



Dermatological Society of Malaysia **Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia (PDM)**

KULIT – Living with Psoriasis PDM Campaign 2007

(Article 5 – 'I' – Interaction)

Interacting with the world – despite psoriasis

This six-part KULIT article series by the Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia aims to raise awareness of psoriasis. In this fifth article, PDM President Dr Allan K C Yee highlights ways in which people with psoriasis can gain – and also give – support to achieve a better quality of life.

With psoriasis, even shaking hands with others can be a big problem. Nevertheless, interacting and connecting with others are essential for a normal healthy life. A person with psoriasis should not attempt to cope alone, and they are not alone. This article explains why.

However, even before we explore our interaction with the outside world, we should first get in touch with our inner self. We need to accept ourselves before we can be fully accepted by others in any relationship. Persons with psoriasis, especially if it begins at a younger age, tend to have acquired a negative self-image. We need to re-program negative scripts and affirm our intrinsic self-worth. This is not too difficult in a culture that assumes a loving creator, but even with a non-religious world-view, it is difficult to argue against the beauty and intelligence of an ordered creation, and we are that special creation. We are to rejoice in it. To paraphrase Rick Warren, author of the best seller, 'Purpose-Driven Life'... "if life is a test (and if psoriasis is our test), then we shall not fail this test." Indeed many psoriasis sufferers have passed their tests with flying colours, many of them captains of industry and leaders in society.

After we have re-programmed our internal software (positive internal scripts), we are now ready for the world wide web of enriching interactions.

Professional interactions

Psoriasis support starts with your doctor. Talk to your doctor about your symptoms and progress. By sharing information with your doctor, you will be able to work towards achieving your treatment goals – and a better quality of living with psoriasis.

For those seen in the Dermatology Department in Hospital Kuala Lumpur, there is also a counseling service support for new patients with psoriasis.

Interactions with family

Your family and friends are also vital sources of support. They are the ones who know you as the individual that you are, and accept you for who you are.

Make sure you share your understanding of psoriasis with them so they can help make your life easier – bring them along to support group meetings or retreats. Knowledge about psoriasis



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empowers all concerned to help manage it better.

For parents of children with psoriasis, it is essential to help them cope with difficulties in school relationships, bullies, school activities, and teachers. There must be a healthy balance of sheltering from negative events without removing the child from much needed social interactions with peers and friends. Lots of love and affirmation is also warranted to prevent negative self-image from taking root. Although there is no cure yet, treatments are getting better and safer, and it is vital to transfer this optimism and hope to the child.

Interactions with acquaintances and co-workers

Once you accept yourself, you can be quite matter-of-fact about having psoriasis. After all, it's no big deal and does not diminish your worth as an individual. Once they know that psoriasis is not contagious, and that you are comfortable with yourself, normal relationships should ensue.

Interactions with fellow psoriasis sufferers

There are many benefits in being part of a local support group such as the Psoriasis Association of Selangor and Federal Territory. (PASFT)

The PASFT, set up in 1987, is one of the most active support groups in Malaysia. It provides a community where people with psoriasis (or psoriatic arthritis), their families, and caregivers can comfortably share their experiences with people who understand.

PASFT has three-fold goals:

1. To increase public awareness and acceptance of psoriasis
2. To provide continuing education and information to persons with psoriasis
3. To provide a support group for persons with psoriasis and their families

The PASFT under its current president Eugene Cross is an enthusiastic lot and is always on the lookout for the latest information on psoriasis. It has two voluntary medical advisors, dermatologists Dr Allan K C Yee & Gangaram Hemandas to help them to realize their 3 goals. They help organize continuing medical education (CME) meetings and to advise on the many new offerings that unsurprisingly come their way. Some of these are harmless fad 'cures', but others are not. A few years ago, a foreign "specialist" tried to promote his bath therapy but was not allowed to address PASFT as we were not convinced of the treatment's safety and efficacy. Sadly, it took one death from a non-PASFT member from this treatment, and the deportation of this "specialist" before we were rid of yet another "cure" for psoriasis.

PASFT holds a public CME talk at least once a year in conjunction with its AGM. This is a good time for everyone to meet and be updated on the latest advances and to address any medical issues with the medical advisors. There is usually good sharing and fellowship. On one retreat some years ago, the guest speaker, a psychologist taught members of PASFT an effective stress-release technique called 'progressive muscle relaxation' (PMR) and members found it helpful especially when their psoriasis trigger factor is stress. See www.guidetopsychology.com/pmr.htm as an example of how to go about doing PMR for psoriasis or for any other stress-related problem.

The PASFT is also affiliated to the US-based National Psoriasis Foundation (NPF), one of the



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largest psoriasis resource groups in the world, and with its permission, PASFT sends out a bulletin with NPF articles to PASFT's 1,600 odd members throughout Malaysia.

Psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis affect people of all ages, races and backgrounds. PASFT helps Malay-speaking members by providing them with a booklet on psoriasis from the National Psoriasis Foundation USA which has been translated into Bahasa Malaysia.

Interaction with the online community

In today's technological age, you can meet with like-minded folks online in internet forums without getting out of your chair. However, we cannot vouch for the accuracy of the information provided on internet forums and one has to beware of the commercial agenda behind some of these forums or chat rooms. Be especially cautious of any promises of 'cure'. Psoriasis has a genetic basis, so there is no way to cure psoriasis since scientists have not yet found a safe way to alter our genes.

We would suggest that anyone wishing to go online to find out more about psoriasis access our local website, or the recommended links below for accurate and reliable information. If you have benefited from being part of a support group, have someone in your family with psoriasis and would like to help others, why not join the PASFT and share your experience with others. Or if you reside outside the Klang Valley, why not start a support group where you live. Let us know how we can help you get started.

Psoriasis: support sources The Psoriasis Association of Selangor and Federal Territory (PASFT) can be reached via phone (03-8948 4335), email (psoriasisassn@hotmail.com) and regular mail (1 Jalan 14/2C, Taman Serdang Utama, Sri Kembangan, 43300 Selangor). They can be found on the Net as a link within the Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia website www.dermatology.org.my

If there is no support group near you, consider locating one on the Net and becoming a "virtual" member. And don't forget to regularly update yourself with information on sites such as:

- National Psoriasis Foundation (USA) www.psoriasis.org
- Psoriasis Association of UK <http://www.psoriasis-association.org.uk/>
- International Foundation of Psoriasis Associations <http://www.ifpa-pso.org/t1.aspx>
- American Academy of Dermatology <http://www.skincarephysicians.com/psoriasisnet/>

If you are part of a local support group that is not listed here, do send an email to kulitcampaign@yahoo.com to inform us of your existence.

Psoriasis affects 2-3 percent of Malaysians. This is the fifth of a six-part series from PDM's "KULIT – Living with Psoriasis" Campaign 2007. For more on psoriasis, treatment options and KULIT, visit www.dermatology.org.my or email kulitcampaign@yahoo.com. This article is a guide to help you better understand psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Consult a suitably qualified medical practitioner before acting on any information contained above. KULIT is a community programme sponsored by Wyeth Malaysia.