

Providing culturally responsive mental health care during COVID-19 and beyond

VIGNETTES

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Abdul

You are a GP who has referred Abdul, a 51 year old Afghan plane arrival, to his local community mental health clinic for assessment for depression and anxiety. You are aware of the clinic's six month waiting list; your efforts to contact the visiting psychiatrist to try and fast track the referral have not been successful due to her increased workload as a result of COVID-19.

Abdul has been in Melbourne for 26 months on a Bridging Visa A. Abdul's plan for his wife and five children, who currently remain in Afghanistan, to come to Australia when his protection claim is determined is taking much longer than anticipated.

Abdul consistently confides in you that *'my God will prevail'*, however you are concerned about his increasing agitation and anxiety for the health and safety of his wife and children back home due to COVID-19; his increasing anger and frustration regarding the time it is taking for his protection claim to be processed; and his increasing despondency that the plan to reunite family may not come to fruition. He is losing weight and complaining of sleeplessness and you worry that his decline in mood is impacting his health.

Lian

You are a psychiatry registrar working in a public community mental health clinic, grappling with how to provide effective treatment and support to Lian, a refugee from Myanmar of Chin ethnicity. In your last supervision session, you realised that you no longer have confidence in your usual repository of tips and strategies.

Lian was referred to you by her GP for treatment of post-natal depression. Lian is a first time mother to a six month old baby girl. Her husband works full time regularly undertaking 12 hour shifts at the local meatworks. Lian was attending a local mothers' group but stopped after an outbreak of COVID-19 infections at another meatworks resulted in tightening of lockdown restrictions and, *'all the mothers, they looked at me differently after that'*.

Lian has become increasingly isolated – she spends most of her time at home. As the household does not have the internet she struggles to keep in contact with her and her husband's Myanmar based family. She lacks confidence in her parenting and often admits to, *'not feeling good enough to be a mother'*. Lian is non-compliant with her medication

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instead sharing that your, *'understanding'* is all she needs. As a first time mother yourself you are aware of the challenges in becoming a mum but feel uncomfortable when Lian reiterates her position; she wants to continue seeing you but isn't willing, *'to take pills'*. *'My pain cannot be fixed with pills. But your warmth makes me feel better'*.

Phuong

You are a psychologist working at **headspace**. You've just seen Phuong, a 19 year old, second generation Vietnamese man who lives at home with his parents and grandparents. Phuong presented without an appointment requesting to see a psychologist, *'for help in giving me my freedom'*.

Phuong is receiving Job Keeper payments after he lost his casual employment at McDonalds. After the long and strict state government imposed lockdown he is ready to *'have some fun'*. He describes his mother as always having been strict (*'she worried that my western friends were going to led me to drugs and alcohol'*) but since COVID-19 she has become even stricter due to her anxiety about the risk of infection to her elderly parents and in-laws. He admits their relationship has become volatile claiming the stress of which has led him on several occasions recently to take, *'meth with some mates, and for the first time I didn't feel different, I felt the same'*.