

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

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NTU Singapore and National Healthcare Group launch new Master's programme to boost national palliative care capabilities

To meet the urgent need of upskilling healthcare professionals in end-of-life care, **Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore)** and the **National Healthcare Group (NHG)** have launched a new **Master of Science (MSc) in Holistic Palliative Care (HoPE)**.

The postgraduate programme is developed and delivered by the **Palliative Care Centre for Excellence in Research and Education (PaIC)**, a collaboration between **NTU's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine)**, NHG and **Dover Park Hospice** to spearhead palliative care research and education.

The new MSc in Holistic Palliative Care is part of **NTU's FlexiMasters** programme that offers a flexible and 'stackable' learning pathway, from a Graduate Certificate to a FlexiMasters and finally to a full Master of Science degree.

With its flexible structure, the MSc in Holistic Palliative Care is the first-of-its-kind postgraduate programme in Asia for healthcare professionals keen on upskilling their knowledge in palliative care on a part-time basis, while allowing them to pursue their existing work and family commitments.

Professor Joseph Sung, NTU Senior Vice President (Health and Life Sciences) and Dean of NTU LKCMedicine, said: "The Master of Science in Holistic Palliative Care joins the growing portfolio of quality postgraduate programmes for healthcare professionals in NTU LKCMedicine. It will not only contribute to addressing the manpower needs of the palliative care ecosystem, but also the overall readiness of the healthcare system to provide good quality holistic care for the Singapore population, from cradle to grave. Learners will be better equipped to look beyond pharmacological methods and diagnosis when caring for patients, especially at the end-of-life stage, by incorporating bio-psychosocial elements when providing support to patients and their family members."

Highlighting the urgent need to increase both the capacity and quality of palliative care

in the healthcare system due to the exponential growth in Singapore's elderly population, **Associate Professor Allyn Hum, PaIC Centre Director, Course Director of HoPE and Senior Consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH)** said: "To meet the needs of an ageing population with complex chronic health conditions, all healthcare professionals should be equipped with palliative care knowledge, ensuring that their patients receive appropriate care that minimises suffering and improves their quality of life, and are empowered with information and resources from their care team to engage in meaningful dialogues about Advance Care Planning."

Associate Professor Michelle Jong, Group Chief Education Officer, NHG, said: "NHG and NTU LKCMedicine have been strong partners in ensuring the supply and training of the next generation of physicians. Continuous professional development of healthcare professionals is critical to NHG in providing quality and safe care for improving the health of our patients and population. Therefore, it is imperative that NHG and NTU LKCMedicine continue to collaborate and introduce new stackable programmes for postgraduate continuing education and training of our healthcare professionals. The partnership between NHG and NTU LKCMedicine marries both our medical, technological and academic expertise to develop and operate postgraduate programmes necessary to underpin successful teaching and learning."

As one of the programme's key delivery partners, Dover Park Hospice provides clinical attachments for learners who enrol in the programme. **Dr Mervyn Koh, Medical Director, Dover Park Hospice**, said: "Palliative care is more than just the care of a patient's physical needs. It is a whole-person approach that includes the emotional, psychosocial and spiritual wellbeing of patients that are pertinent during end-of-life care. The learners will be able to apply what they have learned with hands-on experience working in different palliative care settings such as inpatient, home care and day care."

The course commences in August this year, with registration for **HoPE's Graduate Certificate programme** opening from January 2024 to April 2024.

First palliative care 'stackable' master's to meet industry and individual needs

The MSc in Holistic Palliative Care is designed for working healthcare professionals, such as doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. It supports the growing demand for professional training and manpower development in the palliative care industry, such as palliative care for terminal and end-stage chronic disease patients in hospices, at the patient's home, and in healthcare institutions.

A survey of 2,326 healthcare professionals by the Singapore Hospice Council in 2020 found only about four in 10 received training in palliative care. Of this group, 58 per cent of doctors, 45 per cent of nurses, and 60 per cent of allied health professionals

felt that more could be done to prepare them to provide end-of-life care.¹

Professor Jennifer Cleland, Vice Dean of Education, NTU LKCMedicine, said: “The current manpower needs in the palliative ecosystem are fulfilled by local programmes that do not extend to the Master of Science level. However, these courses do not provide a sustainable and comprehensive training pathway to develop the skill sets needed to match the expanding scope of palliative care. While existing university-level programmes are only for medical doctors, the MSc in Holistic Palliative Care programme is a viable option for all working healthcare professionals to develop their expertise in palliative care.”

