

Lifewise

AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR CUSTOM-PUBLISHED, DESIGN & LAYOUT, AND FEATURE WRITING, APEX 2023 // JUL-OCT 2024

ISSUE
99



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HEALTH AT YOUR DOORSTEP

NHG collaborates with community partners to deliver healthcare services more effectively on the ground.



We cannot do this alone, which is why the involvement of community partners is vital to form a robust network within the neighbourhoods."

MS. LOH SHU CHING, CHIEF OF COMMUNITY CARE, POPULATION HEALTH CAMPUS, NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP



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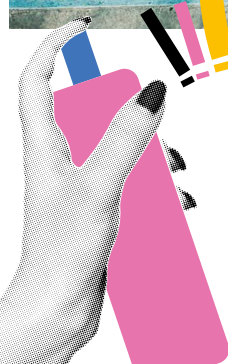
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Lifewise clinched the following awards at APEX 2023:

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
Magazine, Journals & Tabloids
- Custom-Published

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
Magazines, Journals & Tabloids
- Design & Layout (entire issue)

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
Writing - Feature Writing

CELEBRATING CARE AND COLLABORATION

HEALTHCARE IN SINGAPORE IS DYNAMIC, keeping step with the country's rapidly-evolving population dynamics. From the traditional hospital and General Practitioner (GP) settings, the focus has shifted to an integrated care approach that incorporates community and social partners into the healthcare ecosystem, thereby expanding the reach of care beyond conventional boundaries.

With its vision of "*Adding Years of Healthy Life*", the National Healthcare Group (NHG) has — since 2020 — championed this approach. This has yielded significant benefits for residents in Central and North Singapore, enabling them to age comfortably in familiar surroundings, enhancing their life satisfaction, overall well-being, and self-esteem. The close collaboration with partners has also contributed to prolonged health and vitality among residents.

In this issue of *Lifewise*, we honour the pivotal shift to community care and the collective efforts that are making it a success. Discover the profound effects of these on everyday Singaporeans in *Health At Your Doorstep* (page 6), and explore how strong partnerships are enhancing elderly care in *Growing Old Gracefully* (page 4). Additionally, *In Good Hands* (page 26) highlights the crucial role of community nurses in maintaining the well-being of the residents under NHG's care.

Beyond partnerships, NHG also harnesses innovation to enhance community care, easing the strain on hospitals. Find out how the Group utilises new technologies in *Power Care in the Community* (page 17).

But even as healthcare goes high-tech, the essence of NHG's service remains deeply personal and patient-focused. In *Giving Voice* (page 22), meet Ms Sarah Ko, a speech therapist whose commitment has uplifted many lives, both within and outside of the hospital setting.

Passion for patient care extends beyond our healthcare staff; it also inspires dedicated volunteers, including over 20,000 individuals at NHG's Network for Senior Volunteers, who are above 60 years old. In *The Age of Giving* (page 32), we meet one such volunteer, whose commitment began with a chance glance at a hospital poster.

Together, these narratives underscore that modern care — fuelled by collaboration, innovation, and passion — still holds true to NHG's core values of compassion, integrity, and respect. Embark with us on a journey towards a healthier and closer-knit community.

Happy reading.

THE EDITORIAL TEAM



PHOTOGRAPHER
DILLON TAN
ART DIRECTION
NEO AIK SING, PATRICIA FONG
STYLING SHEH ALKADDRI
HAIR & MAKEUP
JENNY TAN, YAP KIM MIN

WARDROBE On Christina: Jacket & pants, both by Mango; printed blouse, by Zara. On Shu Ching: Scarf, jacket & pants, all by Mango; camisole, by H&M. On Christian: Shirt, pants & knitted tee, all by Mango; jacket, by Uniqlo.



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EDITORIAL

Jennifer Yap, Lydia Soh, Cassie Low, Jason Chiew, Joanne Teo, Tracy Bay, Kevin Seak, Sabrina Ng, Illy Iman, Kristen Lee

LIFEWISE ADVISORY PANEL

Prof Benjamin Seet, A/Prof Thomas Lew, Prof Chua Hong Choon, A/Prof Chong Phui-Nah, Prof Roy Chan



EDITORIAL & DESIGN

Senior Editor	Ronald Rajan
Contributing Senior Editor	Agatha Koh Brazil
Editor	Dennis Yin
Art Director	Neo Aik Sing
Associate Art Director	Patricia Fong
Chief Photographer	Aik Chen
Photographers	Kelvin Chia
	Dillon Tan

CONTRIBUTORS

Eveline Gan, Joyce Lim, Keenan Pereira, Koh Yuen Lin, Michelle Bong Lejtenyi, Morgan Awyong, Nicholas Yong

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Assistant Lead	
Business Development	Michele Kho
michelek@mediacorp.com.sg	

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The silver tsunami is upon us — by 2030, almost one in four residents will be 65 years old. To this end, the government launched *Age Well SG* in November 2023. This national programme takes a strategic approach towards supporting seniors to age actively, stay socially connected, and be cared for within their own communities.

Here is what to expect from the initiative as it rolls out over the next decade and beyond.



➤ **\$3.5 billion**

The amount invested in *Age Well SG* over the next 10 years.

GROWING GRACEFUL

Supporting seniors in living healthier and happier lives. BY JOYCE LIM

01

SENIOR-FRIENDLY UPGRADES IN YOUR ESTATE

➤ At Home

SENIOR-FRIENDLY HOME FITTINGS — such as handrails, foldable shower seats, and slip-resistant floor treatment — will enable the elderly to live safely and more independently. Families with members above 65 can apply for subsidies to install these under Housing Development Board (HDB)'s **Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE)** programme.

➤ Around The Neighbourhood

VARIOUS ENHANCEMENTS — such as barrier-free ramps, sheltered linkways to bus stops, and distinct signages to improve way-finding — will be implemented over the next five years in older precincts like Ang Mo Kio and Toa Payoh.



➤ On The Road

Piloted in five neighbourhoods, including Ang Mo Kio and Toa Payoh in 2023, the **Friendly Streets** initiative aims to improve safety and convenience for seniors. By 2030, it will expand to all HDB towns and private estates with high-activity areas and key amenities nearby. Enhancements include longer and more frequent 'green man' signs, wider centre dividers that help seniors cross the road in two stages, and pedestrian overhead bridges with lifts.

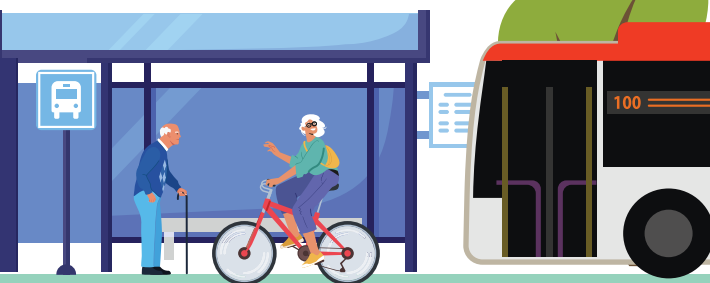
02

MORE FLATS DESIGNED FOR THE ELDERLY

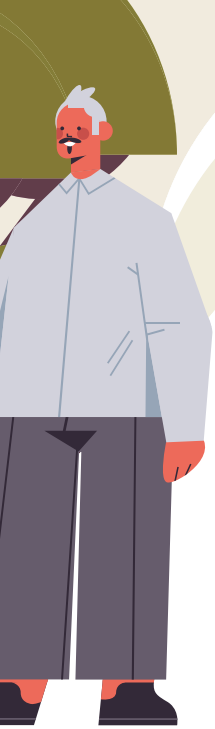
➤ HDB's **Community Care Apartments (CCAs)**

come minimally furnished with a built-in wardrobe and kitchen, as well as pre-installed senior-friendly fittings, such as wheelchair-accessible bathrooms. A basic service package — which includes 24-hour emergency monitoring and response, basic health checks, and simple home fixes — is included. Optional services, such as meals and caregiving, are fee-based. There are communal spaces for activities.

To date, three CCAs have been launched in Bukit Batok, Queensway, and Chai Chee. By 2030, up to 30 CCAs will be spread across different locations, so that seniors can remain in familiar neighbourhoods.



OLD LY



03 MORE HOME CARE SERVICES

↳ The **Enhanced Home Personal Care** service offers trained care professionals, who provide assistance with activities such as showering and housekeeping. It also provides 24/7 technology-enabled monitoring to detect falls and incidents.

A pilot project was launched in September 2023 to explore the feasibility of **Stay-in Shared Caregiving**, where domestic helpers care for several seniors who share an apartment.



04 COORDINATING SERVICES FROM DIFFERENT CARE PROVIDERS

↳ From the second half of 2024, there will be a **single point of contact** to coordinate across the service providers, including daycare centres and home care providers. This is designed to help seniors and their caregivers address their various needs through appropriate providers, minimising repeated assessments and unnecessary referrals.

05 KEEPING ACTIVE IN BODY AND MIND

↳ By 2025, there will be 220 **Active Ageing Centres (AACs)** across Singapore. **Eight in 10 seniors** will have access to a centre near their homes, where they can participate in wellness activities, communal meals, and programmes. Most activities will be free, while a few will require a small fee.



06 GIVING SENIORS A SENSE OF PURPOSE

↳ By 2025, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) would have trained about 4,000 senior volunteers for the **Silver Generation Volunteer** programme. These volunteers will be matched to various volunteering opportunities. The National Healthcare Group (NHG) operates its own NHG Network for Senior Volunteers serving the Central and North regions. *Turn to page 32 to find out more.*

↳ \$800 million

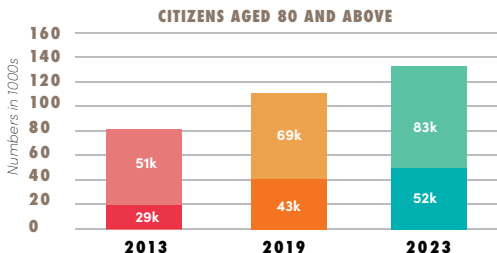
The amount to be spent on enhancing AAC programmes over the next four years.



07 GROWING OLDER IN SINGAPORE

More Singaporeans are living beyond 80

This number has increased by about **70 per cent** in one decade.



Source: Population In Brief 2023 report (published Sept 2023)

Life expectancy in Singapore will continue to increase

- ▶ Citizens born between 2010 and 2015: 80.1 years (men) and 84.5 years (women)
- ▶ Citizens born between 2045 and 2050: 85.6 years (men) and 89.3 years (women)

Our Ageing Population In 2030

↳ ABOUT **22.3%**

of seniors will have a mild disability at the very least, and will require assistance with at least one activity of daily living.

↳ **1 in 4**

Singaporeans will be over 65.



↳ AN ESTIMATED **83,000**

seniors will be living alone.



Source: 40 Year Projections of Disability and Social Isolation of Older Adults for Long-Range Policy Planning in Singapore. Reuben Ng et al, Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2020

A CARING
COMMUNITY

HEALTH AT YOUR DOORSTEP

+
DR CHRISTINA TIONG



+
MS LOH SHU CHING



+
MR CHRISTIAN CHAO



IN BRIEF



- ▶ NHG's Communities of Care (CoC) network was rolled out across neighbourhoods in the Central and North of Singapore in 2020.
- ▶ Since then, multi-agency efforts implemented under the CoC framework have profoundly impacted residents and its partners.
- ▶ Partners in the CoC ecosystem receive enhanced support from NHG, enabling them to deliver preventive health and care on the ground more effectively.
- ▶ The connected ecosystem enables residents with complex health and social issues to continue to live and age well in the community.

NHG's integrated care model is strengthening community health through collaboration and advanced care strategies.

More than four years have passed since the National Healthcare Group (NHG) officially launched its first Communities of Care (CoC) network across neighbourhoods in the Central and North of Singapore. The aim of this neighbourhood-based care model is to integrate the care services of localised health and social partners, in order to deliver and increase accessibility to care services for residents. It also aligns with the *Healthier SG* initiative by empowering residents to live and age well within their communities.

Ms Loh Shu Ching, Chief of Community Care at NHG's Population Health Campus (PHC), emphasises the importance of this model in a rapidly-ageing society. "Our priority is to keep our population healthy, and support them to age in place," she says. Ms Loh highlights the necessity of collaborative effort, stating, "We cannot do this alone, which is why the involvement of community partners is vital to form a robust network within the neighbourhoods."

As at March 2024, there are 89 active CoC networks across NHG neighbourhoods, each anchored by an Active Ageing Centre (AAC). Plans are underway to establish 111 CoC networks by year's end, targeting one network per 10,000 to 20,000 residents. Over the past year, these networks have engaged approximately 85,000 residents through joint outreach efforts.

CATCH THEM BEFORE THEY FALL

Heartwarming stories from community partners illustrate the impact of multi-agency efforts within the CoC ecosystems on residents, particularly those facing complex health and social issues.

