

NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS



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Primary care is the bedrock of Singapore’s care transformation journey. For more than two decades, the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) has been working hard to achieve a future-ready primary care ecosystem, one that is sustainable, accessible, and effective in improving population health. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated NHGP to operate in a new norm of care, where innovation and technology are key to quality care for our patients while adhering closely to restrictions and safety measures.

CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19

Since COVID-19 was detected in Singapore, NHGP swiftly responded to, and remains dedicated to supporting the nation’s fight against the pandemic. The polyclinics took active measures to prevent and contain infection risk to staff and patients. Outside of the polyclinics, NHGP set up and managed different care facilities around Singapore.

Prevention and Containment of Infection

In response to COVID-19, NHGP swiftly implemented comprehensive safe distancing measures, deferred non-critical appointments, triaged and segregated patients into three colour zones – red, orange, and green. Possible suspect cases were isolated and managed in the red zone.

In line with the Ministry of Health’s (MOH) workflows, all patients who matched MOH’s suspect case definition, or had an acute respiratory infection, underwent a swab test. As of 31 March 2021, NHGP completed more than 96,000 Swab And Send Home (SASH) swabs at its six polyclinics. This enabled earlier diagnosis of patients, and also alleviated the swab workload at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) and hospital emergency departments.



Patients were triaged and segregated into colour zones to minimise COVID-19 transmission risk.



NHGP managed Forward Medical Posts in dormitories and cared for migrant workers.

Forward Medical Posts at Dormitories

NHGP set up and operated 14 Forward Medical Posts (FMP) in Purpose-Built-Dormitories (PBD) in Northern Singapore, caring for more than 50,000 migrant workers. The teams manning the medical posts comprised doctors and nurses. They provided triage services and clinical care, and conducted swab tests on migrant workers. Non-clinical staff supported the administration duties. These FMPs were handed over to private healthcare providers in September 2020.



Swab Isolation Facilities

NHGP led operations at four Swab Isolation Facilities (SIFs), which offered patients who were waiting for the results of their swab tests a safe space to self-isolate. The teams manning the SIFs comprised medical, nursing, allied health professionals (AHPs), and operations staff from NHGP, NHG HQ, and NHG Pharmacy, and they took care of close to 5,000 migrant workers.

Mass Swabbing Efforts

NHGP worked closely with NHG HQ to conduct mass swabbing operations. Two teams of NHGP dentists, care coordinators, nurses, AHPs, and administration staff took part in 100 mass swabbing missions for migrant workers. NHGP nurses also conducted Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) refresher briefings for non-clinical support staff, including SAF personnel, to ensure everyone was adequately equipped.



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COVID-19 Vaccination Operations

In January 2021, NHGP commenced COVID-19 vaccinations for its staff at all six polyclinics under Phase 1 of the National Vaccination Programme. While staff vaccinations continued, three polyclinics – Ang Mo Kio, Hougang and Woodlands – piloted COVID-19 vaccinations for external healthcare and frontline workers. On 27 January, Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic piloted COVID-19 vaccinations for seniors aged 70 and above as part of the national vaccination effort. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited the Polyclinic on the same day to observe COVID-19 vaccinations for 200 seniors.

In February, the remaining five polyclinics started to administer vaccinations. As of 31 March 2021, NHGP administered 56,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccinations to members of the public and staff.



ADVANCING TELEHEALTH SERVICES

Adapting to the new normal of delivering care, NHGP rolled out new/enhanced existing telehealth services in April 2020, including:

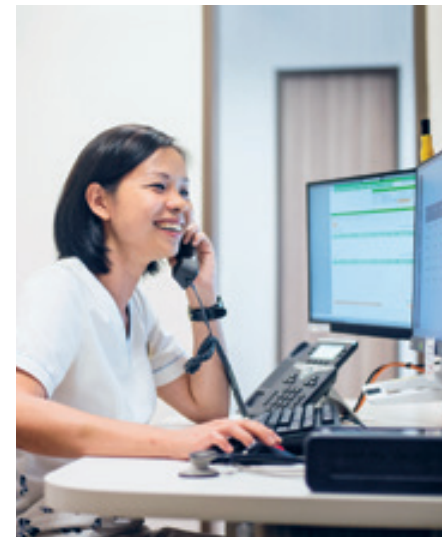
Teleconsultations (with Doctors)

The teamlet care model was extended beyond face-to-face consultations to encompass video sessions in view of safe distancing measures in the clinics. Patients with well-controlled chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol were offered the option of a video or phone consultation with a Family Physician instead of a visit to the polyclinic. The Family Physician would assess the patient's medical condition and review the results of the latest laboratory tests. For the medications prescribed, patients could have them delivered to their homes. As of 31 March 2021, NHGP conducted some 70,000 doctor-led teleconsultations.

A patient experience survey showed that 98 per cent had good overall experience with doctor-led teleconsultations, and 94.5 per cent expressed willingness to use this virtual mode of care again.

