

Chatbot to help poly students with Covid stress

Institutes tapping technology, upping support structures to aid mental wellness

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Institutes of higher learning are implementing various socio-emotional measures in addition to existing ones to help students with their mental well-being during these unprecedented times.

Temasek Polytechnic (TP) and Republic Polytechnic (RP) have piloted the use of Wysa, an artificial intelligence-based mental health chatbot app, for students as a resource.

The bot is a virtual coach that responds to the emotions the student expresses. It uses evidence-based cognitive behavioural techniques, dialectical behaviour therapy, meditation, breathing, motivational interviewing, and micro-actions to help students build mental resilience skills and to feel better.

In a joint response by the two polytechnics, they said the application reduces any perceived help-seeking stigma that students may have, as the conversations are anonymous and they will not feel “judged” by a bot.

However, this application cannot be used for crises such as abuse and mental health conditions or any other medical emergencies, as Wysa does not offer



The Wysa app is a virtual coach that responds to the emotions the student expresses. PHOTO: TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC

medical or clinical advice.

Mr Samuel Wee, director of student support and career services at TP, told The New Paper: “We are keeping a vigilant eye on the challenges that students might face, such as adjustment issues when students transition back to campus, concerns about future employment opportunities, and financial issues for families impacted by the economic downturn.”

To ensure students are well supported during this time, Mr Wee said various support structures and programmes have

been put in place, such as regular check-ins by tutors, referral of students in need for assistance, counselling and financial assistance, and making e-programmes on self-care and resilience-building available.

Ms Jacqueline Toh, RP’s senior manager and trained counsellor, office of student support, said: “Students are also provided with self-help resources to learn about mental wellness, including webinars which are organised regularly, and downloadable resources.”

National University of Singapore’s Office of Student Affairs produced a video describing the principles of self-care to help students better cope with Covid-related stress.

The three-minute video was screened during freshmen orientation and has been made available on its website.

An NUS spokesman said it anticipates students, especially freshmen, to feel some anxiety about adapting to online learning and the academic workload. Given the Covid-19 situation, lower levels of social interaction may also affect students’ usual access to support from friends.

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