Mdm Chan, now 73, saw her life change after Care Corner intervened. Following her husband's passing in 2012, she showed symptoms of disorientation and frailty, and became increasingly withdrawn. Care Corner collaborated with her family to develop a care

BY EVELINE GAN
IN CONSULTATION WITH
MS LOH SHU CHING
CHIEF OF COMMUNITY CARE
// POPULATION HEALTH
CAMPUS // NATIONAL
HEALTHCARE GROUP

MR CHRISTIAN CHAO
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER //
CARE CORNER

DR CHRISTINA TIONG
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER //
HOME NURSING FOUNDATION

PHOTO: DILLON TAN
STYLING: SHEH ALKADDRI
HAIR & MAKEUP: JENNY TAN, YAP KIM MIN
ON CHRISTINA: JACKET & PANTS, BOTH BY
MANGO; PRINTED BLOUSE, BY ZARA.
ON SHU CHING: DRESS, BY H&M.
ON CHRISTIAN: SHIRT & PANTS, BOTH BY
MANGO; JACKET, BY UNIQLO.

A CARING COMMUNITY

plan, while the AAC at Toa Payoh Block 149 engaged her in social activities. Her health was regularly monitored at the NHG Community Health Post in the same block.

“Through monthly inter-agency meetings to coordinate her care, Mdm Chan’s well-being has improved. She continues to enjoy the social interaction at the daycare she attends,” says Mr Christian Chao, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Care Corner.

As a CoC partner, Care Corner Singapore collaborates with NHG to provide integrated health and social services for seniors across multiple touchpoints, including Care Corner AACs and Integrated Case Management Teams in Toa Payoh and Woodlands. For example, once a month, the team meets up with healthcare professionals from the NHG Community Health Team and Toa Payoh Polyclinic to review and discuss the care plans of seniors under their care.



A nurse from NHG’s PHC providing personalised care at a Community Health Post.

The NHG Community Health Team – comprising community nurses, allied health professionals, and health coaches – conducts regular visits to the AAC at Toa Payoh Block 149 to monitor the seniors’ health and manage their chronic

diseases, ensuring necessary follow-up care.

Mr Chao notes the benefits of coordinated care through the multidisciplinary team and social prescribing for seniors with complex needs. “Patients under NHG’s purview can also



Our priority is to keep our population healthy, and support them to age in place. We cannot do this alone, which is why the involvement of community partners is vital to form a robust network within the neighbourhoods.”

MS LOH SHU CHING,
CHIEF OF COMMUNITY CARE,
POPULATION HEALTH CAMPUS,
NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP



CoC FIGURES

89

The number of Communities of Care (CoC) networks currently in the Central and North of Singapore. A total of 111 CoC networks are expected to be completed in FY2024.

85,000

The number of residents whom the CoC networks have reached out to in the past year.

200+

The number of community partners that NHG has worked with since the launch of Health Kampung in April 2023.



seamlessly transition to community-based step-down care provided by Care Corner, gaining access to active ageing programmes and befriending services tailored to their needs,” he adds.

Non-medical factors, such as socioeconomic status and access to social support, can significantly affect health outcomes. Health and social partnerships bridge these gaps by connecting patients to community services or resources that enhance their well-being. “This synchronised ecosystem ensures that seniors who require support do not fall through the cracks and receive timely assistance through the partnerships and shared processes we have developed,” explains Mr Chao.

A HELPING HAND, FROM HOSPITAL TO HOME

Patients often face significant challenges in regaining independence after being discharged from hospital, particularly if they lack adequate home support. This underscores the importance of robust safety nets that assist them in recovering and living well within the community.

The Home Nursing Foundation (HNF), another partner in the CoC

initiative, provides essential home care services. HNF collaborates with various community care partners to support clients who are frail, homebound, or require complex care at home.

Dr Christina Tiong, CEO of HNF, points out that most patients referred to them struggle with mobility issues due to frailty or

medical conditions, and often lack caregiver support. Some patients require specialised care, such as complex wound management, nasogastric or percutaneous gastrostomy tube changes, and peritoneal dialysis.

As a CoC partner, HNF operates an AAC (Care) in Buangkok, near the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). The NHG Community Health Team regularly visits the AAC to provide health advice and follow up with clients with chronic illnesses. HNF extends mental health support in the Buangkok area through CREST, a community safety network for individuals with or at risk of mental health conditions.

“Social workers and primary care doctors of patients who are discharged from acute hospitals can refer them to the AAC,” says Dr Tiong. Programme associates then conduct post-hospitalisation check-ins and home visits, and enrol them into the centre’s programmes, or provide befriending services for those who are isolated or vulnerable.

A particularly poignant case for Dr Tiong involved Mr Tan, a wheelchair-bound patient who



Patients under NHG’s purview can also seamlessly transition to community-based step-down care provided by Care Corner, gaining access to active ageing programmes and befriending services tailored to their needs.”

MR CHRISTIAN CHAO,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CARE CORNER



Care Corner staff engaging with a senior during an exercise session.

had been a long-term resident at IMH. After his discharge and move to a shared rental flat, Mr Tan's condition deteriorated rapidly. Estranged from his family and unmotivated to care for himself, he often stayed in bed, soiled with his own waste, and left delivered meals uneaten and rotting.

Dr Tiong recounts how multi-team, coordinated efforts supported Mr Tan, who was about to be sent to a nursing home. "After many months of home visits, relationship-building, and house cleaning by the AAC staff, Mr Tan asked why they kept visiting him. He was deeply touched by their care," she recalls.

This investment in building trust paid off. Mr Tan eventually agreed to let the centre staff take him to his follow-up appointments at a specialist outpatient clinic, and began to take responsibility for his medications. Today, he visits the AAC daily to take his medication, and receives various forms of support that enable him to live independently, including meals-on-wheels and regular check-ins by HNF's CREST team.



After months of home visits, relationship-building, and house cleaning by the AAC staff, Mr Tan asked why they kept visiting him. He was deeply touched by their care."

DR CHRISTINA TIONG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HOME NURSING FOUNDATION

UNDERSTANDING WHAT MATTERS TO SPUR MOTIVATION

As demonstrated by Mr Tan's case, care partnerships grounded in trust and understanding are pivotal within the CoC framework. Unlike traditional care models — which often focus solely on treating

specific illnesses or immediate health issues — relationship-based care aims to enhance a patient's ability to engage in self-care effectively.

Patients are more likely to share their concerns and needs with caregivers when a supportive relationship based on trust exists. This open communication

▶ THE CoC MODEL IN ACTION

How a coordinated network of care has helped a senior amputee to live independently in the community.

At 63, Mr Ho faced significant challenges in living independently after a below-the-knee amputation due to diabetes in 2022. Wheelchair-bound and dependent on a borrowed motorised wheelchair, he was estranged from his six children, with only infrequent visits from his daughter. As an unemployed divorcee, he relied on friends for informal support.

His case was identified by the Social Prescribing pilot programme at Marsiling

early this year, and Mr Ho was referred to Care Corner's Community Case Management Service (CCMS), following a visit from Silver Generation Office (SGO).

The Social Prescribing programme involves coordination efforts across multiple agencies — two AACs, Family Service Centre (Woodlands), Social Service Office (Woodlands), NHC's PHC, and SGO. This collaborative approach aims to identify seniors with complex social

and health needs, and provide coordinated care and support.

In Mr Ho's case, he was connected to both formal and informal services. For example, the CCMS assisted him in applying for the Senior Mobility Fund and Home Nursing service, ensuring he received essential medical and mobility aids. Regular check-ins at the Community Nursing Post near his

home provide ongoing health monitoring.

Through the comprehensive network of care, Mr Ho's medical and care needs have been met, enabling him to continue living in the community. With his mobility issues addressed, Mr Ho has also taken an interest in attending social activities at Care Corner AAC, further improving his quality of life.



encourages individuals to actively participate in their self-care, resulting in improved adherence to care plans, follow-ups, and positive lifestyle changes.

Ms Loh points out that maintaining motivation is a common challenge among patients. Although many desire to remain healthy, taking proactive steps can be daunting. To address this, the CoC framework adopts a person-centred approach by asking, “What matters to you?” This question is key to unlocking individual motivation.

For instance, asking an older person about their hopes for the next five years can unveil personal goals. “Some may express a desire to watch their grandchildren grow up,” Ms Loh explains. “To fulfil this aspiration, it’s essential that they maintain their health, engage in regular exercise, and manage any chronic conditions they may have.”

Ms Chloe Tham, a Senior Staff Nurse at the Community Nurse Post in Toa Payoh, says that some people resist attending doctor reviews because they are just not motivated. Working closely with Care Corner AACs at Toa Payoh



Toa Payoh residents from the Mindful Steps programme together with Care Corner staff.

Blocks 149 and 170, community nurses collaborate with local partners to develop comprehensive care plans for seniors requiring health and social support. “Patients and families who need support may not always recognise that they need such assistance. Their resistance and, sometimes, limited awareness could pose as a challenge,” says Ms Tham. “Having a network of different partners providing multiple diverse approaches in engaging

the residents helps them to open up and improve their overall condition.”

Ms Tham adds that understanding the residents’ preferences, goals, and challenges is crucial. “We share resources suited to different situations, enhancing the residents’ health literacy and empowering them to take charge of their well-being. It is also vital to acknowledge their strengths and resources, and not simply focus on their ailments or difficulties.”



A home therapy rehabilitation session with HNF.

REACHING OUT TO DIVERSE POPULATION SEGMENTS

In April 2023, NHG launched Health Kampung, a “marketplace” of health and social care programmes, which residents can sign up for via the NHG Cares App and website. These programmes focus on guiding residents toward healthier living through exercise and movement, nutrition, and mental wellness initiatives.

Since its inception, NHG has collaborated with more than 200 community partners to develop an extensive array of over 1,000 community-based health and social activities. As at April 2024, more than 30,000 residents have registered for Health Kampung, underscoring its growing popularity and impact within the community.



Having a network of different partners providing multiple diverse approaches in engaging the residents helps them to open up and improve their overall condition."

MS CHLOE THAM, SENIOR STAFF NURSE,
COMMUNITY NURSE POST TOA PAYOH

Despite extensive outreach, reaching some segments of the population remains challenging. To address this, faith-based organisations are brought into the CoC network. "This collaboration ensures that no one falls through the cracks," explains Ms Loh.

Health screenings and Community Health Posts have been organised at places of worship, such as Covenant Evangelist Faith Church, Yusof Ishak Mosque, and An Nur Mosque. In the North region, NHG works closely with M³, a joint effort between MUIS (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore), MENDAKI (Council for the Development of the Singapore Malay/Muslim Community), and MESRA (The People's



HNF staff interacting with a senior during a session of peritoneal dialysis.

Association Malay Activity Executive Committees Council).

In 2023, Woodlands Health collaborated with Sri Siva Krishna Temple, based in the Marsiling vicinity, for mental health talks and awareness programmes for its devotees.

One notable initiative, Gaya Sihat @ Marsiling-Yew Tee, spearheaded by M³@Marsiling-Yew Tee, encourages residents to take ownership of their health and foster a community-supportive ecosystem. Together with NHG and the Health Promotion Board (HPB), the eight-week programme

combines physical exercises with health education talks, covering topics such as healthy eating and Advance Care Planning.

Participants undergo an initial screening during the first session of the programme. Health Coaches then work with the participants to set personalised health goals and connect them with the nearest Community Health Post. Since its commencement in September 2023, Gaya Sihat has successfully completed two iterations with 93 participants. A third run at An Nur Mosque commenced in late May 2024.

"Our ongoing dialogue with leaders and volunteers at these faith-based organisations has yielded deeper insights into how to activate residents for better self-management of their health," says Ms Loh. "They are an integral part of the CoC, linking with other community partners to provide holistic care and support for our residents."

ENHANCING SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Beyond empowering residents to take charge of their health, the CoC networks also bolster support for local partners, enabling them to deliver care more effectively. "The partnership with NHG



Health assessments organised by NHG's PHC at the Gaya Sihat@Marsiling-Yew Tee's healthy lifestyle programme.

bridges healthcare gaps on the ground,” says Mr Chao.

He details how Care Corner staff now have the necessary tools and resources to proactively identify medical issues in seniors, allowing for effective referrals or guidance to appropriate care settings. Improved data-sharing practices further enable more coordinated and seamless care. “This ensures timely access to healthcare services, ultimately enhancing the well-being of seniors we serve,” says Mr Chao.

Dr Tiong adds that staff at the AAC undergo comprehensive, rigorous training programmes designed by the Agency of Integrated Care (AIC). They also receive specialised training in dementia care, conflict management, first aid, and mental healthcare. The comprehensive training equips them to better understand, and meet, the needs and challenges of the elderly population.

Looking forward, the focus will be on strengthening existing CoC



Interactive activities at an AAC with Care Corner.

networks by integrating social and health services, and building a robust supportive network. “The goal is to ensure that residents always have access to the help they need, with community care and primary care partners connected and guiding them

seamlessly to the right care”, says Ms Loh. “We also want to build trust among the partners, united by a common purpose of building a healthy community and *Adding Years Of Healthy Life* for our residents,” she adds. [LW](#)

HARVESTING GOOD HEALTH

A programme that cultivates healthier eating habits from young.



In addition to supporting seniors and residents with complex health and social needs, NHG also focuses on nurturing healthier lifestyles among the younger population within its CoC ecosystem.

The Field-to-Table (F2T) programme, an after-school gardening and nutritious meal preparation course, encourages youths to increase their intake of fresh vegetables they have grown themselves.