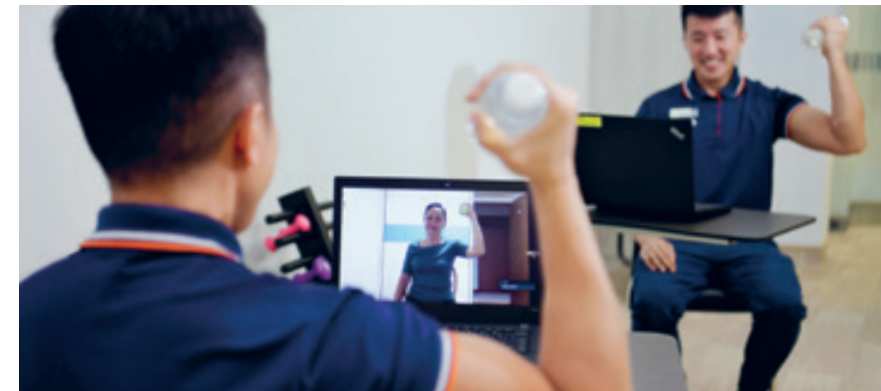


Telehealth services allowed patients to receive care at home, instead of visiting the polyclinic.



Teleconsultations (with Care Managers)

Patients with well-controlled chronic conditions could opt for a teleconsultation with a Care Manager instead of a visit to the polyclinic. The Care Manager would assess patients' home monitoring readings and adherence to medications, and keep track of recent hospitalisations and new symptoms reported by patients, if any. Medication refills could also be delivered to patients' homes.



Tele-Physiotherapy

Eligible patients with appointments for a physiotherapy review were offered a virtual therapy consultation with an NHGP physiotherapist. This gave patients convenient access to physiotherapy services in the comfort of their homes. The physiotherapist would observe patients' movements, and guide and prescribe exercises during the video consultation.

Tele-Psychology

Eligible patients ascertained through a pre-screening were offered this service to enable essential mental health support and timely interventions to be provided over the phone. This allowed patients to better manage depression, anxiety, insomnia or other stress-related problems, and facilitated early detection and risk management of their conditions. Patients with complex psychological issues continued with their face-to-face consultations.

Tele-Direct Observed Therapy (DOT)

NHGP was the first public healthcare institution to implement the Tele-DOT service to patients with tuberculosis. Available at its polyclinics since June 2020, patients who fulfilled the criteria set by the Tuberculosis Control Unit (TBCU) for Tele-DOT could substitute face-to-face DOT at polyclinics with a video consultation from a nurse, within the safety and convenience of their homes.

Tele-Dietetics

Patients with chronic conditions as well as paediatric patients with feeding and nutritional needs could receive dietetic consults via video calls with NHGP dietitians. Besides convenience and time-savings for patients, Tele-Dietetics also facilitated closer intervals between reviews, allowing the dietitians to introduce specific dietary interventions to patients in a timely manner, and according to their individual environments.



NGEMR GOES LIVE AT NHGP

In February 2021, Geylang Polyclinic's Next Generation Electronic Medical Record (NGEMR) system went "live", as part of MOH's IT Master Plan to deliver seamless and holistic care to patients. The other five clinics transited to the new system in May 2021.





“Many of our staff on the frontline worked tirelessly to contain the outbreak, be it at the polyclinics, or as part of teams deployed to provide medical support at the dormitories, Swab Isolation Facilities (SIFs), or mass swabbing missions. In knowingly putting themselves at risk to save lives and reduce the number of patients affected, they are our heroes. This strong team spirit and dedication demonstrated will definitely bring us a long way during this tough period.”

Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah
CEO, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics & Primary Care

CONTRIBUTING TO PRIMARY CARE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

- **MAY 2020** Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah, CEO of NHGP & Primary Care, was invited to speak at a four-part webinar series titled *Experiences from the Front Lines: The Global Primary Healthcare Response*. The webinar was jointly organised by The Harvard Medical School Department of Global Health and Social Medicine’s Program in Global Primary Care and Social Change, the Center for Primary Care, and members of the World Health Organization’s Primary Healthcare Young Leaders Network. A/Prof Chong gave an overview of Singapore’s response to COVID-19, and outlined the strategies adopted by NHGP, including harnessing technology to expand the suite of telehealth services to patients.
- **JUN 2020** As an invited guest speaker to an online seminar titled *Telemedicine – Continued Care in a COVID-19 World* organised by the Singapore Medical Association, Dr David Ng, Family Physician, Consultant and Head of Special Projects (Primary Care), shared NHGP’s experience in scaling up teleconsultations from the start of the COVID-19 Circuit Breaker. The seminar was graced by MOH’s Director of Medical Services, Associate Professor Kenneth Mak, and was attended by 1,400 participants.
- **JAN 2021** NHGP and the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) signed a Master Collaboration Agreement (MCA) to co-develop and deliver a six-week health and wellness coaching module for undergraduates. This partnership, the first of its kind between a primary care organisation and an academic institution in Singapore, aims to nurture a pipeline of local graduates equipped to conduct person-centred health and wellness coaching. By 2023, the course would be offered to a wider group including working professionals under SUSS’ Centre for Continuing and Professional Education.



NHGP CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF PRIMARY CARE

In November 2020, NHGP held its 20th Anniversary celebration, graced by President Halimah Yacob and then Health Minister Gan Kim Yong. During the virtual event, President Halimah conferred the COVID-19 Warrior Awards to six NHGP staff in recognition of their courage and dedication in the fight against COVID-19. A fabric mosaic art piece, comprising 2,020 photos contributed by NHGP staff was also unveiled. It set a new record for the ‘Largest Fabric Photo Mosaic’ in the *Singapore Book of Records*.

