

## THEIR LOVE WAS TESTED TO THE LIMIT

In 2004, Dr Rita Goh's husband, Mr Vincent Loy, returned from an overseas trip to find his wife behaving oddly.

In an e-mail interview, Dr Goh, 51, who founded and heads a company which provides counselling services for people with mental health issues, said: "I was rolling about and pressing my head to the floor."

Shocked and worried, Mr Loy immediately called an ambulance. What he did not know then was that his wife was suffering from schizophrenia, a severe and disabling brain disease which usually hits people in their teens and early 20s, and is often a life-long problem.

Dr Goh, who received a PhD in Business Administration just before her mental illness, was later also diagnosed with clinical depression.

Although her mental illness was eventually brought under control with medication and psychotherapy, her struggle highlights some of the unique challenges faced by marriages in which one or both parties suffer from a mental illness.

While the primary effects of a mental illness itself may be debilitating, this difficulty is exacerbated when both parties do not approach it with the same perspective.

"My husband felt that it was a spiritual issue and that medication was unnecessary. On the other hand, my belief was that it was a medical problem and treatment was key to my recovery. The contrast in our beliefs led to many arguments," she said.

However, they eventually compromised and came to the understanding that in addition to religious beliefs, taking medication was vital to Dr Goh's health.

Another problem she faced was discrimination from friends and relatives. As some of them did not understand what schizophrenia was, they started to shun her.

"We try our best to educate people, telling them for example, that the majority of mentally ill people are not dangerous or violent," she said.

Dr Goh said that although her mental illness was a trying period, her marriage was an invaluable source of encouragement and strength.

"Our love has been tested to the limit through many crises, but I'm glad to say that our relationship remains as strong as ever."

Lisabel Ting

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Rita Goh