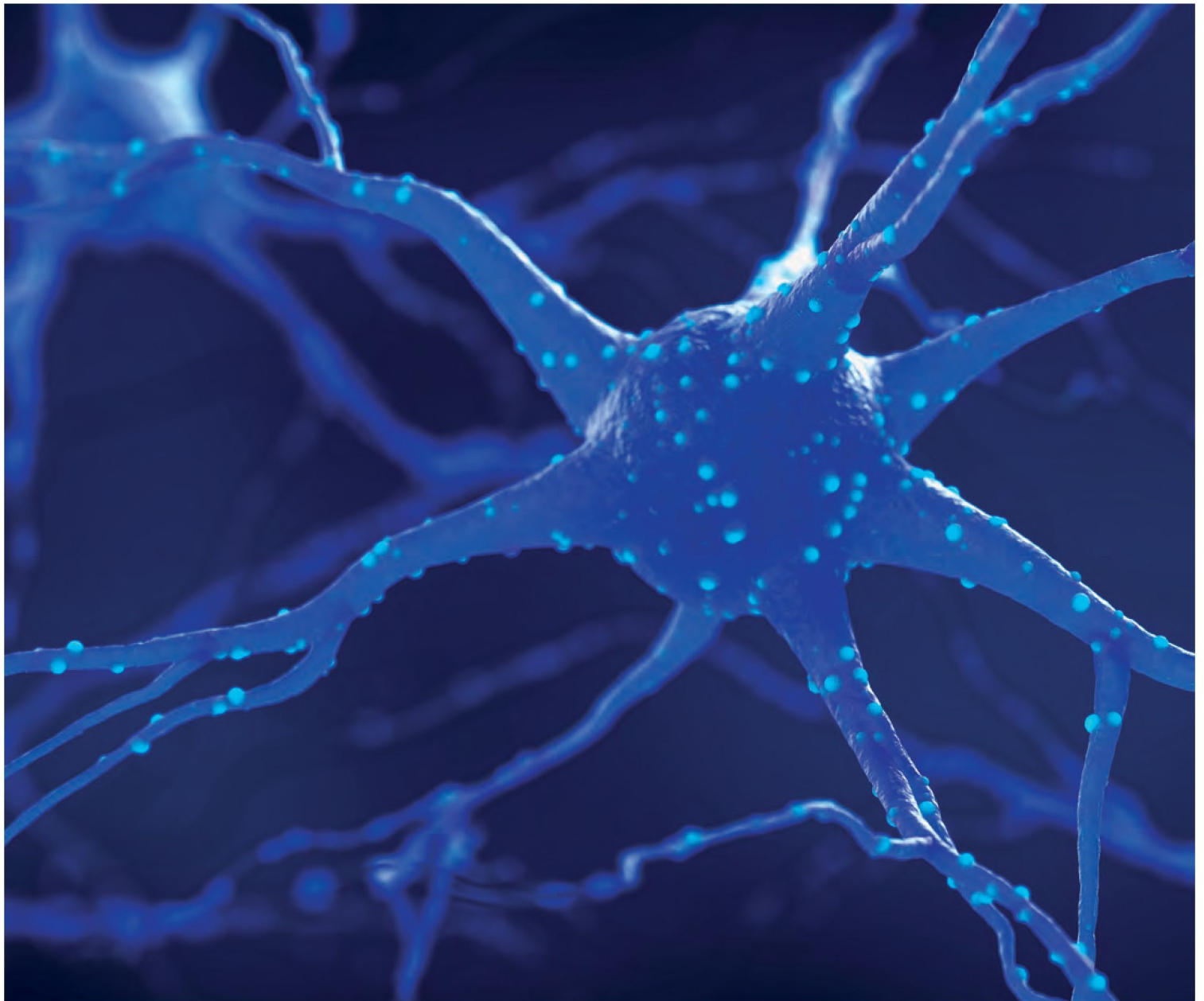


When it comes to mental health, the conversation often surrounds solutions to fix various prevailing issues. However, what about sustaining your mental health? Dr Sarah Rasmi, Founder of Thrive Wellbeing Centre, discusses techniques on how to maintain optimal mental health

# Mental Health,



# Mental Wealth

What inspired you to go into the wellness space? I started my career as a full-time psychology professor and researcher. During this time, I had many opportunities to connect with the community through various workshops, speaking engagements, and media opportunities. This is when I realized that my real interest lies in applying the science that I love so much. I took the decision to launch Thrive in 2018. I was the only psychologist for the first few months and was focused primarily on workshops and research consultancy. I started to grow my team and the clinic naturally evolved. We are now a total of fifteen practitioners – psychologists and psychiatrists, supported by a team of six administrators. We offer the full range of psychological services – therapy, assessments, learning and development, and research.

As an expert in the field of mental health, what do you find people struggle with the most? I would say that there are three primary struggles: anxiety, relationships and burnout.

The conversation surrounding mental health has certainly become more prevalent in recent years, but there's still a long way to go. What is your advice to combatting this? Mental health is like physical health. We want to focus on promoting it. We also want to ensure that any challenges are prevented – and if this is not possible, that intervention happens early. This requires a number of steps. The first is to raise awareness about various issues. We were very proud to partner with Dubai Science Park on a recent awareness campaign about depression and some of the symptoms that people can look out for. The next step is to reduce stig-

ma. One way to do this is to normalize talking about mental health and seeking support. There is no shame in seeking support and I am the first to admit that I personally see a therapist on a weekly basis. It doesn't make me – or anyone else getting support – weak or negative. The third step is related to the second one: quality support needs to be available. There is a shortage of qualified psychologists and psychiatrists here in the UAE and this means that it can be difficult to find the right match and meet with someone right away. Luckily, at Thrive, we have a diverse and relatively large team so we are able to address this.

Often when it comes to mental health, we tackle problems when they get far beyond our control. How can we sustain optimum mental health without getting to this point? The first step is to go back to basics. Getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising regularly can do wonders for our physical and mental health. It is also important that we nurture our social connections because they are a key driver of well-being, according to the Harvard Study of Adult Development. I also recommend making time to connect with ourselves – time alone to introspect, reflect, and engage in activities that are purposeful and meaningful can be incredibly healing. These are all preventative measures and coping strategies that we can use if we're struggling. That being said, sometimes we need professional support and that is ok too. It is ok to not be ok. We have good, evidence-based treatments available to help people overcome the challenges that they are facing. It's been a particularly tasking time for people over the last two years due to the pandemic.

What have you found people have struggled with the most? The primary struggles have not changed during the pandemic but there have been some nuanced shifts. For example, anxiety was the primary presenting problem in my experience with the community at Thrive. That hasn't changed but now the anxiety is more likely to be around health and social issues than it was before. In your opinion, what affect does social media have on our minds and how can we minimize the negative impact it can have? Social media has a number of benefits and a number of challenges. For example, it provides us with a space to connect with loved ones all over the world. It also provides us with an opportunity to express ourselves. At the same time, social media can disconnect us from people in our lives if we spend too much time on it. It can also be challenging because we only get access to other people's carefully curated lives. As a result, most of what is shared online is positive whereas our own lives are much more balanced. Sometimes, it is hard to remember that and we end up having unrealistic expectations of ourselves and feel poorly when we fail to meet them. That being said, I am so pleased to see that many content creators are showing a more balanced approach online. Two of my favourites are Helen Farmer and Dina Butti. I also try to do my part by sharing my own challenges and experiences in therapy. I struggled to do this at first because I am a private person by nature, but I realized that many people assumed that I had it all together because I am a psychologist. I want everyone to know that no one has it all together; not even the "experts" and that is ok.