

Lifewise

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



STRONGER SENIORS

Maintain strength as one ages
12

A DERMAL HEALTH HUB

The National Skin Centre's new facility
16

ISSUE
98

THE PULSE OF PRIMARY CARE

Building a healthier Singapore together



Adding years of healthy life



We Salute All FRONTLINERS



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When care is moved upstream toward preventive health, it allows for even better care for patients with chronic diseases.”

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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

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

THE FIRST POLYCLINIC IN SINGAPORE OFFICIALLY OPENED IN 1963, IN QUEENSTOWN.

It was also the first to offer a combination of outpatient, maternal, and child health services.

Today, polyclinics have evolved from medical centres which offered basic medical care to medical institutions that excel in various areas of primary care and Family Medicine. As of March 2024, there are 25 polyclinics in Singapore, of which eight are operated by the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP). The function of these essential healthcare facilities is ever-expanding with the rollout of *Healthier SG*. In *Charting New Paths in Primary Care* (page 6), NHGP senior management, including Dr Karen Ng who took over as CEO last October, discuss how the sector is being equipped to focus on proactive, preventive healthcare – and to support the next phase of Singapore’s national strategy to improve and sustain its citizens’ health.

General Practitioners (GPs) are one of the pillars that uphold the foundations of primary care. Dr Loh Kok Chi is one such GP, who stands among the thousands in Singapore ready to embrace the transformation of primary care. In *Good Hands* (page 20) explores the pivotal changes these frontliners must undergo to prepare for the future. As Dr Loh shares, the role of a GP extends to that of a confidante and friend as well.

On that note, offering a listening ear can be considered a gift. *Help Is A Strength* (page 25) highlights how you can better support those who need help with their mental well-being, and to learn to spot the tell-tale signs of someone who may need professional assistance.

To cater to a population that requires more complex skin care treatments, the long-established National Skin Centre (NSC) continues to forge strong collaborations with primary care providers. Since October 2023, NSC has transitioned to a new and larger facility. This expansion enhances the Centre’s capabilities, and among these are the Skin Allergy and Therapy Clinic that gives patients the convenience of receiving intravenous treatments on an outpatient basis; and the Ultraviolet A1 phototherapy cabin that delivers effective full-body treatments for skin conditions like eczema and scleroderma. Find out more in *A Wider Canvas for Skin Health* (page 16).

This edition of *Lifewise* also offers plenty of pro tips for a healthier lifestyle. Learn the importance of sticking to your daily medication routine in *Timing Is Everything* (page 18), and the benefits of regular strength training in *Stronger for Longer* (page 12).

Stay well; keep well.

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HOW HEALTHY ARE WE?

The National Population Health Study 2022 is a barometer of how Singapore residents fared at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic years. Here are some key findings. BY JOYCE LIM



The National Population Health Study 2022, conducted by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Health Promotion Board (HPB), surveyed over 8,000 residents aged 18 to 74 years from July 2021 to June 2022.

The study evaluated the state of health and wellness among the population during that trying period. The results play a crucial role in ongoing efforts to boost community health and provide vital insights for the development of future healthcare policies and programmes.

IN A SNAPSHOT

Takeaways from the National Population Health Study 2022.

THE GOOD

- ✓ Prevalence of diabetes and high cholesterol decreased
- ✓ Prevalence of daily smoking decreased
- ✓ Participation in health screenings improved
- ✓ Willingness to seek help for mental health issues increased*

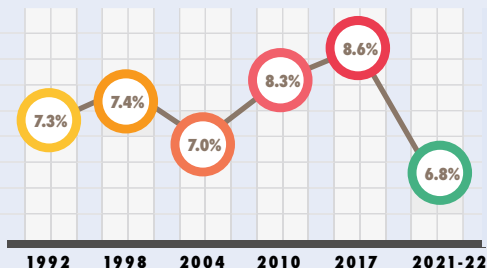
THE BAD

- ✗ Prevalence of high blood pressure and obesity increased
- ✗ Total sufficient physical activity decreased
- ✗ Prevalence of poor mental health increased*

*Refer to page 25 for more details.

Source: MOH

01 DIABETES MELLITUS CASES DOWN



✓ MOH's rigorous campaign against diabetes mounted in 2016 showed positive results. The diabetic population **dropped to 6.8%**, reversing the upward trend seen over the past 30 years.