Studies have shown that when young people engage in hands-on nutrition education, they consume up to three times more fruits and vegetables. Additionally, their willingness to try new foods and adopt healthier eating habits significantly improves.

Since its pilot in 2022, F2T has been introduced in several schools and community settings, with plans to scale up by partnering with more agencies and offering a Train-the-Trainer module for wider adoption.

During the seven-week programme, students are guided to become a ‘producer’, learning how to grow edibles and prepare nutritious dishes from their own garden harvest.

Within the community, NHG has partnered TOUCH Community Services. TOUCH’s volunteers implemented the F2T programme in its TOUCH Young Arrows (TYA) networks in Hougang and Woodlands. Plans are in place to extend it across other TYA networks in Singapore.

HEADS UP FOR BETTER POSTURE

BY NICHOLAS YONG

IN CONSULTATION WITH
MR TAN HOWE YONG
SENIOR PHYSIOTHERAPIST //
REHABILITATION SERVICE //
KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL



SCROLLING THROUGH

THE PAIN

That ache in the neck could be your body's way of telling you to cut down on screen time.



An nagging pain in the neck and upper back is a symptom of a modern kind of repetitive stress injury, one that has manifested itself in the age of mobile devices and social media, and a 24/7 work culture. Officially termed “mechanical neck pain”, it is colloquially known as “text neck”.

First coined in 2008 by American chiropractor Dr Dean L. Fishman, the term gained traction in popular media and discussions about digital health, leading to widespread recognition of the issue. Text neck is caused by the frequent or sustained forward bending of the neck while using mobile phones

or electronic devices. Symptoms include a sharp pain in the neck and shoulders, and tightness in the areas affecting your range of motion. Tingling or numbness in the upper extremities might also be present.

The pain can often be attributed to prolonged use of mobile phones or electronic devices in a forward head posture, explains Mr Tan Howe Yong, Senior Physiotherapist at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital's (KTPH) Rehabilitation Service. However, recent research challenges some common assumptions about this posture.

“While biomechanical and cadaveric studies have shown that the weight of our head increases as we bend forward — putting more strain on the muscles of the neck and upper back — current research evidence has found no direct relationship between static neck postures and neck pain,” Mr Tan clarifies.

He notes that there may be other significant factors contributing to discomfort. “The cumulative time spent and the amount of repetitive exposure to a forward bending position, as well as the lack of activity, could still play a role. As we sustain that forward bending position, our muscles start to become fatigued, and become sore,” he adds, suggesting that lifestyle modifications and increased activity might mitigate some of these effects.

WHO SUFFERS FROM TEXT NECK?

Text neck is not confined to a particular age or demographic. While some studies suggest that text neck is more prevalent in adolescents and young adults, Mr Tan says his patients are primarily middle-aged or older adults who are physically inactive and holding deskbound jobs.

There are no statistics available on the number of text neck sufferers in Singapore, but it is worth noting that some 97 per cent of residents own a smartphone (*Singapore Digital Society Report 2023*). Analytics firm data.ai also reported that in 2022, Singaporeans spent an average of 5.3 hours on their mobile phones each day.

No surprise then, that a study by Singapore researchers (published in the *Spine* medical journal in 2021) showed that neck pain is increasingly common.



The cumulative time spent and the amount of repetitive exposure to a forward bending position, as well as the lack of activity, could play a role [in neck pain]. As we sustain that forward bending position, our muscles start to become fatigued, and become sore.”

MR TAN HOWE YONG, SENIOR PHYSIOTHERAPIST,
REHABILITATION SERVICE, KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL

SINGAPOREANS SPENT AN AVERAGE OF 5.3 HOURS ON THEIR MOBILE PHONES EACH DAY.



And it is not just about neck pain either – other conditions such as thumb and eye strain have also been linked with excessive usage of electronic devices.

A 2023 study in the United States (US) even found that hand and wrist pain from overuse of mobile phones, and injuries related to distracted behaviours – such as falls and texting while driving – represent an “increasing burden of disease” to the US healthcare system.

HOW BAD CAN IT GET?

Fortunately, text neck is typically a benign condition with a favourable prognosis, says Mr Tan. The symptoms are mild, with patients only experiencing pain while carrying out tasks that require repetitive or sustained neck postures, such as using a phone or computer. A minority, however, will experience increased pain and symptoms. These may even spread, with headaches and pain in the arms or fingers. Such pain then starts to affect more of the sufferers’ daily activities and their ability to tolerate repetitive or prolonged postures.

Mr Tan notes that there are multiple contributing factors to a person’s pain – when these are not adequately addressed, pain and sensitivity can increase. One key factor is physical inactivity, often a result of prolonged usage of mobile devices.

This lack of physical activity is a risk factor for developing joint pain. “It can happen anywhere, but the most common areas affected in the patients I see are the back, knee, and shoulder,” says Mr Tan.

HOW IS TEXT NECK TREATED?

A combination of lifestyle changes, physical therapy, and self-care practices is prescribed. These are specific recommendations for each patient based on their pain contributing factors, after a consultation with and physical examination by a physiotherapist.

“Exercise would be a key part in a person’s rehabilitation to help manage pain and symptoms,” says Mr Tan. Text neck notwithstanding, a sedentary



HEADS UP FOR BETTER POSTURE



Exercise would be a key part in a person's rehabilitation to help manage pain and symptoms."

MR TAN HOWE YONG, SENIOR PHYSIOTHERAPIST, REHABILITATION SERVICE, KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL

lifestyle is a risk factor for musculoskeletal pain in general, as well as the development of other chronic diseases.

Mr Tan recommends the national guideline on exercise: at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, and at least two days per week of moderate-intensity strength training to strengthen muscles, bones, and joints. Given the demands of work and family, setting small weekly or monthly targets in order to gradually increase physical activity, would ensure that these guidelines can be achieved.

HOW DO I USE MY MOBILE DEVICES RESPONSIBLY?

"Balancing necessity and health when it comes to mobile device usage is crucial," says Mr Tan, who recommends setting limits

on screen time, taking frequent breaks, and prioritising real-life interactions over virtual ones if possible, and, of course, exercising.

Regular postural changes are also key — as the saying goes, motion is lotion. If you are unable to minimise using your mobile devices or computer for prolonged periods, try to move around regularly. "Your body generally likes bigger changes in posture, so something like changing from a seated desk to a standing desk might be good," says Mr Tan.

Walking around, bending forward, and reaching up to the ceiling with your arms are good exercises to start with — and you should do it before the soreness sets in. Setting alarms to remind you to change your posture can help.

Treatments such as massage therapy, heat therapy, and Transcutaneous Electrical Stimulation (TENS) — or using a mild electrical current to reduce pain — can also provide additional pain relief.

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution," says Mr Tan. "But it always starts by getting off the chair and moving your body." **LW**



WORK OUT THE PAIN

Common stretches and strengthening exercises to ease text neck.

LEVATOR SCAPULA STRETCH

→ To stretch your left/right side, turn your head to the opposite direction. Gently pull your head downwards towards your armpit. You should feel a mild stretch over your neck.

Hold for 10 secs, 10 reps, 2-3 times a day



TRUNK EXTENSION WHILE SITTING

→ Support the back of your neck with your hands, and lean your upper back backwards, over the top of the chair. Lift your chest upwards.

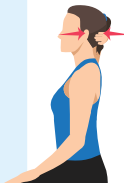
Hold for 10 secs, 10 reps, 2-3 times a day



ISOMETRIC NECK EXTENSION

→ Press your palm against the back of your head without moving your hand or head.

Hold for 10 secs, 10 reps, 2-3 times a day



TRICEPS STRETCH

→ Position your left/right hand behind your head. Gently pull your elbow towards the opposite shoulder with your other hand.

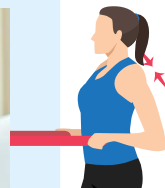
Hold for 10 secs, 10 reps, 2-3 times a day



SHOULDER RETRACTION WITH THERABAND

→ Anchor a resistance band to a stable support at waist level. Hold firmly and pull the band backwards as you squeeze your shoulder blades together.

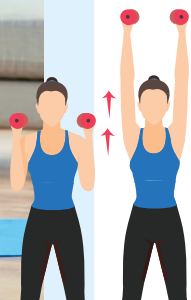
Hold for 1-2 secs, 10 reps, 3 sets, once a day



SHOULDER PRESS

→ Begin with both hands at the side of your head holding on to moderately heavy weight/band, while keeping your elbows facing each other. Lift the weight or band upwards towards the ceiling.

Perform 8-15 reps, 3 sets, multiple times per day, 2-3 times a week



POWER CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

There is great and beneficial impact on the health of a community when ideas are transformed into products and services.

Demand for healthcare services is growing rapidly, fuelled in no small measure by Singapore's fast-ageing population. Changing disease patterns and a growing chronic disease burden are also factors in the drive to deliver better, faster, and more lasting solutions.

Increasing healthcare manpower can help to ease the situation — but doing so is costly and unsustainable. That is why Singapore has turned to new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, to achieve its healthcare goals. Facilities like the National Healthcare Group's (NHG) Centre for Medical Technologies and Innovations (CMTi) help drive these innovations, such as those that promote prevention and early

diagnosis in the community. "With this focus, we aim to keep the population healthy and reduce the overall demand for healthcare," explains Associate Professor Tey Hong Liang, CMTi's Clinical Director. A/Prof Tey is also a Senior Consultant and the Head of Research at the National Skin Centre (NSC).

CMTi's work includes enabling community-centric care through innovations, which empowers primary care facilities, patients, caregivers, and the general population with the self-care skills and knowledge to remain well. "Community-based solutions — such as robotics, consumer products, and advanced medical solutions — are vital to alleviate the healthcare burden on our hospitals," says A/Prof Tey, adding that this approach is even more critical in Singapore's Central region, home to a large elderly population.

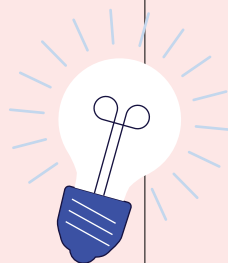
BY KEENAN PEREIRA

IN CONSULTATION WITH
ASSOCIATE
PROFESSOR
TEY HONG LIANG
CLINICAL DIRECTOR //
NATIONAL HEALTHCARE
GROUP CENTRE FOR MEDICAL
TECHNOLOGIES AND
INNOVATIONS



Innovations span across multiple disciplines, including infectious disease, chronic disease management, rehabilitation, dermatology, general medicine, and mental health. The impact of such innovations can go beyond patients to support caregivers as well. For instance, Play2Care is a mobile app developed by The Institute of Mental Health's (IMH) Aged Psychiatry Community Assessment and Treatment Service (APCATS) Clinical Service that educates caregivers on effectively communicating with individuals living with dementia. With this tool, caregivers can better understand the needs of patients with dementia, and reduce their own stress level. Innovations introduced in other NHG institutions include devices for community screening of diabetes, and microneedle patches that reduce scarring.

Although such efforts impact hospital demand, the effects may not be immediately noticeable,





The best research cannot improve patients' lives if there is no product or service."

PROFESSOR BENJAMIN SEET, GROUP CHAIRMAN MEDICAL BOARD (RESEARCH) AND CO-CHAIR, ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP OFFICE, NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP

stresses A/Prof Tey. "It may take years to see the effects, but we have to keep the end-goal in mind – to empower the community so that clinical load in hospitals is reduced. This way, we can cope with the growing demand for healthcare."

ALL ABOARD FOR INNOVATION

Healthcare innovation and transformation is not a journey that can be undertaken alone. Clinicians are a key stakeholder, as they lead much of CMTi's work. Their perspectives shed light on the pressing problems in healthcare settings that can be tackled through new products and services. Having them onboard early also keeps the solutions relevant, practical, and easy-to-implement. "They represent both ends of the spectrum: they understand the problems, but

they also know how they can adopt these technologies to help patients," explains A/Prof Tey.

While clinicians are well-versed in clinical care and management, not many are familiar with concepts like product design. Thus, training is important. The CMTi offers a Clinician Innovator Preparatory Programme (CiPP) that equips emerging innovators with foundational skills for HealthTech innovation. Participants engage in a comprehensive training curriculum, which includes a project offering

hands-on innovation experience, funding for courses, and mentorship opportunities. Additionally, CMTi supports them through their innovation journey, including needs identification, grant applications, IP management, and, finally, finding collaborators.

This last stage is critical for research to have a real-world impact. As Professor Benjamin Seet, Group Chairman Medical Board (Research) and Co-Chair, Academic Partnership Office at NHG puts it, "The best research cannot improve patients' lives if there is no product or service."



CARING FOR CAREGIVERS

By 2030, the number of people living with dementia is projected to nearly double, reaching 152,000. Dementia causes those affected to gradually lose their ability to understand what is communicated to them or comprehend what others are saying. This can lead to stress and frustration for caregivers, who play a crucial role in keeping patients out of the hospital.

