

## eCPR, Singapore and Synthesis By Sam Ahrens, eCPR Trainer

In October 2012, twenty-five people participated in a four-day eCPR facilitation training in Singapore. The training was funded by Singapore's Association for Integrated Care and organized and sponsored by the Singapore Association of Mental Health in connection with World Mental Health Day. The training was conducted by Daniel Fisher, Sam Ahrens, co-trainer, and by Jenny Speed, Sharon Stocker and Vinay Nair, apprentice facilitators from Australia.

As we planned our training for Singapore, we were mindful and curious about the part culture would play. We learned a bit about Singapore on our own, and talked with some of the organizers about cultural norms and expectations we needed to consider. At the same time, we felt sure that eCPR, with its values of openness, respect and curiosity, would allow us to share and connect and learn from each other. Here, through excerpts from presentations made by training participants, are a few snapshots of the journey. A huge and heartfelt thank you to our Singapore hosts! You have touched our hearts with your generosity and hospitality, and your sharing has enriched our lives more than we can say.

**聽** tīng, "to listen"

Ting is a Chinese word for listening. Written in Chinese characters, tīng draws the symbols for ear, eyes and heart together as one. This one word, shared with us during the course of the training, reflects the synthesis that was one of the great gifts of our experience in Singapore. The interchange of words, ideas and experiences led us to fresh insights and new connections. Toward the end of an emotional CPR facilitation training, participants take on the role of facilitators and demonstrate eCPR facilitation skills through team presentations. For the trainers, these presentations are like a magic mirror, where the content and process of our training is reflected back. And yet, as each person adds their insight and experience, it evolves into something richer and deeper. Ting is one such an addition. Introduced to us through two of the presenters, tīng offered us a glimpse into Singapore culture. The dimension added through this word deepens our understanding of what listening is. Ting became part of the language of our group during the training, and has become part of eCPR as a whole. Similarly, the word *journey* now has an added depth of meaning for us. Throughout the training, *journey* was used as a verb, carrying with it a subtle but distinct connotation of togetherness that we felt as we journeyed together.

### **“When My Heart Say Yes, I Say Yes”**

One presenter offers her experience of connection: “I follow my heart: When my heart says yes, I say yes; when my heart says no, I say no.” Shared this way, connecting with another

clearly begins with connecting to ourselves. Enlarging on this, the presenters link the capacity for compassion with the ability to be genuine. Speaking authentically has the ability “to soothe.” And yet, heart-to-heart communication can be radically different from the way we often relate. As one presenter put it, “Before you step into the room, you have to unlearn everything.” This leads to conversation on how eCPR can be understood as a process of unlearning. Someone asks if you need to suppress your own feelings when providing eCPR. The answer is no; in contrast to approaches where helpers try to be objective and neutral, the basis of eCPR is genuine emotional exchange. A participant observes that this unlearning process that may initially feel “unnatural” if we are not used to sharing when we support someone. A presenter adds that it takes personal bravery for her to share her own experience, but she feels that the trust built through sharing makes it worth the risk. As one participant expresses it, as the unlearning process unfolds, “eCPR allows you to find your authentic self.”

### **“You are right, but the other person is not wrong”**

Presenters emphasize the value of dialogue, and demonstrate it by engaging in a dialogue on what it is and why it’s important. Having respect for differences, one presenter points out, can be especially important in Singapore because, culturally, anything that differs from family norms may be seen as wrong. Respect and openness for all views are key concepts in dialogue, as shown by the remark: “You are right, but the other person is not wrong.” Dialogue calls for us to be aware of what is not being said; we need to “listen out to the silent parts” of someone’s communication. Dialogue also encompasses what we all have in common. As one woman puts it, “In order to connect, we have to let go of the façade of superficial differences and connect on the basis of our shared humanity.”

### **“When we take care of ourselves, we know who we are and where we are”**

Participants embrace the ethic of self-care; the entire group is happy to incorporate a guided meditation (internal eCPR) into our daily schedule. They share ways to build self-care into daily routines. One important element in self-care is being “congruent with self” which several people describe as, “knowing who you are and where you are.” This level of self-care and congruence is a pre-requisite for providing eCPR: “Until you do this, you can’t journey with the person you are supporting.”

### **“Don’t push me the tissue paper too soon”**

While acknowledging the social norms and constraints that made it difficult, presenters clearly see great value in supporting the expression of strong feelings: “Learning to be with the strong feelings is the essence of eCPR.” The ability to do this is also related to belief that even in crisis, people are fundamentally whole. Far from needing to be fixed, they can be supported to find their own answers. As one woman puts it, “Trying to be a savior is distressing for me and for them.”

### **“Can I add something about equality?”**

Presenters find many ways to embody the eCPR value of shared power. “If a person is on the floor,” shares one participant, “sit on the floor, so that you are on par with them.” They

point that symbols of social status can affect how people perceive us, and affect our ability to connect with each other: “Starbucks, jewelry --- we have to be sensitive to the statements they make.” One presenter talks about status in terms of “hats” and said that eCPR needs to be “hats down – even fancy hats.” Another woman brings up that many people she works with have had more than their share of power struggles: “We shouldn’t be adding to this,” she says.

### **“Mutual Benefit”**

Comparing eCPR with conventional clinical approaches, presenters point to some advantages of ECPR. As one presenter says, “planning should flow,” and because eCPR is based on a connection that is natural and not calculated,” it supports a natural planning process. More “objective” approaches tend to be “structured around a certain purpose.” Because empowerment is central to eCPR, the goals of the person are supported, and at the same time, dialogue opens up a “middle way” of “mutual agreement.” The element of mutuality is seen as a distinctive difference in eCPR, which “allows us to be very honest about what is the benefit, the mutual benefit.” One presenter likens revitalization in eCPR to a “fountain,” and talks about how different it is from the experience of a doctor looking at a computer and taking notes while he meets with someone.

### **“Connecting transcends everything”**

The image of a fountain captures something of the synergy and flow of the training as a whole. Asked to sum up the impact of eCPR in a few words, participants offer: “life-giving” . . . “new energy” . . . “refreshment –fully recharged” . . . “clear, unclouded, fresh.” One man talks about eCPR as a paradigm shift, and shares a story about a business project in another country. When he was struggling to understand the view of a local man who objected to the project, the man told him, “Listen to the voice of my heart.” For him, this saying reflects the shift we make with emotional CPR. One participant says that, “Connection transcends everything.”

### **Future of eCPR in Singapore**

Over the four days of the training, in conversations during breaks and after sessions, we all talk about the development of eCPR in Singapore. Many people are excited about the prospect of eCPR training as a public health education program that can be taken into communities across Singapore. One woman sums up the vision in terms of its outcome: “The end goal is a community that is emotionally well, independent and resilient. Much of the answer is within ourselves.”