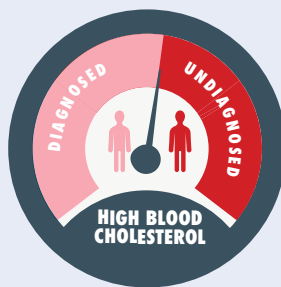
✓ However, the people who were not previously diagnosed with diabetes are of concern. Young adults aged 30 to 39 years had the **highest proportion (42.1%)** of undiagnosed diabetes.

02 INCIDENCES OF HYPERLIPIDAEMIA INCREASED WITH AGE

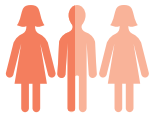
3 in 10 people had hyperlipidaemia (high blood cholesterol).

1 in 10 adults aged 18 to 29 years have high blood cholesterol, but **1 in 2 adults aged 60 to 74 years** have high blood cholesterol.

Among those with high blood cholesterol, almost half (46.7%) had not been previously diagnosed with the disease.



03 HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE ON THE RISE



OVER **1 in 3** people had hypertension.



MORE THAN HALF (**53.5%**) had not been previously diagnosed with hypertension.

ABOUT TWO-THIRDS (**64.8%**)

who attended a health examination did not control their blood pressure well.



04 SINGAPOREANS ARE GETTING FATTER

ABOUT **1 in 9** (11.5%) people were considered obese.

ABOUT **22.3%** were in the high-risk BMI category (BMI equal to or greater than 27.5kg/m²).

ABOUT **43.3%** were found to have abdominal obesity, defined as a waist measurement of greater than 90cm in men and 80cm in women.

One reason for the rise in obesity could be sedentary lifestyles.

1 in 4

adults did not get enough physical activity.



05 A PROMISING INCREASE IN HEALTH SCREENING

Overall participation in health screenings went up in 2022 after a drop during the pandemic period (2020 to 2021).



About **three-fifths** (60.3%) of people aged 40 to 74 years with no previous diagnosis of **diabetes, high blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol (DHL)** were screened for all three conditions in 2022.



GET TESTED: JOIN THE SCREEN FOR LIFE PROGRAMME**

Early detection of diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and certain cancers can result in better treatment, fewer complications, and better outcomes.

FOR WOMEN

AGE	WHAT	HOW OFTEN
25 to 29 years	● Pap Test	Every 3 years
30 and above	● HPV Test	Every 5 years
50 to 69 years	● Mammography	Every 2 years

FOR EVERYONE

AGE	WHAT	HOW OFTEN
40 years and above	● Diabetes ● Hyperlipidaemia ● Hypertension	Every 3 years Every 3 years Every 2 years
50 years and above	● Colorectal Cancer	Every year

**DO NOTE: The Screen For Life Programme does not list specific tests for men.

A PROACTIVE APPROACH

IN BRIEF



- ▶ To build a healthier Singapore, NHGP uses a preventive care approach, working with community partners to support patients with complex challenges.
- ▶ Patients are managed using a Teamlet Care Model, while nurses are equipped with advanced skills to enhance care delivery.
- ▶ GPs are supported by the NHG Central North Primary Care Network to better care for residents.

CHARTING NEW PATHS IN PRIMARY CARE

+
MS LIM VOON HOOI

+
DR KAREN NG

+
DR LIM CHEE KONG



The rollout of *Healthier SG* has placed preventive care at the centre of the national agenda. This has given greater impetus to the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics' approach to strengthen primary care and its population health strategy. Here is how it is empowering Singaporeans to take charge of their health.

BY EVELINE GAN
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What would you think of a primary care provider that not only provides care for those who are unwell but also takes active steps to manage their chronic disease and improve health outcomes — and even prevent the occurrence of a chronic disease in the first place?

The National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) has stepped up to be such a healthcare provider. To meet the changing medical needs of Singapore's rapidly ageing population, NHGP adopts a multi-pronged approach that provides comprehensive care and fosters partnerships with General Practitioners (GPs), and community and social agencies.

This approach is part of NHGP's efforts to support the *Healthier SG* initiative, a major national shift in focusing on improving population health through a proactive preventive care approach.

POPULATION HEALTH MATTERS

By 2030, one in four Singaporeans will be aged 65 and older. The rapidly ageing population will likely lead to the higher prevalence of chronic diseases, and higher healthcare costs.

