hope for their recovery.

Be it parents or patients, her philosophy is never to avoid a difficult situation. "During our daily work, we meet people from all walks of life. Some have higher expectations. All the more we must engage them, communicate with them to see what their needs are and find out how we can help them... You must always think positively and say 'I can!'," she says.

Teamwork is key. "The whole team must work together – doctors, nurses, psychologists, medical social workers and occupational therapists. We must know the patients well and work cohesively to provide consistent care."

Underpinning this care is passion, commitment and her love for the job. Her reward comes when the patients recover and return to their families or go back to school. "That is what really brings us joy," she says. ♦