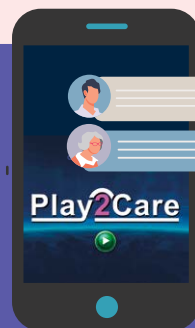
To address this issue, APCATS teamed up with health tech provider Taggle, in a collaboration facilitated by CMTi, to develop Play2Care. This app uses gamification to train caregivers in communication techniques to better interact with patients with dementia. "The games were tested at various stages of development by caregivers, health professionals, and subject experts for continuous improvement," says A/Prof Tey.

How Play2Care works:

In the game, caregivers will first be introduced to the T.A.N.G.O approach through a series of videos. They will then apply T.A.N.G.O in five scenarios commonly encountered during dementia caregiving.

What T.A.N.G.O stands for:

- T**ender approach – Offer comfort and reassurance by being patient and supportive through expressions and body language.
- A**cknowledge – Validate their emotions and unmet needs.
- N**o challenging – Instead of challenging their views,



listen and orientate them to reality by providing cues and prompts about the current date, time, and location.

Get into simple conversations – Accommodate their abilities by using familiar phrases and expressions, concise and simple sentences, as well as providing clear choices.

Optimise environment – Make environment adaptations to promote meaningful engagement, comfort, and independence. For example, include large, contrasting-coloured visual reminders, such as clocks and calendars, in familiar areas in the house to help them stay connected with the present and reality.

There will be two avatars in each scenario – a caregiver and a person with dementia. The caregiver has to apply T.A.N.G.O to communicate effectively with the person with dementia. Through this, the caregiver

▶ A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DIABETES

The complexity of a disease like diabetes signifies that there are multiple stages at which innovations and new approaches can be introduced:

EARLY DETECTION

- ▶ The community can be empowered to check for prediabetes and diabetes risks, with the use of a **portable test kit**. A quick prick on the finger is all it takes to obtain a blood sample, making it ideal for community screenings. Results are usually available in minutes, allowing for timely intervention, where required.



DELAYING PROGRESSION

- ▶ Unchecked diabetes can have wide-ranging complications: four in 10 diabetes patients develop CKD. To tackle this scourge, the teams from TTSH developed a **software that uses electronic health data** to predict how likely an individual would develop CKD. This data can then be used by healthcare teams to provide suitable interventions.



REVERSING THE DISEASE

- ▶ Substantial weight loss in obese patients with early Type 2 diabetes can normalise blood sugar levels without medication. Both bariatric surgery and lifestyle changes like diet and exercise can contribute to this. Launched in 2022, the **NHG Diabetes Reversal Programme** funded by the Tanoto Foundation and NHG Fund, aims for diabetes remission in these patients through dietary and lifestyle modifications, avoiding the need for medication or surgery.



To date, CMTi has supported more than 300 clinicians in their innovation journey, facilitating over 130 project collaborations with industry partners.

FROM SINGAPORE TO THE WORLD

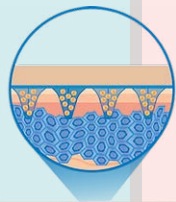
It is not enough for the solutions devised to be used at NHG institutions only. For true impact, the team works closely with partners in the innovation ecosystem, such as Enterprise SG, the Economic Development Board, the National Health Innovation Centre Singapore (NHIC), other healthcare clusters, and even international partners — all with the aim of supporting the development and eventual adoption and commercialisation of the technology at scale.

This can be seen in the example of HealthVector Diabetes, a solution that uses clinical data from electronic medical records to predict and stratify risk of future chronic kidney disease (CKD) within a three-year horizon in patients with diabetes. Clinicians can use this information to prioritise specific treatments for at-risk patients, delaying the progression of end-stage kidney failure. The solution, co-developed by Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) and Mesh Bio, has since been approved by Singapore's Health Sciences Authority, and is now piloting implementation in NHG and another healthcare cluster in Singapore.

Some of these solutions have also found a global audience. In the past year, RNAscence Biotechnology, a spin-off company from the NSC and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), introduced a first-of-its-kind Dissolvable Micro-Tips patch, BioRNA Antiscar, that reduces the appearance of scars. The product has since found a market outside of Singapore, and is now available in Hong Kong. RNAscence is intending to roll out this product in Malaysia, Taiwan, and Australia as well. Similarly, products by Suu Balm® — an award-winning skincare range, co-developed by Good Pharma Dermatology and NSC to combat dry, itchy, and sensitive skin — is currently available in 13 countries. **LW**

MANAGING SCARS WITH A PATCH

- ▶ The BioRNA Antiscar patch has been proven to effectively reduce post-surgical scars by up to 84% after 60 days of use.
- ▶ 88% of users prefer the BioRNA Antiscar patch over silicone gel sheets.
- ▶ Scars were 30% flatter as compared to those treated by silicon patches.
- ▶ BioRNA Antiscar targets the root cause of scarring with proprietary technology.
- ▶ The patch comprises dissolvable Micro-Tips formulated from hyaluronic acid, which dissolve into the skin and scar when applied. Hyaluronic acid is a well-known humectant, which effectively draws in water to moisturise the scars and skin.
- ▶ RNAscence Biotechnology is studying how similar technology can be used in patches or creams to treat eczema.



will learn which techniques are more suited for the different scenarios they may face in real life. These five scenarios were crafted with inputs from IMH clinicians, who drew from their experience working with patients and their caregivers.

- ▶ The app also features mini games that caregivers can play with those they care for.



BY MICHELLE BONG LEITENYI

IN CONSULTATION WITH
MS LEAH TAN LI LENG
SENIOR CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST //
INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH



FACING THE 'FOURTH TRIMESTER'



Having a baby brings with it a 180-degree lifestyle change that can be daunting – that is why maintaining optimal mental well-being is essential.

The last time there was a Dragon year (in 2012), Singapore experienced a baby boom – 38,641 resident live-births were recorded. This was higher than the non-Dragon years of 36,178 in 2011 and 35,681 in 2013.

It would hardly be surprising if Singapore records another bumper crop of babies in 2024, as the Year of the Dragon is considered particularly auspicious.

'Dragon baby' or not, having a newborn introduces overwhelming changes such as new responsibilities, sleep deprivation, and pressure from both self-imposed and societal expectations. Couples will discover that the activities they once enjoyed together are getting replaced by daily tasks required to care for the baby. The learning curve will be steep, as they work to ensure the child is sleeping, feeding, and even burping well.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A HEALTHY MINDSPACE

Despite the abundance of reference materials, even the most well-read

first-time parents may find this period stressful, with their own needs slipping down their list of priorities. This could lead to common mental health conditions.

Before the baby is born, would-be mothers could experience prenatal depression, characterised by persistent sadness, poor sleep or appetite, and feelings of guilt or worthlessness. Perinatal anxiety could also occur, causing excessive worry or fear about pregnancy, childbirth, and the baby's health, often resulting in constant irritability.

After childbirth, new mothers could develop postnatal depression or anxiety, conditions that can impact their bond with the baby and cause social withdrawal or physical symptoms like dizziness, nausea, and shortness of breath. More serious mental conditions, such as postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder or postpartum psychosis, could also arise, leading to detachment from the baby, rapid mood swings, and thoughts of self-harm or harming the child.

These struggles can make it difficult for a woman to form secure attachments and provide nurturing care to her child, potentially having long-term implications to the child's emotional health and the mother-child relationship.

"New mums facing such challenges should seek help from a healthcare provider early if symptoms persist, are severe, or interfere with their ability to function daily," advises Ms Leah Tan Li Leng, Senior Clinical Psychologist at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). "Early diagnosis and treatment can greatly improve the outcomes for both parent and child."

If not addressed, these difficulties could also negatively impact the woman's relationship with her partner. "Feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and hopelessness can have a ripple effect, causing strain and helplessness in the marriage – especially if the husband is unsure of how to support his partner," explains Ms Tan.

Husbands may also feel pressured to fulfil multiple roles as both father and spouse. "Ultimately, couples must work together to overcome challenges during pregnancy and after childbirth," says Ms Tan.

GIVING MENTAL WELLNESS A BOOST

For such couples, adopting effective preventative measures and coping strategies is crucial. Prioritising



SPOT THE WARNING SIGNS

Keep a lookout for these symptoms of pregnancy and postpartum mental health conditions, which may be dismissed as hormonal shifts.

- ▶ Persistent changes in mood/behaviour
- ▶ Difficulty in bonding with the baby (i.e. unable to feel joy when spending time with the child)
- ▶ Changes in sleep patterns
- ▶ Obsessive thoughts (i.e. constantly worrying about the baby's health), or compulsive behaviours (i.e. constantly checking if the child is still breathing while sleeping)
- ▶ Feelings of guilt, shame, or worthlessness (i.e. repeated thoughts of being a bad mother)
- ▶ Withdrawal from social activities or hobbies



self-care, even in small ways, can be beneficial. Setting realistic expectations about your parenting approach is also essential. "Remember that adjusting to parenthood takes time, and it is okay to feel overwhelmed and uncertain," says Ms Tan. "Be patient with yourself and trust that both of you are doing your best."

Another effective way to manage stress is to simplify daily routines and prepare meals or sterilise bottles in advance when possible. Do also prioritise sleep, as adequate rest is essential for optimal physical and mental health. New mothers, especially, need to adjust to functioning with limited sleep. A mother's mental health directly impacts the baby's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Poor maternal mental health can increase the risk of attachment issues, developmental delays, and behavioural problems in the child later in life. It would be helpful for fathers to take on the night shifts when taking care of infants as well, so that mothers can catch up on their sleep. Doing shifts in rotations will ensure that both parents have sufficient rest.

Additionally, a strong support system of family, friends, and fellow parents can offer practical assistance and encouragement during this transition.

PROTECTING FAMILY DYNAMICS

For families who are welcoming the birth of another child, mothers are not the only ones experiencing change. Fathers may also struggle with the increased demands of parenthood, while older siblings may feel neglected or be affected by the negative emotional environment at home.

It is important to discuss your thoughts, feelings, and concerns about

parenthood with your partner. When faced with challenges, both spouses should communicate and listen empathetically to each other's experiences. "Open communication strengthens your bond as a couple and offers mutual support," emphasises Ms Tan. Fathers can also reach out to other fathers, friends, family members, or support groups for validation, encouragement, and practical advice.

Parents welcoming another child can maintain a sense of normalcy for older siblings by involving them in preparing for the new baby. "Let them help decorate the nursery or pick out toys. Encourage them to ask questions or raise concerns about the upcoming arrival," Ms Tan suggests. "Beyond this, try to maintain regular routines and schedules for older siblings as much as possible. Consistency and predictability can help provide a sense of stability and security during times of change."

Parents can complement this approach with one-on-one time with their older children. Plan special activities to reinforce their connection, validate feelings of jealousy or insecurity, and encourage constructive ways of expressing these negative emotions through avenues such as drawing pictures or talking about their feelings.

Above all, reassure the older children that they are loved and valued, while emphasising the importance of their role in caring for and nurturing their new sibling. "Highlight the positive aspects of becoming a big brother or sister, and encourage them to be involved in helping with diaper changes, singing lullabies, or reading stories to the baby," says Ms Tan. **LW**



SUPPORT IS A CALL AWAY

The National Healthcare Group Polyclinics' (NHGP) EMBRACE programme provides mental health support for mothers as one of its core components.

The EMBRACE programme focuses on the early detection of risk factors, and provides preventive care and support for new mothers and caregivers through screening and early intervention. It offers health education, such as nutritional advice and parentcraft skills. When necessary, families are referred to appropriate services like childcare and financial support. In this way, EMBRACE helps to address the challenges

and struggles faced by first-time parents, and also foster stronger parent-child relationships.

Beyond EMBRACE, new parents can access resources like the Families For Life Parenting portal and the National Centre for Fathering's DADs For Life initiative. Family service centres, hotlines, and online platforms — including Samaritans of Singapore, TOUCHline, Mindline.sg, and Beyond the Label Helpbot — also offer mental health support.



A mother's physical, mental, and emotional health, along with a supportive family environment, are vital for healthy child and family development. This is especially crucial in the first 1,000 days, when infants are particularly vulnerable."

DR CHEN SHIYUN, FAMILY PHYSICIAN AND ASSOCIATE CONSULTANT, PROGRAMME LEAD FOR EMBRACE AND DEPUTY HEAD, SEMBANGWANG POLYCLINIC, NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS

MEET YOUR
SPEECH
THERAPIST

Ms Sarah Ko, 37

PRINCIPAL SPEECH THERAPIST,
TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL

REBUILDING LIVES,
ONE WORD AT A TIME

Speech therapy is a field of healthcare focused on diagnosing and treating communication and swallowing disorders.

"At Tan Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) Speech Therapy department, we see adult patients with various illnesses ranging from cancer to neurological and respiratory conditions," says Ms Ko. "We also help people who have trouble swallowing their food or communicating after an illness." This therapy can significantly improve a patient's quality of life, aiding in their overall recovery and independence.



GIVING VOICE

Speech Therapist Ms Sarah Ko uplifts lives through her work, both within the hospital and outside of it.

BY KEENAN PEREIRA PHOTOS DILLON TAN



" I BECAME A SPEECH THERAPIST 13 YEARS AGO.