To keep pace amid these challenges, a robust primary care system is essential — and this is where NHGP, the primary healthcare arm of the National Healthcare Group (NHG), plays a vital role as one of the key players in the building of a healthier Singapore. "We must act in the capacity of stewards for preventive health, good health, and the well-being of our patients and residents in our population," says Dr Karen Ng, Chief Executive Officer of NHGP. "This means developing an ecosystem to integrate care to meet the health and social needs of the population we serve. Through partnering the General Practitioners and community, patients and residents are able to take proactive steps to manage their health and lead healthier lives."

Dr Lim Chee Kong, Director of Clinical Services at NHGP, further emphasises

that the aim is to "optimise the population's health holistically". This means caring for not just physical health but also the population's social and mental well-being. "It helps the well to remain healthy, targets the at-risk for early management or prevention, and helps the chronically ill from developing potential complications," says Dr Lim.

Prior to the rollout of *Healthier SG*, there were already efforts in place at NHGP to promote healthy living and encourage Singaporeans to take proactive measures to prevent diseases. Such initiatives include vaccinations, and cardiovascular and cancer screening programmes at all their polyclinics. With *Healthier SG*, Dr Ng notes that the polyclinics' role in encouraging preventive health is strengthened. "Patients' health is better managed, not just by the healthcare team but also the community partners and patients themselves," he says.

Family physicians, with their expanded role in *Healthier SG*, are now the drivers of patient-centred care and have become directly involved in the care of individuals and their families. "When care is moved upstream towards preventive health, it allows for even better care for patients with chronic diseases," says Dr Ng.

Here is how NHGP has been forging new paths in primary care towards building a healthier Singapore.

PROVIDING CARE AS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM

Previously, it was not uncommon for a patient who required long-term care for a chronic condition, such as diabetes or hypertension, to be seen by a different doctor at every follow-up appointment.

At NHGP, this has not been the case for almost a decade. To provide better care to patients living with chronic diseases — including those with mental health issues and dementia — NHGP moved away from a 'one-size-fits-all' doctor-patient relationship to a team-based approach called the Teamlet Care Model.

First piloted at Toa Payoh Polyclinic in July 2015 and currently operational in all NHG polyclinics, this relationship-based care model

PHOTO: DILLON TAN;
STYLING: SHEH ALKADDRI;
HAIR & MAKEUP: MANDY YEO;
CLOTHES: ON VOON HOOI;
NAVY JACKET AND STRIPED
BLOUSE, FROM MANGO;
PANTS, FROM UNIQLO;
ON KAREN: LIGHT GREY SUIT,
FROM MANGO; PULLOVER AND
BLOUSE, FROM UNIQLO;
ON CHEE KONG: JACKET AND
SHIRT, FROM MANGO; PANTS,
FROM ZARA; PULLOVER,
FROM UNIQLO

A PROACTIVE APPROACH

is delivered by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals. Each Teamlet comprises two family physicians, a care manager, and a care coordinator, and is supported by allied health professionals and a Care Coach. This facilitates synergy and inter-collaboration between healthcare professionals, leading to more comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous care for patients.

Patients with chronic conditions now see the same team during each visit, a move which has tangible benefits and garnered positive feedback. As Dr Ng explains, such a model of care helps to build trust and creates a sense of familiarity between the Teamlet and patients. "This in turn empowers the patients to take on greater ownership and decision-making for their chronic disease management and lifestyle, and embark on behavioural changes, so that any complications can be identified and managed early," she adds.



A doctor and a care manager at a joint consultation, showcasing how NHGP's Teamlet Care Model is delivered by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals.

Encouraging patients to monitor their chronic diseases and go for regular cancer screening is also a cornerstone of the clinical team's approach, a strategy proven to enhance health outcomes. For example, a study conducted from 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2016 by NHGP to evaluate the health outcomes of the first cohort of Teamlet patients showed significant improvements for chronic disease

management. Those enrolled in Teamlets were more likely to have better control of their diabetes, more likely to go for preventive health screenings — such as for diabetic eye and foot screenings, pap smears, and mammograms — and less likely to visit the Emergency Department for diabetes- and hypertension-related problems.

Apart from providing care to patients with chronic diseases, the multidisciplinary teams in NHGP also provide care in mental health for patients of varying ages. For 10 years since the inception of the Health and Mind Service in NHGP, family physicians, care managers, and psychologists work together collaboratively to detect, assess, and manage common mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and insomnia with or without physical health conditions for individuals aged 18 and above.

