

NATIONAL SKIN CENTRE

“WHEN THE CALL FOR HELP WENT OUT, WE RECEIVED AN OVERWHELMING RESPONSE FROM OUR STAFF. DESPITE IT BEING VOLUNTARY, **MANY NSC STAFF STEPPED UP AND VOLUNTEERED** TO GO WHERE THEY WERE MOST NEEDED – TO SERVE IN BOTH THE ACUTE HOSPITALS AND THE COMMUNITY.”

Professor Tan Suat Hoon Director, National Skin Centre



NATIONAL SKIN CENTRE

The National Skin Centre (NSC) improves and advances the skin health of the population by setting the highest standard of excellence in dermatological care, education, and research. NSC's continued efforts extend into the community, collaborating with partners to deliver holistic care to frail patients in nursing homes. When COVID-19 emerged in Singapore, NSC staff stepped up to meet the nation's needs, providing exemplary care at the frontlines.

SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

When the number of COVID-19 infections surged in Singapore last year, NSC together with the other NHG Institutions augmented the medical and nursing manpower at the frontlines. From April to October 2020, close to 70 Medical, Nursing, Ancillary, Allied Health, and Administration staff were deployed or seconded across Singapore at the Community Care Facility (CCF) at Singapore EXPO and medical posts at the migrant worker dormitories, as well as at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH), and Admiralty Medical Centre (AdMC).



Top left: NSC doctors rallied Singaporeans to stay home to protect themselves and their loved ones. Bottom left and top: A/Prof Steven Thng, Senior Consultant, NSC, attending to migrant workers at the dormitories.

"We have entered a new normal, where practices such as wearing masks, routine testing, and hybrid work arrangements are here to stay. NSC has ramped up teleconsultations to ensure continuity of care for our patients, while ensuring their safety and well-being. We will continue to partner primary care and community partners to reach out to patients, as well as invest in innovation and research to achieve impactful dermatological outcomes that will help improve population health."

Professor Tan Suat Hoon Director, National Skin Centre

REVAMPING WORKFLOWS

NSC Taskforce

A multidisciplinary Taskforce across departments was formed to align operations with the Ministry of Health's (MOH) and NHG's COVID-19 measures. The Taskforce held regular meetings to ensure the Centre kept pace with, and responded appropriately to the latest developments of the disease. Precautions taken included team segregation and safe distancing measures. Activities were also reconfigured to focus on priority areas, such as reviewing patients' notes and diagnosis to defer non-urgent appointments, and transitioning services to home-based treatment, such as liquid nitrogen for viral warts and targeted phototherapy for vitiligo.

Set-up of Triage Area and Fever Clinic

NSC observed strict segregation of patient and staff zones to minimise transmission. It set up a triage area in the basement to monitor patients' and visitors' temperatures, and assist patients and their next-of-kin with electronic travel and health declarations. Administration staff supported the screening of patients and visitors.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Refresher Training

PPE refresher training was conducted for all staff, as well as blood spillage management.

Adjustment of Clinic Operations

As a preventive infection control measure, NSC scaled down operations in February 2020 to focus on essential services, and to safeguard patient and staff safety. It suspended non-essential services and replaced face-to-face consultations with remote tele-dermatology sessions for vulnerable patients.

The Operations and Infection Control teams worked closely to establish a new Fever/Upper Respiratory Tract Infection (URTI) Clinic. It is a designated isolation area for patients with fever or URTI symptoms and deemed to be high-risk, requiring medical attention.

The Nursing team managed caseloads by scheduling appointments for treatments based on essential and non-essential (non-medical) services. They also monitored and identified potential high-risk patients that might not have been detected at the triage screening stations.



Medication Delivery Services

To ensure seamless care delivery for patients with prescriptions, the NSC pharmacy increased medication deliveries across the island. To pre-empt against drug shortages and potential supply chain disruptions due to the pandemic, pharmacy staff closely monitored and managed stocks, and applied dispensing restrictions.

Patient and Staff Communication

The Corporate Development and Communications teams supported the NSC Taskforce by updating staff and patients on the latest COVID-19 announcements through advisories across platforms, including the NSC website, staff newsletters, and social media.

Education and Academic Activities

Medical education and training was reconfigured as e-learning via Zoom for medical undergraduates, and Continuing Medical Education (CME) programmes.



INNOVATIONS IN CARE

Teleconsultations For Patients

When Singapore entered into the Circuit Breaker in April 2020, NSC doctors, nurses, and staff from clinic operations and pharmacy worked together to coordinate teleconsultation sessions for patients and ensured the smooth home delivery of medication. This enabled patients to receive timely reviews and diagnosis of their medical conditions remotely, while keeping them safe with reduced contact and waiting times. It also saved cost and made care more convenient for patients who were frail or bedridden.



Ensuring Care Continuity Through Tele-Dermatology Nursing Services

In February 2020, when Singapore raised its Disease Outbreak Response System (DORSCON) level to Orange, the dermatology nursing services at three nursing homes were suspended. To ensure care continuity, NSC converted its physical visits into tele-nurse consultation sessions in June 2020. Nurses from the nursing homes worked closely with NSC dermatology nurses to discuss appropriate care and treatments for residents' conditions. Cases that required further assessment were escalated to the medical team for consultation.

NSC Retail Pharmacy Launches Electronic Shelf Labels

In August 2020, NSC introduced the Electronic Shelf Label system at its retail pharmacy. The new price labels were fully graphic, with E-ink displays which could be updated wirelessly and in real time. This system eliminated manual tasks such as the printing and changing of paper tags, allowing staff to better focus on inventory management. It also helped reduce NSC's carbon footprint.

BOOSTING STAFF MORALE

NSC WeShare Session 2020

In July 2020, NSC held its annual WeShare session virtually with some 280 participants. Professor Tan Suat Hoon, Director, NSC, shared on the global impact of COVID-19, NSC's various roles during the pandemic, and the challenges foreseen in the near future. The Human Resource department introduced a counselling hotline to support staff mental well-being. An appreciation video featuring staff in action at the different CCFs was also screened.

Donating Moisturisers To Frontline Healthcare Workers

In April 2020, NSC appealed to the public for donations of moisturisers to support healthcare professionals experiencing skin problems while battling COVID-19. As a result, NSC received some 1,320 tubes of moisturisers from donors, which were distributed to healthcare workers deployed at the CCF@EXPO.

Nurses' Day Celebration 2020

In August 2020, NSC commemorated Nurses' Day virtually, with all nurses and Senior Management in attendance. A special video montage put together by Nurse Clinician Norlaila Kamarudin and her team highlighted memorable moments captured during their deployment at various institutions and contributions to the fight against COVID-19. Professor Tan Suat Hoon, Director, NSC, expressed her appreciation for the nurses — about 40 per cent of nursing staff were seconded to support public health institutions at the various CCFs to care for COVID-19 patients. The nurses who remained in NSC continued to provide essential services and carried on with daily operations with unwavering dedication.



PRESCHOOL CHILDREN GIVE THANKS TO HEALTHCARE HEROES

In April 2020, frontline staff at NSC received handmade cards, with words of encouragement and appreciation from the children at Averbel Child Development Centre Pte Ltd and My First Skool (Woodlands Circle).



NSC Townhall 2021

In January 2021, NSC held a virtual Townhall to address the COVID-19 vaccination exercise. The session enabled participants to better understand and address their concerns about the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. After the Townhall, there was an increase of 8.4 per cent in the vaccination take-up rate among staff and partners who previously declined or were undecided.