Growing up, I knew I wanted a meaningful job that was not desk-bound. I chose to do speech therapy through a process of elimination – there wasn't really a 'eureka' moment at that time. But when I went through my placements at university and saw the impact speech therapy had on patients' lives, I knew then that this was something I would love to do. Once, my clinical supervisor and I saw a young woman who had suffered a brain haemorrhage. We helped her find a way to communicate her needs and wants to her family. Her dad was so grateful that he even held our hands and said, 'Thank you for all that you have done'. That moment has really stayed with me.

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS IN MY CAREER.

These include helping a nursing home resident who had severe swallowing difficulties caused by a stroke. After three years of being fed through a tube, we were able to help him eat normally again. I also remember the joy of a patient who suffered from Parkinson's Disease. He shared how he felt 'more like himself' after speech therapy; he could speak up more clearly and confidently at work meetings.

ONE OF THE DISEASES THAT AFFECTS SPEECH IS PARKINSON'S DISEASE.

Early in my career, I was trained to help people with this condition speak better. This opened many more opportunities for me to work with

SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE

“Values like empathy and inclusivity are caught, and not just taught. Our children are watching us. If we model those traits to them, they will emulate us without us needing to tell them to be nice or kind. They will naturally model our behaviour.”

Ms Ko highlights the need for parents to be mindful of their own behaviour, as children often imitate what they see at home.

people with Parkinson’s Disease. My work can be challenging, especially if a patient is apathetic towards therapy. But I have learnt that it’s important to understand a patient’s goals. Not every patient is able to articulate what they want, or is even aware that they do have a goal. During therapy sessions, I sometimes feel like a ‘detective’, trying to find out what would motivate a patient so as to encourage them to start their therapy journey.

I CHOOSE TO HOMESCHOOL TWO OF MY CHILDREN.

My husband, a social entrepreneur, and I want to have a greater influence on their views of the world and about themselves. I have four children: twins, aged nine, a six-year-old, and a 30-month-old. I homeschooled our third child until he was five and am beginning to homeschool our youngest.

THERE ARE MANY REWARDS OF HOMESCHOOLING.

I have established a special bond with my children, and witness their joy and pride whenever they discover something new. The challenge for me, especially at the start, was the nagging thought about whether I was doing ‘enough’ for our children.

LIVING IN A MATURE HOUSING ESTATE, I AM HAPPY THAT MY CHILDREN CAN INTERACT REGULARLY WITH SENIORS.

We usually



smile and say ‘hi’ to those we meet because we might be the only friendly faces they encounter that day. It is important that my children learn how to respect the older generation and also how to interact with people of all ages.

I LEARNT ABOUT EMPATHY FOR OTHERS THROUGH MY VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES WITH A GROUP OF CHURCH FRIENDS.

I started visiting families in rental flats soon after I joined the workforce. I was trying to improve my Hokkien, and a friend invited me to visit these residents as a way for me to practise the dialect. I was surprised by how open and friendly some of them were; they welcomed me, a stranger, into their homes.

VOLUNTEERING HAS TAUGHT ME TO PAY ATTENTION TO PEOPLE AND HEAR THEIR STORIES.

This has also helped at work. I am now able to understand more Chinese dialects and can communicate with patients better. Knowing some of the everyday worries of seniors allows me to relate to them better, and I can then frame our discussions in a way that they understand.

I HAVE INVOLVED MY FAMILY IN MY VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES.

We have befriended a couple in their 70s with no children. Auntie has a foot condition, but is resilient – she cycles

around the neighbourhood to buy groceries and meals. Uncle has been working as a cleaner at my husband’s company, and he always greets us with a ready smile and snacks for our family.

MY MANTRA IS TO BE FULLY PRESENT AT WORK AND AT HOME.

Juggling various responsibilities may not be easy, but I am thankful for understanding superiors and co-workers, as well as my supportive family.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT ‘SEASONS’ IN MY LIFE, EACH REQUIRING ME TO APPORTION MY TIME ACCORDINGLY.

Perhaps in one season, when I have a newborn at home, I may have to step back at work and not be involved in projects requiring more attention and time. If I’m preparing for an upcoming assessment at work, my husband can be the main parent, bringing the kids out on weekends.

I’M EXCITED ABOUT HOW WE CAN USE TECHNOLOGY TO BRING GREATER AWARENESS AND ACCESS TO THERAPY FOR PEOPLE WITH PARKINSON’S DISEASE.

My dream is that it will become mainstream for people with the condition to start speech therapy or voice exercises as early as at the point of diagnosis. Then, hopefully, we can preserve their speech/voice for an even longer time.” **LW**



FINDING PEACE IN THE EVERYDAY

Research shows that practising gratitude can reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. Here are three things Ms Ko is grateful for:

- Any opportunity to read a good book uninterrupted.
- Little moments with her family. On Saturday mornings, she enjoys having breakfast with them and heading to a park or playground together.
- The ability to make a difference in her patients’ lives.

THE SILENT THREAT

BY MICHELLE BONG LEJTENYI

IN CONSULTATION WITH
DR YEOW SIYING
CONSULTANT // UROLOGY //
KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL



KEEPING A STEADY FLOW

Urinary Tract Infections rank as a leading cause of death in Singapore, which makes understanding and preventing the condition vital.

Most people would dismiss a urinary tract infection (UTI) as a minor, albeit painful ailment; but

UTIs are among the top 10 leading causes of death in Singapore.

Dr Yeow Siying, Urology Consultant at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH), points out that there is a critical gap in awareness: "While most Singaporeans are generally aware of the symptoms of UTI, few understand its risk factors or how to prevent it effectively."

UTIs can impact any part of the urinary system, which includes the kidneys, ureters, and urinary bladder. Though it most commonly affects

adults, among those most vulnerable are individuals with poorly-controlled diabetes and those who are hospitalised. "UTIs are more prevalent among hospitalised individuals, particularly those with limited mobility or those needing a urinary catheter (a tube inserted into the bladder to drain urine). It is also more likely to affect those who are immunocompromised (have weakened immunity)," explains Dr Yeow.

HEED THE WARNING SIGNS

UTIs affect both men and women. Common risk factors include inadequate fluid hydration and urinary stones, alongside conditions that impede the normal flow of urine, such as enlarged prostates in men. Women, especially those who are sexually active or postmenopausal, are more likely to have UTIs. Recent surgeries for the urinary tract can also predispose individuals to UTIs.

Symptoms of UTIs can vary from painful urination and blood in the urine, to fever and localised pain in the lower back or sides. "Interestingly, women with a family history of recurrent UTIs

may be more likely to suffer from them," says Dr Yeow.

For men, UTI symptoms may mimic those of prostate problems, such as benign prostate enlargement or prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate gland), which can affect urine flow and cause urinary urgency, frequency, or difficulty passing urine.

Diagnosing a UTI generally involves a urinalysis to check for signs of infection, and a urine culture to guide antibiotic treatment. "In severe cases, hospitalisation may be required for intravenous antibiotics and supportive care to effectively manage the infection," says Dr Yeow.

She adds that it is important to complete any prescribed antibiotic regimens, as not doing so can lead to unresolved infections or drug-resistant infections, complicating future treatments.

TREAT EARLY TO PREVENT WORSENING

UTIs disproportionately affect women due to anatomical differences – the female urethra is shorter in length and its proximity to potential sources

of bacteria increases the risks of infection. "Since the female urethra is closer to the reproductive organs and the anus, it is easier for bacterial infection of the urinary tract to occur," explains Dr Yeow. According to the Urology Care Foundation in the United States, approximately 40 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men will experience at least one UTI in their lifetime, with the incidence peaking during puberty as well as postmenopause for women.

Recurrent UTIs are classified based on their frequency — it is considered recurrent if there are three or more occurrences within a year, or two within a period of six months. Factors contributing to recurrence include frequent sexual activity, change in sexual partners, and the use of certain types of contraceptives, such as spermicides. Those with certain conditions, including poorly-controlled diabetes mellitus, enterovesical fistulas (where there is an abnormal connection between the intestine and bladder), and postmenopausal women are more likely to have recurrent infections," Dr Yeow adds.

For those reliant on urinary catheters or those with medical conditions — such as urinary stones or enlarged prostates that can cause urine retention — the risks are compounded. "These patients often require further investigations, including urine cultures, ultrasound, or X-ray of the urinary tract," says Dr Yeow.

If not promptly and adequately treated, UTIs can escalate into serious health issues, including kidney infections. In severe cases, they can lead to life-threatening conditions like sepsis — where the body's response to an infection causes widespread inflammation — which can result in tissue damage, organ failure, and even death. "Those with compromised immune systems or drug-resistant strains of bacteria are particularly at risk," Dr Yeow notes.

Potential complications such as kidney infections (pyelonephritis, renal abscess), prostate infections (prostatitis, prostate abscess), and other forms of severe infection leading to sepsis may require admission to the Intensive Care Unit.

Dietary changes and supplements, such as the intake of cranberry products and probiotics, can potentially reduce the risks of recurrent UTIs.

PREVENTION IS THE BEST DEFENCE

"Early recognition and treatment are key," Dr Yeow emphasises. Adopting preventive measures can significantly reduce the risk of developing UTIs. She suggests staying hydrated, diligently maintaining personal hygiene (such as wiping from front to back after bowel emptying), and avoiding douching (washing the inside of the vagina with harsh cleansing agents) are simple yet effective ways to prevent bacteria from entering the urinary tract.

For postmenopausal women, topical vaginal oestrogen therapy (the application of oestrogen cream within the vagina) to treat vaginal dryness and irritation can be helpful. "This can greatly reduce the incidence of UTIs and the symptoms, but caution should be exercised, especially in women with a history of breast cancer," explains Dr Yeow. For those prone to frequent infections after sexual intercourse, a single dose of antibiotics taken immediately after the activity or

a low-dose regimen as a long-term preventive measure may be recommended.

Dietary changes and supplements, such as the intake of cranberry products and probiotics, can potentially reduce the risks of recurrent UTIs.

A new type of oral vaccine, Uromune®, is available in Singapore, including at KTPH. This is a sublingual spray administered under the tongue. It contains four types of inactivated bacteria that commonly cause UTIs (Escherichia coli, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Proteus vulgaris, and Enterococcus faecalis). The treatment involves two sprays daily for three months and has been shown to increase the UTI-free rate to up to 90.7 per cent after a year.

"Engaging in these preventive practices can greatly reduce the likelihood of developing a UTI and help avoid the complications that can arise from an untreated infection," says Dr Yeow. **LW**



TRUE OR FALSE?

Dr Yeow separates myth from fact about UTIs.



1 ▶ CERTAIN FOODS AND DRINKS LIKE CRANBERRY JUICE AND PROBIOTIC BEVERAGES PREVENT UTIs

Cranberry products contain the compound proanthocyanidins, which prevents bacteria from binding to the urinary tract. For effective UTI prevention, clinical research suggests consuming 36mg of proanthocyanidins daily (about 240ml to 300ml of 25 per cent pure cranberry juice).

Probiotic drinks containing lactobacilli may inhibit the adherence and growth of bacteria that cause UTIs. Similarly, D-mannose (a type of sugar related to glucose) supplements can block harmful

bacteria from entering the urinary tract, thus, improving symptoms and decreasing the frequency of infections.

2 ▶ TAMPONS AND SEX TOYS INCREASE THE RISK OF UTIs IN WOMEN

Using tampons does not lead to UTIs. However, sex toys might increase UTI risk if not used hygienically, as they can introduce bacteria into the urinary tract.

3 ▶ REGULAR BUBBLE BATHS CAUSE UTIs

Bubble baths do not directly cause UTIs.

4 ▶ URINATING AFTER SEXUAL INTERCOURSE PREVENTS UTI

For women who tend to have UTIs after sexual intercourse, urinating after sex can help reduce the risk of having UTIs.



BEYOND THE HOSPITAL

BY JOYCE LIM



IN CONSULTATION WITH
MS NG WOEI KIAN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF NURSING
(COMMUNITY HEALTH) // POPULATION
HEALTH CAMPUS // NATIONAL
HEALTHCARE GROUP



MS PUA JUNE LI
SENIOR NURSE // POPULATION
HEALTH CAMPUS // NATIONAL
HEALTHCARE GROUP



MS JIANG HAILING
NURSE CLINICIAN // POPULATION
HEALTH CAMPUS // NATIONAL
HEALTHCARE GROUP

Community nurses are the essential link in preventing illness and promoting health.

With Singapore's rapidly ageing population and evolving care needs, the nation's healthcare system has pivoted from focusing solely on disease management to prioritising prevention and patient empowerment. "Community nurses help to facilitate this shift by providing personalised care to patients in their homes and reducing the need for hospitalisation, while promoting patients' independence and comfort," says Ms Ng Woei Kian, Assistant Director of Nursing (Community Health) at the National Healthcare Group's (NHG) Population Health Campus (PHC).

Community nursing is a branch of nursing that addresses the health needs of patients beyond the confines of hospital settings. It assists a wide array of patients, from those with chronic conditions and disabilities to seniors requiring daily assistance. "Community nurses support individuals across different stages of their life journey, from those *Living Well* to those *Leaving Well*," explains Ms Ng.

THE ROLE OF NHG COMMUNITY NURSES

NHG is focused on creating a strong healthcare system that meets the needs of Singapore's evolving demographics by emphasising on two areas: building relationship-based care and strengthening place-based integrated care.