Since then, NHGP recognises the importance of child and maternal health. Doctors and nurses engage in opportunistic screening of mothers with young babies to ensure early detection of symptoms of postnatal depression. Subsequently, provision of needed support is given to help mothers cope with their emotional challenges.

With collaborative training by specialists from the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), NHGP doctors and medical social workers keep a vigilant lookout for adolescents with early signs of mental health issues and proactively provide psychosocial support for these youths and their families.



With Healthier SG, we need to continue to transform primary care, and we cannot do this alone. A strong primary care sector through partnerships with general practitioners will help our residents in Central and North Singapore stay healthy and manage their chronic conditions holistically within the community."

DR KAREN NG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS



BREAKING DOWN SOCIAL BARRIERS TO GOOD HEALTH

Patient activation and social prescribing will be part and parcel of NHGP's Teamlet Care moving forward. Dr Lim points out that health and social challenges often coexist in patients with complex medical conditions. Population health studies have shown that psychosocial needs that are not met are linked to poorer health. Hence, it is essential to provide patients with psychosocial support. "Our population is growing older," says Dr Lim. "Based on our observations, we see that many elderly patients — especially those who live alone and have chronic conditions — are likely to be more vulnerable and face various issues such as social isolation, financial issues, and difficulty moving around."

"These are social determinants of health which we try to address holistically with our community partners. Managing these psychosocial barriers to health is a key priority to enabling management of the clinical condition that the patient has," he adds.

NHGP has several programmes in place and works closely with its community partners and social service agencies to support patients facing these challenges. One such initiative is RELATE (**REL**ationship-based **heAl**th and social **inTE**gration) programme, which started in 2020 at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic to manage complex patients with psychosocial issues. The aim is to improve clinical outcomes in this patient group by improving their



“
When care is moved upstream towards preventive health, it allows for even better care for patients with chronic diseases.”

DR LIM CHEE KONG,
DIRECTOR, CLINICAL SERVICES,
NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS

compliance to medications and follow-ups. At the same time, patients may also be referred to the relevant agencies for social and financial support.

Dr Ng shares, "Since its launch, RELATE has benefitted more than 400 patients in addressing their health and social needs. Six months after these patients were enrolled in the programme, nearly half of them saw a reduction in polyclinic visits because of better management of their chronic conditions."

In addition, compliance to medication also improved by 10 per cent. "As a result, patients with poorly-controlled diabetes saw

improvements in their condition," says Dr Ng.

Recognising the importance of laying the foundations of optimum health and development in the first few years of life, NHGP also expanded its services to support mothers and their children. First piloted at Yishun Polyclinic in 2020, the **Enhanced Maternal Baby Toddler And Child Surveillance (EMBRACE)** programme was introduced as a joint service for mother and child to be cared at the same time. For example, while a child gets his or her vaccinations and development assessed, the mother may also get support for breastfeeding and parentcraft advice.

A component of the programme called **EMBRACE^{PLUS}** identifies at-risk children up to three years old from low-income families, and provides support for health, social, and financial issues.

NHGP has since expanded the programme to all its eight polyclinics, benefitting close to 53,000 patients. Between September 2020 to July 2023, close to 400 at-risk families in **EMBRACE^{PLUS}** were identified with needs, and more than 96 per cent of the families received medical, social, or financial support from NHGP and its community partners.



Under the RELATE programme, elderly patients with complex medical and social needs are identified by NHGP and its community partners, so that a shared care plan can be developed to address the patient's needs.

A PROACTIVE APPROACH

PUTTING TECHNOLOGY TO GOOD USE

As part of its care delivery, NHGP leverages technology to ensure that care is accessible to patients. Since 2005, NHGP has offered various telehealth services and expanded its suite of telehealth services in early 2020 (see *Telehealth services at your fingertips*).

"These services offer eligible patients the option of remote consultations from the comfort of their own homes, reducing the need for patients to travel to the clinics," says Dr Ng. "Medications are also prescribed after the teleconsultations and patients can choose to have these delivered to their homes." For example, patients with well-controlled chronic conditions, such as diabetes and high cholesterol, have the option to review their medical conditions and laboratory test results via video consultation with NHGP's family physicians.