To create a programme attuned to Singapore’s evolving healthcare system and the learning needs of the healthcare community, the curriculum for the MSc in Holistic Palliative Care was developed by PaIC in consultation with Singapore’s Ministry of Health, Agency for Integrated Care, Singapore Hospice Council and an international expert, along with focus group discussions with 60 healthcare professionals. Their feedback formed the basis of the programme’s multidisciplinary focus on psychosocial aspects of palliative care as well as its flexible structure.

The programme’s stackable design allows learners to build their skills and credentials incrementally, and allows them the flexibility of multiple entry and exit points in the training pathway. This benefits new healthcare professionals entering the palliative care workforce and existing healthcare professionals keen on upgrading their skills and capabilities.

The Graduate Certificate programme will focus on building basic foundational knowledge and skills in the medical, psychosocial, and practical aspects of palliative care. Learners can then move on to the FlexiMasters programme, which builds advanced foundational knowledge and skills in the same areas.

The credits earned during the FlexiMasters can be transferred into an MSc in Holistic Palliative Care degree, which healthcare professionals pursuing senior or leadership roles in palliative care can appreciate. This stage of the programme focuses on higher-order topics such as research, economics, communication, and specialised paediatric aspects of palliative care practice, and includes 40 hours of clinical attachment.

The Asian-centric focus of the programme also helps enhance the palliative care ecosystem across Asia, which as a continent increasingly faces the challenges of an ageing population and manpower development needs in palliative care.

¹ [2020 SHC Key Survey Findings of Awareness of Hospice & Palliative Care among Healthcare Professionals in Singapore.](#)

Multi-disciplinary curriculum emphasising Asia's unique cultural and spiritual setting

The MSc in Holistic Palliative Care emphasises the multi-disciplinary nature of palliative care and its management in different healthcare settings, such as hospitals, nursing homes, and in the community, and across all illnesses and diseases.

The course will cover topics such as palliative medicine, psychosocial care and thanatology taught by experts from the palliative care ecosystem, including clinicians, academics, senior nurses and allied health professionals. This multi-disciplinary mix of expertise and skillset will provide a holistic foundation in the practice of palliative care in Asia, recognising the social, cultural, and spiritual context that defines our healthcare settings.

It provides healthcare professionals with greater awareness and understanding of the psychological and medical needs of their patients and the support they require, within the cultural context of the role of religions and the family unit's involvement in end-of-life conversations.

The programme also focuses on real-world application through mentoring and clinical attachments, so that learners can apply palliative care and its psychosocial elements confidently in hospitals and care settings.

For more information about the programme as well as enrolment details, please view the website [here](#).

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About Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

A research-intensive public university, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has 33,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Engineering, Business, Science, Medicine, Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, and Graduate colleges.

NTU is also home to world-renowned autonomous institutes – the National Institute of Education, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering – and various leading research centres such as the Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Environment & Water Research Institute (NEWRI) and Energy Research Institute @ NTU (ERI@N).

Under the NTU Smart Campus vision, the University harnesses the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources.

Ranked amongst the world's top universities, the University's main campus is also frequently listed among the world's most beautiful. Known for its sustainability, NTU has achieved 100% Green Mark Platinum certification for all its eligible building projects. Apart from its main campus, NTU also has a medical campus in Novena, Singapore's healthcare district.

For more information, visit www.ntu.edu.sg

About Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine

Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) trains doctors who put patients at the centre of their exemplary care. The School, which offers both undergraduate and graduate programmes, is named after local philanthropist Tan Sri Dato Lee Kong Chian. Officially opened on 28 August 2017, LKCMedicine aims to be a model for innovative medical education and a centre for transformative research. The School's primary clinical partner is the National Healthcare Group, a leader in public healthcare recognised for the quality of its medical expertise, facilities and teaching. Graduates from the five-year undergraduate medical degree programme will have a strong understanding of the scientific basis of medicine, with an emphasis on technology, data science and the humanities.

Visit www.ntu.edu.sg/medicine for more information.

About the National Healthcare Group

The National Healthcare Group (NHG) is a leader in public healthcare in Singapore recognised for the quality of its medical expertise and facilities. Care is provided through an integrated system of primary care polyclinics, acute care and tertiary hospitals, and national specialty centres. Together, we provide comprehensive and innovative healthcare to address the unique needs of our patients and the population we serve.

As the Regional Health Manager for 1.5 million residents in Central and North Singapore, NHG through its Central, Woodlands, and Yishun health networks collaborates with private general practices, public and community health and social care providers to keep residents well and healthy.

The 22,000 healthcare professionals in NHG are committed towards building healthier and resilient communities, and Adding Years of Healthy Life to the people we serve.

More information is available at www.nhg.com.sg.