Central to these efforts are the community nurses, whose holistic care approach extends beyond basic nursing tasks; they serve not only as care providers but also as care partners. "Our community nurses promote health and well-being through educational initiatives, screenings, and early intervention programmes, contributing to improving the overall health of the population," says Ms Ng.

Key functions that NHG community nurses perform include:

➤ Supporting outreach and preventive care interventions.

These include increasing health awareness and identifying risk factors for early interventions, such as conducting screenings to delay frailty progression and addressing risk of falls.

➤ Partnering with health and social care partners through Communities of Care (CoC) to enable residents to age well in their neighbourhood.

Community nurses set up Community Health Posts (CHPs) in community nodes, such as Active Ageing Centres (AACs), Resident Networks, public libraries, and faith-based organisations, to bring care closer to residents. At CHPs, community nurses provide health and geriatric assessments of residents' functional and cognitive abilities, and coordinate

care to build social network and support systems, with a long-term health and care plan in mind. In addition, community nurses conduct educational outreach and skills-based workshops to empower residents and caregivers to be proactive in managing their health. Topics include chronic disease management, blood pressure monitoring, and Advance Care Planning.

Nurse clinician Ms Jiang Hailing is a member of the multidisciplinary Community Health Team covering the Central and North regions under NHG. Part of her job scope includes preventative interventions and managing residents who are relatively well. "I educate residents on the early detection of illness and how to better manage their chronic diseases," she says. "I talk to them about modifying their lifestyles and monitoring their health, and advise them to seek early medical reviews when they experience adverse events, such as poorly-controlled hypertension." Ms Jiang also refers cases that are "not known to the healthcare system." "While restoring hope in *Living Well*, we also help residents to navigate *Leaving Well* through Advance Care Planning," she adds.

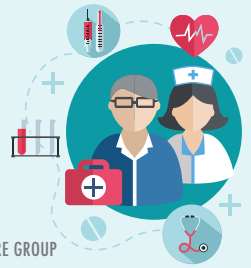
➤ Facilitating and supporting hospital-to-home-care transitions.

As part of the multi-disciplinary Community Health Team, community nurses play a crucial role in stabilising



There are challenging and tough days for sure, but community nursing is a journey of non-stop exploration and learning.”

MS JIANG HAILING, NURSE CLINICIAN, POPULATION HEALTH CAMPUS, NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP



the nursing home staff to improve their clinical knowledge and competencies.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Working in community settings presents unique challenges, which differ greatly from traditional clinical environments. Senior nurse Ms Pua June Li – who was an inpatient nurse in a hospital geriatric ward before becoming a community nurse anchoring a CHP at SASCO@ Khatib AAC – notes that many patients she works with are middle-aged and seniors. They also typically have more chronic conditions and care needs. Ms Pua facilitates the transitional care of such patients from hospital to home; manages clinical care such as assessing the patient’s medication competency and compliance; performs supportive nursing procedures such as wound care and continence management (managing urinary and bowel issues); and trains caregivers.

Community nurses must also be able to work independently in the management of cases, and doing so can be challenging as they have to navigate intricate health and social care systems, and coordinate community assistance services for patients. They also face the difficult task of carrying out preventive and behavioural change strategies when patients do not adhere to their medication or care plans. Their work requires them to be resourceful and adaptable, as they support patients from different walks of life, including those with varying health conditions and backgrounds.

Despite the demanding nature of her role, Ms Jiang finds great satisfaction in community nursing. Before she switched to her current field, she worked in an acute patient ward for 12 years. “I wanted to explore care beyond the hospital setting, to see how we could help patients in the community,” says Ms Jiang, who holds a nursing degree and an advanced diploma in Gerontology. “The

relationships that I forge with patients and their families are special. We rejoice over each milestone, no matter how small. The most rewarding part of my job is when patients share how, with our support, they are able to cope better at home.”

Ms Jiang recounts various positive outcomes from her interventions: A resident’s blood pressure levels improved after finally agreeing to adhere to prescribed medication; an elderly patient started enjoying park visits in a wheelchair following rehabilitation; family members found peace of mind after being connected to community resources like daycare centres; and caregivers experienced respite, thanks to her recommendation for home equipment. “There are challenging and tough days, but community nursing is a journey of non-stop exploration and learning,” she says.

Ms Pua concurs: “Spending quality time with patients, putting myself in their shoes, and seeing things from their perspective is a privilege.” She adds that serving within the community has improved her care delivery. “Community nursing allows me to gain a better understanding of my patients and their living situations as a whole, so that I can provide person-centred care.” **LW**

patients’ care needs after discharge. They conduct home visits and help patients access various care support and resources, including co-managing with home care partners like the Home Nursing Foundation to facilitate last-mile care.

Ms Jiang explains that referrals from the inpatient team often involve patients with complex medical conditions that require multiple medications, have high care needs, or whose caregivers are under significant stress. She also deals with referrals from community partners concerning residents who frequently fall, or have cognition and medication issues.

During home visits, Ms Jiang may perform nursing procedures, including wound dressing, as well as provide caregiver training. She also educates the patient and family on health monitoring, and assesses the home environment and the patient’s health and social needs. “I engage in many case discussions and collaborate with other healthcare professionals and community partners to craft care plans, and coordinate care to link patients to appropriate resources,” she adds.

➤ Collaborating with nursing homes on end-of-life care.

To improve the quality of life and care for nursing homes residents with palliative care needs, community nurses provide not only clinical care, but also training for



SPORTS,
ETC.

BY DENNY YING

Recently-added Olympic events such as sport climbing and breaking offer excitement and notable health benefits.



The 2024 Paris Olympics (26 July to 11 August) is featuring four optional sports in its edition. Unlike core sports such as athletics and swimming — which are part of every Olympic cycle — optional sports can be added or excluded based on the interests of the host city and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). This also offers the Games flexibility to evolve with global trends.

Making its debut in Paris is breaking — better known to most of us as breakdancing. Meanwhile, surfing, sport climbing, and skateboarding, which premiered at Tokyo 2020, will return. By highlighting these engaging

activities, the IOC aims to connect with new audiences and enrich the Olympic spirit.

Here is how each sport — and their everyday iterations — can contribute to physical and mental well-being.

GLIDE TOWARDS OPTIMAL HEALTH

Skateboarding, known for its creativity and individual expression, brings with it a host of physical benefits. Despite its roots in street culture, skateboarding offers a comprehensive workout that improves balance, coordination, and cardiovascular health.



According to a study, the sport burns an average of 370 calories per hour. This is equivalent to calories burnt during brisk walking, and more calories burnt than playing badminton, making it an effective way to maintain or lose weight. The constant motion and engagement of core muscles contribute to improved balance and stability, which are crucial for overall physical health and injury prevention.

Skateboarding, traditionally seen as a sport for the younger audience, is also increasingly recognised for its mental health benefits in older adults. A study highlighted by British online newspaper, *The Independent*, underscored how skateboarding helps combat depression by fostering a sense of community and providing a creative outlet. The activity also releases endorphins, which boost mood and reduce stress.

▶ Places to try the sport:

Stadium Skatepark at the Singapore Sports Hub, Xtreme Skatepark at East Coast Park, and Trifecta, located next to Somerset MRT

RIDE THE WAVE OF WELLNESS

Surfing, a sport deeply intertwined with nature and the elements, offers a blend of physical and mental benefits.



mood. Breaking, with its dynamic movements, spins, and freezes, provides a high-intensity workout that engages the entire body. It enhances coordination, balance, and agility, leading to improved motor skills and functional movement patterns.

► Places to try the sport:
ActiveGroove Club under ActiveSG, Recognize Studios

ASCEND TO PEAK FITNESS

Not many of us can aspire to be a sport climber with Olympic credentials, but indoor rock climbing is well within our capabilities. A study found that indoor rock climbing required the same energy expenditure as running eight to 11 minutes per mile (approximately 1.6 kilometres). The combination of sustained effort and intermittent bursts of energy during climbs engages both the aerobic and anaerobic systems, enhancing overall cardiovascular health.

Moreover, climbing requires precise coordination and balance, activating multiple muscle groups simultaneously. Research suggests that this full-body workout leads to increased endurance and muscle strength, particularly in the arms, back, and core.

Climbing also improves handgrip. Research shows that grip strength is a key indicator of ageing. Weaker grip strength is linked to poor health outcomes such as bone fractures, diabetes, cognitive decline, depression, and disease-related mortality.

In addition to physical benefits, climbing promotes mental well-being. The problem-solving aspect of navigating routes challenges the mind and fosters cognitive flexibility. Studies have revealed that engaging in activities that require mental concentration, such as climbing, can reduce stress and improve mood.

► Places to try the sport:
The Civil Service Club, SAFRA, and HomeTeamNS clubhouses LW

✎ **IMPORTANT:** *Because all the sports involve intricate moves that require practice and skill, beginners are advised to practise under supervision, particularly when attempting new techniques and moves for the first time.*

Riding the waves requires strength, balance, and adaptability, making it an excellent full-body workout.

Better Health, a digital platform produced in consultation with the Victoria State Government's Department of Health in Australia, highlighted that surfing engages multiple muscle groups, including the core, legs, arms, and back. Paddling out to catch waves builds upper body strength, while the dynamic movements of riding waves strengthen the lower body and improve flexibility. The cardiovascular benefits of surfing are also significant, with research showing that paddling and manoeuvring through waves elevate heart rate and improve cardiovascular endurance.

Moreover, surfing requires focus and concentration, as riders must anticipate and react to changing

wave conditions. Studies have demonstrated that spending time in natural environments can have positive effects on mental health, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

► Places to try the sport:
Splash-N-Surf at the Singapore Sports Hub, and Trifecta, located next to Somerset MRT

DANCE YOUR WAY TO STRENGTH AND STYLE

Breaking is an urban dance form rooted in hip-hop culture, showcasing athleticism, creativity, and self-expression. Beyond its artistic appeal, breaking is a healthy activity.

Dance, in general, has been shown to improve cardiovascular health, flexibility, and muscular endurance. It also boosts



EAT
WELL

EAT RIGHT, SLEEP TIGHT

Finding it hard to doze off at night?
An evening snack might just be the trick in
paving the way to a restful night's sleep.

BY KOH YUEN LIN

A small bowl of milk and whole wheat cereal before bedtime might sound unusual, but did you know that a carbohydrate-rich snack could potentially help you fall asleep faster?

While it might be common knowledge that foods containing caffeine can help keep one awake, few are aware that what we consume before bedtime can affect how we sleep.

We often attribute the quality of our sleep to external factors, such as a peaceful sleeping environment, a mattress with the right level of comfort and support, and the lighting conditions in a bedroom.

However, internal factors like mental wellness and dietary habits typically have a greater impact.

SUPER SUPPER

Sleep is a complex biological process regulated by the body's circadian rhythm — an internal clock that regulates wake and sleep cycles in response to light changes in our environment. Melatonin is a hormone that helps maintain this cycle,

while serotonin triggers melatonin production. Naturally, foods rich in tryptophan, melatonin, and serotonin are associated with better sleep.

Sleep researchers are particularly interested in tart cherries, which contain all three compounds in their natural states. Similarly, a glass of warm milk before bedtime is more than just a comforting ritual. Milk, a good source of melatonin, also contains tryptophan, which increases concentrations of melatonin and serotonin. Many nuts are also rich in melatonin, with pistachio being one of the best sources. Other foods, including goji berries, corn, mushroom, and oats, also contribute to boosting the body's melatonin levels.

There is a long list of serotonin-rich foods, ranging from plantains and bananas to fresh pineapple, ripe tomatoes, and kiwi. Walnuts also contain high concentrations of serotonin.

Tryptophan-rich foods — spanning legumes and grains to seafood and poultry — can also indirectly increase serotonin levels. According to *WebMD*, just 126 grams (g) of tofu contains 296 milligrams (mg) of tryptophan, while 85g of canned tuna contains 252mg.

Other nutrients are also at play when it comes to eating for good sleep. B vitamins, such as that in legumes, eggs and dairy products, alongside omega-3 fatty acids in fatty fish, are linked to higher levels of melatonin. The flavonoids in chamomile tea, along with the calming compounds in valerian root tea, can help to reduce anxiety and induce sleepiness; while magnesium in bananas can reduce the stress hormone cortisol, putting one in a more relaxed state for a good night's sleep.



Heavy meals or spicy foods can cause issues such as acid reflux, heartburn, and indigestion – all of which would disrupt sleep.



What you drink – and when – can disrupt sleep as well. The effects of caffeine can last up to six hours or more, which suggests that a double-esspresso or matcha latte savoured at 6pm could very well keep you up at midnight. Other substances to avoid close to bedtime include alcohol, especially in excess. A small sip of whisky could help your body relax and get you ready for bed. However, excessive amounts might disrupt your sleep in the middle of the night; you could find yourself awake after the alcohol's sedative effect has worn off.

WHAT YOU EAT IS HOW YOU SLEEP

Apart from specific foods and drinks, a person's general diet can also impact how well one sleeps at night. In an interview with *The Guardian* newspaper, the United Kingdom-based physiologist and sleep therapist Dr Nerina Ramlakhan said, "It's not just what you eat, it's also your patterns of eating that make a difference."