Patients with hypertension, or high blood pressure, may also be offered an option of monitoring their blood pressure at home under the Primary Tech-Enhanced Care (PTEC) Home BP management programme. This is done using a Bluetooth-enabled blood pressure device, which sends the readings to the patient's polyclinic care team through a mobile phone application. This allows patients to better control their blood pressure between visits to

their family physicians. "Patients will receive chatbot alerts and tips on blood pressure control if their blood pressure levels are not well-controlled, and reminders if there are missed readings," Dr Ng explains. "If needed, they will receive additional teleconsultation advice from their nurse."

GETTING GENERAL PRACTITIONERS ONBOARD

General Practitioners (GPs) — who, together with polyclinic family physicians, are the first line of care in the community — have been actively recruited to be part of a primary care network.

The NHG Central North Primary Care Network (CN-PCN), a public-private collaboration between NHGP and GPs, was set up to care for residents with chronic illnesses living in Central and North Singapore.

Pointing out that GPs currently meet around 80 per cent of Singapore's primary care demand, Dr Ng, who is also the Director of CN-PCN, says, "With *Healthier SG*, we need to continue to transform primary care, and we cannot do this alone. A strong primary care sector through partnerships with GPs will help our residents in Central and North Singapore stay healthy and manage their chronic conditions holistically within the community."

Since its launch in 2018, CN-PCN has been supporting its GP partners in their transition in the *Healthier SG* landscape. "Working together as one primary care, NHGP actively engages GPs in Central and North Singapore to ensure standardisation of care protocols and professional development," says Dr Ng. "This includes sharing training and clinical protocols with our GP partners, as well as linking them up with community and social partners."

GPs in the CN-PCN are supported by a PCN nurse and primary care coordinator. This PCN care team enhances GPs' capabilities in chronic disease management through shared resources. For example, patients seen at these GP clinics will be able to access diabetic care services such as diabetic retinal photography and diabetic foot screening. Structured nurse education services to patients are also provided to assist GPs to track and monitor patients' progress and clinical outcomes so that their patients can better manage their chronic conditions.

With *Healthier SG*, CN-PCN will play a larger role. CN-PCN will upskill its care team to take on enhanced roles to better support GPs in meeting their *Healthier SG* goals. Primary care coordinators will be equipped with basic care coaching skills to support GPs in preventive health. For instance, they can provide basic health advice to patients and also link patients to community resources which provide opportunities and support for patients to improve their health and well-being. PCN nurses will provide additional support in counselling and promoting mental well-being among patients. They will assist to prepare patients for collaborative care planning, shared decision-making, and goal-setting clinical consults with their GPs, and follow up with patients' self-management post-consult.

THE SUPPORT OF NURSES

Nurses are a key driver in NHGP's endeavours to build a robust primary care system. Ms Lim Voon Hooi, Chief Nurse at NHGP, emphasises that delivering preventive care and promoting health is "not new to primary care". "Nurses have always



The EMBRACE programme addresses health and social issues of vulnerable children aged 0-3 years old from low-income families.



It is imperative for nurses to have a holistic view and assessment of patient care across care settings, be active listeners, and build therapeutic relationships with our patients and caregivers.”

MS LIM VOON HOOI, CHIEF NURSE, NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS

been actively providing health advice, involving evidence-based screening and patient education during their encounters with patients,” she says.

What has evolved however, is that many nurses are now equipped with more advanced skills and knowledge to provide better support, enhancing the delivery of primary care services. For instance, nurses

who take on the role of Care Managers under NHGP’s Teamlet Care Model are trained to manage chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and stroke, while empowering patients to better manage their health. “They can perform in-depth clinical assessments, work closely with our family physicians and care coordinators as a team to deliver comprehensive and appropriate patient care,” Ms Lim says.

For instance, under the EMBRACE programme, nurses perform developmental assessment and childhood immunisations, and at the same time provide parentcraft advice and lactation support to nursing mothers where required. They also carry out postnatal depression screening on women after birth and refer them to other healthcare providers, when needed.

Beyond the polyclinic setting, nurses are also leading the change in primary care. For example, NHGP’s innovative vaccine management system is an example of how nurses contribute to designing solutions to problems that matter to them, Ms Lim says. Nurses are also involved in research to develop new knowledge, and where appropriate, translate this in a relevant and feasible manner in the primary care setting.

“With the paradigm shift to population health, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of the social determinants of health and their link to an individual’s health status,” says Ms Lim. “As such, it is imperative for nurses to have a holistic view and assessment of patient care across care settings, be active listeners, and build therapeutic relationships with our patients and caregivers.” **LW**

TELEHEALTH SERVICES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Leveraging technology is part of NHGP’s evolving approach to build a healthier Singapore. This gives certain patients the option of consulting their doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals through telehealth services.

