

NHG Pharmacy

- As Singapore transitions from pandemic to endemic COVID-19, and embarks on *Healthier SG*, the National Healthcare Group Pharmacy (NHGPh) remains committed to caring for our patients by advocating the safe and responsible use of medication, as well as dispensing holistic care to those we serve.

A NEW GROUP PHARMACY COUNCIL FORMED

In November 2021, NHG inaugurated a Group Pharmacy Council (GPC) that brings together the pharmacy fraternity in NHG with a collective vision to advance the pharmacy practice, deliver better care, experience, and value – beyond medication use – for our patients and the population we serve. GPC is represented by pharmacy leaders from across NHG Institutions, and guided by the NHG Clinical Board. The four primary drivers for GPC's strategic direction and shared vision are:

- Providing accessible, seamless, and personalised pharmaceutical care for the population
- Reducing drug-related problems and healthcare utilisation through medication management
- Developing preventive health strategies to promote wellness and reduce complications
- Creating joy in work by enabling pharmacy staff to practise at the top of their licence or capability

POPULATION-BASED APPROACH TO MEDICATION MANAGEMENT (POP MED)

Patients often seek care across multiple healthcare settings and inevitably face challenges in managing their medications. In August 2019, Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) and National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) started Project PopMed in Toa Payoh Polyclinic to address medication-related problems, and improve health literacy and communication with patients across different care settings. Under this collaboration, pharmacists conduct medication reviews for their patients at planned intervals, address patients' medication-related challenges, and collaborate with other healthcare professionals to provide a holistic, person-centred care experience. Preliminary results showed that Project PopMed has helped to reduce healthcare costs by

Population-Based Approach To Medication Management (PopMed).



The NHG Group Pharmacy Council (GPC) held its inaugural strategic meeting on 2 November 2021.

S\$2,968 per patient per annum and resolved medication-related problems by 84 per cent. In addition, medication adherence and beliefs on medication measures showed improved or sustained scores in 90 per cent and 86 per cent of patients, respectively. Based on these promising results, there are plans to implement Project PopMed in more NHG Institutions.

MEDICATION THERAPY MANAGEMENT CLINIC

The Medication Therapy Management (MTM) Clinic supports the core teamlet model of care in NHGP with a holistic review approach to address the increasingly complex and overlapping issues of primary care patients. Clinical pharmacists proactively review, identify, and resolve patients' pressing medication-related needs.



NHGPh staff packing medication for delivery.

Clinical pharmacists also address medication-related issues such as non-adherence, adverse drug reactions, and drug use without indication, especially in elderly patients taking multiple medications or have conditions which present more risks. Complex medication regimens are then simplified for patients by recommending changes or removing medication, as appropriate. Providing patients with a simpler medication regimen helps them to adhere to their medication, reduces potential side effects, and improves well-being.

CHANGES IN PATIENTS' PREFERENCES AND NEEDS ON MEDICATION USE AND ACCESS

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven changes in patients' preferences on how healthcare is being delivered. In March 2021, collective data from a cluster-wide survey of 890 responses, and a series of virtual Patient Focus Group (PFG) discussions that involved 25 participants, provided insights on users' expectations and needs on pharmacy services in the new normal.

The research showed that patients are more receptive to digitalisation, with 79 per cent stating that they were comfortable with teleconsult for medication-related queries or minor ailments. Sixty-seven per cent preferred to collect or receive their medications from the Institution pharmacies, which have been the conventional mode of dispensing. These findings strengthened NHGPh's resolve to transform pharmacy services. The findings would also form the basis of design and planning of medication management and supply strategies in creating a more person-centred experience for our patients.

SAFETY CHECKS FOR ORAL ANTIVIRALS

As part of the Ministry of Health (MOH)'s efforts to treat COVID-19 in community settings, oral antivirals (OAV) such as Paxlovid and Molnupiravir have been made available for eligible patients to reduce the likelihood of developing severe COVID-19 symptoms that would require hospital admission. At the polyclinics, suitable patients are referred to pharmacists for further checks to determine their active medication list, identify potential drug interactions and contraindications with OAVs, and review patients' kidney function. Recommendations are then made to the doctor on the need for any dose adjustments for OAVs or patients' current medication, temporary cessation of their medications, and the choice of OAV.

SUSTAINED DEMAND FOR MEDICATION DELIVERY

Since January 2022, patients at NHGP have been able to use the Self-Payment kiosks to activate home delivery of their prescription medications instead of waiting to collect them from the pharmacy at the polyclinic. The initiative was jointly implemented by NHGP and NHGPh across all polyclinics after a successful pilot at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic in early 2021. From January to March 2022, an average of 18 per cent of medication deliveries were activated via the Self-Payment kiosk by patients who opted for next-day delivery.

The benefits of medication delivery include less time spent for a patient at the polyclinic and lower patient load at the pharmacy. As the fulfilment of the order is done backend, at the Central Fill Pharmacy, frontline pharmacy staff are able to devote more time and attention to patients' needs.