A paper, published by the United States National Institutes of Health, cites studies that have shown how certain dietary patterns may affect night-time sleep. There has been short-term research linking high carbohydrate intake to the ability to fall asleep faster. However, the same diet is also linked to reduced periods of deep sleep and increased Rapid Eye Movement (REM) – a phase of sleep where most dreams take place. While there seems to be a correlation between a high-fat diet and decreased REM, the consensus is that

a high-fibre, low-saturated fat diet rich in fruit, vegetables, and whole grains promote better sleep.

An individual's dietary habits also affect how one reacts to foods consumed before bedtime. For those who habitually eat before bedtime, a right snack or nightcap could make a difference to the quality of their night-time rest. For those who do not have the habit of eating within an hour to bedtime, nocturnal food intake – regardless

of whatever sleep-inducing properties it might have – could negatively influence sleep quality. This is because digestion plays a big role in our sleep quality. Therefore, it is best not to eat within three hours from your bedtime.

But what about that "food-coma" sensation that puts many of us to sleep after a meal? "Many individuals feel sleepy after a big meal because they overeat and the rate of change in their blood sugar stimulates the insulin response, which sedates them," explained Dr Ramlakhan. Despite the drowsiness a feast might induce, heavy meals or spicy foods can cause issues such as acid reflux, heartburn, and indigestion – all of which would disrupt sleep. As the digestive process diverts blood from the brain to the gut for digestion, it could potentially compromise the brain's essential functions during sleep, especially in relation to repair and waste removal.

There is no recipe to good sleep. However, what is clear is that healthy dietary habits go hand in hand with getting a good night's rest. Eat right, sleep tight! **LW**



DIET AND LIFESTYLE FOR OPTIMAL SLEEP

A holistic approach to improving sleep quality.

THE HYDRATION LOOP

Drinking too much water close to your bedtime can result in disrupted sleep in the form of visits to the bathroom. On the other hand, dehydration – with the discomfort it causes, such as headaches, dry mouth, and muscle cramps – can pose a challenge to sleeping well. A lack of sleep further contributes to dehydration, making it a vicious cycle. Rather than gulping down water only when you feel parched, regularly take sips throughout the day. A balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables helps to increase your daily water intake.

DEVELOP A SLEEP ROUTINE

Set a regular bedtime so that you know when to start winding down the day's activities to prepare for sleep.

LIGHTS OUT

Even the light emitted from your phone screen can impact sleep. Experts recommend switching off all devices – from tablets to television sets and computers – at least 15 to 30 minutes before bedtime.

PUMP UP TO WIND DOWN

While exercising at night is not traditionally prescribed as part of good sleep hygiene, new research has shown that a moderate evening workout at least an hour before bedtime might help individuals fall asleep faster and spend more time in deep sleep.



SILVER
GLOW

THE AGE OF GIVING



A timely glance at a poster in a hospital clinic led Mr Soo Pek Seng to discover a passion for volunteering.

BY KEENAN PEREIRA MAIN PHOTO AIK CHEN

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Here is how NHG's Network for Senior Volunteers taps on the wisdom of seniors:

Volunteers are notified of volunteering opportunities by email.



Volunteers express interest in programmes based on their preferences, needs, and circumstances.



A virtual session is organised to delve into the details.



Those who are still keen are invited to training sessions.



What has become Mr Soo Pek Seng's way of life now started from a routine hospital visit. Almost six years ago, he was at the orthopaedic department of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) for a follow-up visit to treat his chronic lower back pain. Mr Soo, who was 55 years old at that point, was planning to leave the packaging industry where he had spent most of his working life.

It was at the waiting area that Mr Soo caught sight of a poster that called for para-clinical volunteers to assist patients who had total knee replacements. "At that time, I had no real plan for how I would spend my retirement," recalls Mr Soo. "So I decided to give volunteering a shot." After signing up, Mr Soo received training on how to help knee surgery patients perform rehabilitative exercises to improve their mobility.

Volunteers like Mr Soo are among a growing pool of seniors helping fellow elders to live better. The National Healthcare Group's (NHG) Network for Senior Volunteers helps drive such volunteerism by pooling programmes and resources, and matching seniors with volunteering opportunities. There are currently over 20,000 volunteers in the Network.

Pre- and post-COVID 19, Mr Soo remains a committed volunteer, setting aside at least four hours a week for his work at TTSH. Weekends, however, are dedicated to his family, especially his young grandchildren.

Explaining why healthcare volunteering is so close to his heart, Mr Soo says, "It's quite a special way to give back; everybody has a different cause that speaks to them, and this resonates with me most. I can see the impact of my actions on the patients and their families."

Mr Soo is proud to be a part of the recovery journey of a great number of patients. "Engaging in volunteering activities lifts my spirits," he says. "Plus, I have benefitted from TTSH, and want to give back in my own way."

The benefits of volunteering go both ways. Over the years, various studies have shown that seniors who volunteer — especially those who do so regularly — experience an enhanced sense of well-being. The National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre's Silver Volunteerism Study found that senior volunteers above 65 could reach out to twice as many people in times of their own need, compared to those who do not volunteer.

NHG'S NETWORK FOR SENIOR VOLUNTEERS IN NUMBERS

LAUNCHED IN
2023

OVER
20,000

VOLUNTEERS AGED
60 TO 90+

Involves 17 health and social care organisations in Central and North Singapore, including Ren Ci Hospital, Care Corner Singapore, St Luke's Eldercare, Dover Park Hospice, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), and Methodist Welfare Services

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON VOLUNTEERING WITH TTSH:



Mr Soo (standing, far left) with fellow volunteers at the Singapore Patient Conference 2023.

have to spend more time encouraging and cajoling them, as well as explaining the benefits."

FROM PAUSE TO PIVOT

The COVID-19 pandemic halted volunteering activities. Still, the urge to give back never went away and post-COVID 19, opportunities to volunteer re-opened. Mr Soo was pleasantly surprised by the diverse stints that sprang up after the pandemic. "I spent time at the hospital pharmacy, helping to pick, pack, and label medication, while also supporting the *Healthier SG* programme as a volunteer ambassador," he shares. "Since March this year, I have been involved in community health screenings and have also enrolled in the patient buddies programme."

Members of NHG's Network for Senior Volunteers are kept informed of volunteering opportunities through email. Volunteers can then express their interest to be part of an upcoming programme, and after which, attend a virtual session to find out more. This is followed by practical training and assessment. "You never feel like you are

out of your depth. The TTSH team is always ready to help," says Mr Soo.

Volunteering has also enriched Mr Soo's social life. "The more you volunteer, the more familiar faces you see, and they eventually become your friends," he says.

The Network also organises social gatherings, including annual volunteer appreciation parties and recognition lunches. "These help us bond over good *makan*," says Mr Soo. "In addition, I've learnt so much about healthcare and ageing through the CHARGE Up! Learning Programme. The practical knowledge I have amassed will help me and my loved ones as we get older." **LW**



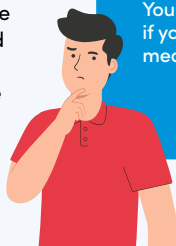
Mr Soo assisting a patient with her exercise.

PATIENTS WHO INSPIRE

When he first started out, Mr Soo found that volunteering at TTSH was not as arduous as one might expect. "It was quite manageable, as patients would be guided by a video, and we would step in to explain the purpose and assist them to perform the exercises correctly," he shares. Mr Soo recalls a sprightly 78-year-old woman, who was an inspiration for him to live better. "She had a no-nonsense approach to the exercises. When I asked why she was so motivated, she said, "I want to have a better lifestyle, continue to travel with my family, and see the world."

"Her determination was very inspiring and made me more conscious about my own lifestyle. I've always exercised, but she made me even more diligent," says Mr Soo, who now hits the gym and swimming pool at least twice a week.

There are also patients who are not motivated. "There are those who are in a bit more pain and discomfort after surgery. They are understandably a bit more reluctant to exercise. In such situations, volunteers may



▶ KNOW THE FACTS

FICTION ❌

Volunteering requires a lot of time and commitment.

You need to have experience to give back to healthcare.

You cannot volunteer if you have existing medical conditions.

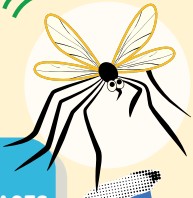
FACT ✅

You can tailor your commitment based on your schedule.

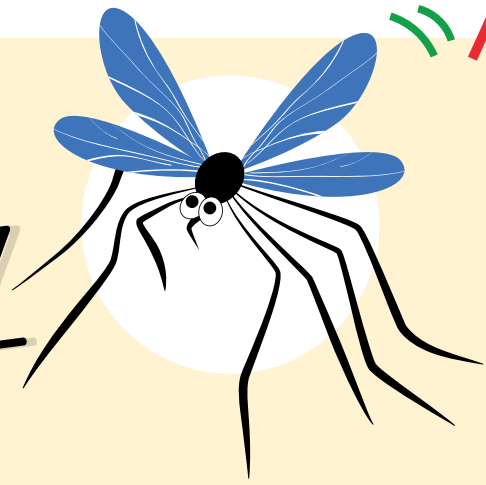
Training programmes equip volunteers with health skills, knowledge, and the confidence to care for themselves and others around them. No prior training or knowledge is needed — all you need is a passion to give back!

Not all volunteers in NHG's Network for Senior Volunteers have always been healthy; a few have suffered from a stroke or are recovering from accidents. Despite these circumstances, they are happy to support others, seeing this as part of their own rehabilitation and recovery.

LIFESPACES



BUZZ OFF



The risk of contracting mosquito-borne diseases rises in tandem with scorching temperatures. Here is how to stay safe.

and 34°C have been prevalent since. This ongoing heatwave, combined with periodic torrential showers, create ideal conditions for *Aedes* mosquitoes to breed as they lay eggs in stagnant water. Warm weather also accelerates the eggs' hatching process, leading to a faster spread of dengue and Zika.

ONLY THE FEMALES BITE

Distinguished by its black-and-white banded body, the female *Aedes* mosquito needs the protein found in blood to develop its eggs. It has a life cycle of approximately two weeks, and during this period, it can attack multiple people. After feeding on someone infected with dengue or Zika, the mosquito becomes a carrier of these viruses, transmitting them to others with each subsequent bite.

A mosquito can produce up to 300 eggs in its lifetime. All it requires is a body of stagnant water as small as a 20-cent coin. In optimal conditions, eggs can hatch into larvae within a day. After six days, an adult mosquito emerges, ready to continue the breeding cycle.

SLOW AND PAINFUL

Dengue fever is characterised by a high body temperature (40°C) developing within four to seven days after an infected mosquito bite. Other symptoms include severe

headache with pain behind the eyes; joint and muscle pain; skin rashes; nausea and vomiting; bleeding from the nose or gums; and easy bruising of the skin.

In some cases, dengue develops into a potentially life-threatening form known as dengue haemorrhagic fever, or dengue shock syndrome. Warning signs include bleeding from the gums, nose and stool; persistent vomiting; abdominal pain or tenderness; and restlessness or lethargy.

For Zika, symptoms usually appear three to 14 days after infection, and include fever, rash, joint pain, muscle pain, headache, and conjunctivitis (red eyes).

It may be trickier to identify Zika patients, as only one in five will display symptoms. Even if they do, the symptoms are generally mild and last between four to seven days. While fatalities are rare, there is no vaccine available for the Zika virus, and it has been linked to neurological complications or abnormalities in foetuses. As direct blood transmission is possible, safe sex practices or abstinence is advised for up to three months for those who have been infected.

What is more troubling is that there are no specific treatments for both infections. Patients receive treatment only for their symptoms, while waiting for the illness to pass. Furthermore, it is possible to contract both viruses simultaneously as a co-infection.

THE HEAT IS ON

Rising temperatures worldwide are making it more conducive for the *Aedes* mosquitoes to breed. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported a record 4.5 million dengue

BY MORGAN AWYONG

Despite stepped-up education and enforcement, the number of dengue cases has been climbing. As of June 2024, the National Environment Agency (NEA) has reported over 9,250 cases so far this year, averaging about 356 per week. Even more concerning is the mortality rate — while there were six fatalities for the entire 2023, there have already been seven deaths in the first quarter of 2024.

Exacerbating the problem is the resurgence of Zika, another mosquito-borne disease. The female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito — responsible for dengue — also spreads Zika, as well as chikungunya, among other viruses. As of June 2024, seven cases of Zika have been reported; and it is worth keeping in mind that in 2023, two cases escalated to 15 in just a month. No cases of chikungunya have been reported so far this year.

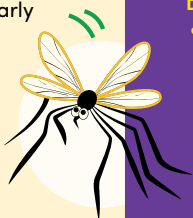
A PERSISTENT LOCAL THREAT

On 26 April 2024, Singapore experienced its hottest day yet this year at 36.4 degrees Celsius (°C). Consistent temperatures between 33

cases in 2023 across 80 countries. Not only is the virus spreading to new regions in Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, and South America; it has also surged in Asia, with nearly a million cases.

Traditionally, the peak infection season falls between May and October in Singapore. However, prolonged hot weather extends the transmission period and provides more opportunities for breeding.

See a doctor immediately if you experience symptoms and suspect you have been bitten by an Aedes mosquito. Early diagnosis and treatment can significantly improve outcomes and reduce the risk of complications. In the case of Zika, this is especially important for pregnant women, as the virus has been linked to microcephaly – a condition where a baby’s head is smaller than expected due to abnormal brain development – in a small number of unborn fetuses. [LW](#)



STOP THE SPREAD

A multi-faceted approach is key to preventing dengue and Zika.

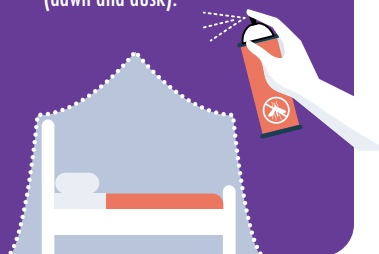


ENVIRONMENT:

- Practise the Mozzie Wipeout ‘B-L-O-C-K’ steps:
 - B**reak up hardened soil
 - L**ift and empty flowerpot plates
 - O**verturn pails and wipe their rims
 - C**hange water in vases
 - K**eep roof gutters clear and place BTI insecticide inside
- Consider using air-conditioning and keeping the doors and windows closed to reduce mosquito activity. Alternatively, installing screens can help.
- Spatial repellents, such as coils, electric vaporisers, and chemical-based diffusers containing D-trans allethrin and prallethrin can repel mosquitoes.
- Use a mosquito net when sleeping, or wherever possible (e.g. baby cots).
- Spray insecticides in dark corners of the house where mosquitos may hide.

INDIVIDUAL:

- Wear long-sleeved clothing and long pants, especially when outdoors.
- Apply insect repellent whenever possible, especially if you experience bites or are in a hotspot. Those containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide), picaridin or IR3535 are the most effective.
- Avoid outdoor activities during peak mosquito hours (dawn and dusk).



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SPOTLIGHT

▶ ELEVATING HEALTH SERVICES IN NEE SOON

The new Khatib Polyclinic enhances community health options, by integrating innovative social and healthcare strategies for residents of all ages.



From left to right: Mr Louis Ng, Adviser, Nee Soon GRC; Ms Carrie Tan, Adviser, Nee Soon GRC; Dr Karen Ng, CEO, NHGP, and Chief, Primary Care, Population Health Campus, NHG; Prof Joe Sim, Group CEO, NHG; Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health; Mr Tan Tee How, Chairman, NHG; Prof Eugene Fidelis Soh, Deputy Group CEO (Population Health), NHG; Dr Gabriel Ding, Head, Khatib Polyclinic, NHGP; A/Prof Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Minister of State for National Development; Mr Derrick Goh, Adviser, Nee Soon GRC.

> Khatib Polyclinic officially opened on 13 May, becoming the ninth facility in the National Healthcare Group (NHG)'s network of polyclinics. The inauguration was graced by Guest-of-Honour Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health; as well as Advisers for Nee Soon GRC, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law Mr K Shanmugam, Minister of State for National Development Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim,

Ms Carrie Tan, Mr Louis Ng, and Mr Derrick Goh.

BRIDGING HEALTHCARE AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Besides offering comprehensive services ranging from acute and preventive care to specialised programmes for women and children, as well as dental care, Khatib Polyclinic also focuses on community integration. This is underscored by the launch of the ENRICH (ENgaging and empoweRING our Community for better Health) programme, which works closely with neighbouring community partners such as Goodlife Studio (Yishun) (Active Ageing Centre) and SASCO@Khatib (Singapore Amalgamated Services Co-operative Organisation).

Collaborations also extend to St Luke's ElderCare at Nee Soon Central to offer fall prevention programmes to at-risk seniors. Residents, patients, and caregivers can also look forward to health promotion activities conducted at the Community Plaza and the Health Studio.

As part of a broader initiative, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) extends its

RELATE (RELationship-based heAlth and social inTEgration) programme to its Central-North Primary Care Network (CN-PCN) General Practitioner (GP) partners. The move allows CN-PCN GPs to connect patients with NHG Community Health Teams (CHTs), enhancing the coordination of care between healthcare providers.



THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF HEALTH

▶ Khatib Polyclinic's community art piece, *Building Blocks for Good Health*, launched during the polyclinic's official opening, is made up of more than 19,000 LEGO® blocks. It features the polyclinic as the heartbeat of the community, uniting healthcare, residents, and patients towards the shared purpose of holistic health and wellness.



Dr Melissa Guay, Dental Head, Khatib Polyclinic, introducing the comprehensive dental facilities such as the ambidextrous chair paired with the wheelchair tilter.

▶ SERVING THE HEALTHCARE NEEDS OF THE NORTH-WESTERN REGION

On 17 May, Minister for Health, Mr Ong Ye Kung, visited the new Woodlands Health (WH) Campus, and toured its Emergency Department, Operating Theatres, and integrated acute and community hospital wards.

UNDER ONE CARE

WH has 430 beds, and its acute and community hospital wards are located in the same building, providing a seamless and holistic approach to patient care across various medical specialties.

The Emergency Department is directly connected to critical care services – such as the Intensive Care Unit, Cardiac Centre, Diagnostic Radiology, and Operating Theatres – by a dedicated lift to ensure rapid response for urgent cases. This integration is crucial for patients requiring immediate and complex interventions.

DIVERSE SPECIALIST OUTPATIENT SERVICES

WH provides an array of specialist outpatient services under one roof, and these include gastroenterology,



A/Prof Nicholas Chew, Chairman, Medical Board, WH (left), and Prof Jason Cheah, CEO, WH, and Deputy Group CEO (Strategy, Planning & Resourcing), NHG, sharing with Minister Ong the layout of the Campus with the 3D model.

ophthalmology, otolaryngology (ENT), urology, endocrinology, and geriatric medicine. These specialist clinics are supported by radiology, rehabilitation, and pharmacy services all located within the same building.

The WH campus also includes a Long Term Care Tower, which houses the Renci @ Woodlands nursing home and a healing garden, to create a holistic environment for recovery.



Minister Ong interacting with a patient.



Minister Ong speaking to patients doing Art Therapy.



Dr Rabind Charles, Deputy Divisional Chairperson (Emergency Medicine), WH, showing Minister Ong around.



▶ GUIDING RESIDENTS TOWARDS LONGER, HEALTHIER LIVES

NHG unveils its Population Health Campus.

.....
▶ On 1 April, over 200 National Healthcare Group (NHG) staff gathered for the launch of the NHG Population Health Campus (PHC). This initiative aims to unify and enhance the Group's population health outreach, including its polyclinics and the integrated care networks, to more effectively serve the 1.5 million residents in the Central and North of Singapore.



The PHC will focus on Population Health, Community Care, and Primary Care, as part of transforming and scaling up NHG's care systems. It will also complement and integrate with its hospitals, institutions, and community care partners, to deliver coordinated care.

▶ EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS WITH PLAY2CARE

This innovative app imparts IMH's T.A.N.G.O communication strategy in managing communication challenges commonly encountered in dementia caregiving.

.....
Caring for persons with dementia can be challenging, especially when there are changes in behaviours that caregivers may find difficult to manage. A newly-launched mobile app by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and digital health platform Taggle aims to help caregivers understand some of these behaviours and develop dementia-focused communication techniques to better manage them.

"Patients with dementia experience a decline in their cognitive abilities such

as their memory and the ability to communicate. What we see as a 'behavioural' problem is actually an attempt to communicate their unmet needs with their remaining cognitive abilities," said Dr Yao Fengyuan, Senior Consultant and Chief, Department of Geriatric Psychiatry at IMH.

The Play2Care app uses gamification and a series of explanatory videos to help caregivers learn the T.A.N.G.O approach, a communication strategy developed by IMH's clinicians based on their clinical experience. In the game, players are guided to apply the T.A.N.G.O

technique in five scenarios, each depicting a behaviour commonly seen in persons with dementia. In each scenario, players will identify an unmet need, and modify the communication approach as they attempt to find a technique that addresses the challenge at hand.

T.A.N.G.O stands for:

- Tender approach
- Acknowledge
- No challenging
- Get into simple conversation
- Optimise environment

See page 16 for more details on T.A.N.G.O.



In one of the game scenarios, the caregiver is faced with an elderly who is refusing to shower. Using the T.A.N.G.O communication strategy, the caregiver has to find the best possible way to alleviate this situation.

▶ CELEBRATING COMMUNITY HEALTH ACHIEVEMENTS

The POPCollect AWPS 2024 highlighted collaborative efforts in Central and North Singapore.

The National Healthcare Group (NHG)'s annual signature event, Population Health Collective (POPCollect) Annual Workplan Seminar (AWPS), celebrates achievements in improving the health and well-being of the 1.5 million population in Central and North Singapore. POPCollect brings together community care providers, social service agencies, general practitioners and institutions of higher learning, as well as religious organisations – all of which have collaborated with NHG to support residents through communities of care.

On 26 April, POPCollect AWPS 2024 kicked off at the Ng Teng Fong Centre for Healthcare Innovation, with Mdm Rahayu Mahzam, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health (MOH), as Guest-of-Honour. This was followed



by a panel discussion and workshop on building sustainable and connected communities of care in support of *Healthier SG* and *Age Well SG*.

On 27 April, POPCollect conversations were hosted and co-organised by Touchpoint@Ang Mo Kio, Care Corner Active Ageing Centre in Woodlands, and St Luke's

ElderCare Centre in Nee Soon Central for General Practitioners (GPs). These sessions strengthened and deepened the connections between primary care and community care, and showcased the wide range of community resources available to address the unique healthcare needs of residents.

▶ DERMATOLOGICAL CARE ON SHOWCASE

The NSC Open House and Public Forum drew enthusiastic crowds to its new facility.

On 25 May, the National Skin Centre (NSC) hosted its first Open House and Public Forum since relocating to its state-of-the-art facility last year. The event, which attracted over 230 participants, offered an exclusive opportunity for the public to witness the latest advancements in dermatological care, and explore the modern amenities of the new building.

Visitors explored clinics, skincare booths, and treatment areas. The event also featured educational talks centred around Men's and Women's Health, with dermatology experts

discussing a range of topics, including hair and nail health, sun protection, vaccines, and sexually transmitted infections.

GOING BEHIND THE SCENES

Among the highlights were the clinic visits that gave visitors a closer look at the Phototherapy Clinic's newest machine – a whole-body UVA1 machine that can bring time-savings and added convenience to patients with severe eczema, scleroderma (a rare condition that thickens skin and tissue), and

mycosis fungoides (blood cancers that cause changes in skin, like itchiness, rashes, plaques or tumours). The clinic also showcased Photodynamic Therapy, a non-invasive treatment option for certain types of skin cancer, and a blue light machine that can effectively target acne.

The Mandalay Clinic Laser Suites, with its thoughtfully designed areas for privacy, rest, and recovery, was also open to the public. Participants learnt about specialised tools used for procedures, such as electro-surgery and cryotherapy.



A/Prof Chua Sze Hon, Executive Director, NSC, giving an opening speech to kickstart the event.



Visitors exploring NSC's new phototherapy clinic.

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NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP CORPORATE OFFICE

3 Fusionopolis Link, #03-08,
Nexus @ one-north
Singapore 138543
Tel: 6496-6000
www.nhg.com.sg

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11 Jalan Tan Tock Seng
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www.wh.com.sg

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Tel: 6389-2000
www.imh.com.sg

YISHUN COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

2 Yishun Central 2
Singapore 768024
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NATIONAL SKIN CENTRE

1 Mandalay Road
Singapore 308205
Tel: 6253-4455
www.nsc.com.sg

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NHG DIAGNOSTICS

3 Fusionopolis Link, #05-08,
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Tel: 6496-6683 / 6496-6682
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Prof Michael Kidd

Professor of Global Primary Care & Future Health Systems, Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, UK; Director of the Centre for Future Health Systems, University of New South Wales, Australia



Prof Francesco Landi

Head of Department of Aging, Orthopedics & Rheumatological Sciences – Fondazione Policlinico Universitario "A. Gemelli" IRCCS, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy



Dr Niamh Lennox-Chhugani

Chief Executive & Director of Research, International Foundation for Integrated Care, UK

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Day 1
10 Oct, Thu

Improving Years of Healthy Life

- Invisible & Enduring Scars of Lifetime Adversities In Singapore: Prevention, Management, & Mental Health Consequences
- New Frontiers in Diabetes: From Care to Community
- Obesity Prevention & Management

Aging Well In The Golden Years

- Cancer – Advances In Screening & Management
- Conversations around Falls, Frailty & Osteoporosis
- Early Detection & Management of Cognitive Impairment

Day 2
11 Oct, Fri

Health & Social Care Integration & Population Health

- Creating a Movement of Health to Add Years of Healthy Life
- Hospital @ Home
- Patient Empowerment: Unlocking the Transformative Potential of Technology

Enablers For Care Transformation

- Clinical Informatics & Data Analytics For Population Health
- Unleashing the Power of Value-Based Care: A Collaborative Workshop to Add Value to Years of Healthy Life!
- Will Artificial Intelligence Replace Clinicians? Educating Healthcare Professionals in the Age of AI

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