▶ VIDEO CONSULTATIONS WITH DOCTORS

Patients with well-controlled chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol may review their medical conditions and laboratory test results via video consultation with the polyclinics’ family physicians. Medications prescribed during the consultation can be delivered to the patients’ homes.

▶ VIDEO CONSULTATION WITH NURSES

Patients with lipid disorder post coronary risk screening, and those who require follow-up for

medication titration can be offered the option of video consultation with a Care Manager, a nurse specially trained in chronic disease management. This replaces the physical visits to the polyclinic and empowers patients to manage their chronic conditions at home.

▶ TELE-WOUND MONITORING

Patients who require frequent care for wounds, such as superficial pressure injuries or post-surgical wounds, may be enrolled into this service. Wound nurses provide remote monitoring and assessment, enabling patients to self-manage their wounds at home.

▶ PRIMARY TECH-ENHANCED CARE

Patients with high blood pressure enrolled under this programme will monitor their blood pressure at home with a Bluetooth-enabled blood pressure device. Readings will be shared with their respective polyclinic care team through a mobile application.

▶ TELE-DIRECTLY OBSERVED THERAPY (DOT)

Patients with tuberculosis may substitute their face-to-face visit to the polyclinic with a video consultation with a nurse. This service allows patients to complete their therapy safely and conveniently at home.

▶ TELE-DIETETICS

Patients with chronic diseases, as well as paediatric patients with

feeding and nutritional needs, can consult NHGP’s dietitians via a video consultation.

▶ TELE-PSYCHOLOGY

Eligible patients with existing psychologist review appointments may be offered the option of a video consultation with NHGP’s psychologists, during which mental health support and intervention are provided to patients in the comfort of their homes.



ON VOON HOOI: SLIM DARK GREY PANTSUIT AND BLOUSE; FROM UNICLO

▶ Note: Telehealth services are only available for eligible patients who are deemed suitable by their healthcare team.

AGEING WITH STRENGTH

BY KEENAN PEREIRA

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STRONGER FOR LONGER

Prioritising muscle health can empower your golden years, keeping you active and resilient.

Muscle strength is central to all our daily activities, whether walking up a flight of stairs or carrying bags of groceries. It is crucial that we safeguard this strength, particularly in the senior years because that is when we begin to lose it.

This loss of muscle strength is known as sarcopenia. Although an inevitable part of ageing, sarcopenia can be exacerbated by lifestyle factors such as a sedentary lifestyle, smoking, and poor nutrition, explains Dr Lim Jun Pei, a consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH)'s Department of Geriatric Medicine.

"Medical conditions that affect appetite and activity may also have an impact," Dr Lim adds.

WATCH OUT FOR SIGNS

Early indicators of sarcopenia include difficulty in climbing stairs, feeling like one's walking speed has slowed down, getting more tired, or a sudden weight loss. "Older adults with sarcopenia will experience unsteadiness in walking and have a high risk of falling. They may find going out of their homes very challenging," says Dr Lim. In severe cases, these seniors might require assistance to perform daily tasks like showering and dressing.

Dr Lim, who is also Translation and Practice Lead at TTSH's Institute of Geriatrics and Active Ageing (IGA), has seen how the condition cripples an elderly's well-being. "A patient of mine had become increasingly sedentary because he feared catching COVID-19.

"He then started to feel easily tired, was not able to travel long distances, and even had a fall when he was using an overhead bridge to get to a nearby hawker centre," she says.

THE THREE M's THAT MATTER

Sarcopenia does not develop overnight; it is a natural phase in our muscle life cycle. The peak of muscle mass and strength is believed to be around the early 30s. Both then stabilise until we turn 50, when they start to gradually decrease. At 70, the rate of deterioration accelerates, which means that muscles become weaker more quickly. That is why resistance exercises are especially important for seniors.

Dr Lim's advice is to...

- **MAXIMISE** muscle health in youth
- **MAINTAIN** muscle health in middle age
- **MINIMISE** loss in older age



Dr Lim had the senior perform the repeated chair stand test and, indeed, the elderly man had developed sarcopenia. The test involves rising five times from a seated position with hands folded across the chest. The time taken for this task is recorded. "Patients with sarcopenia may find it difficult to do this exercise without using their upper limbs for support, or may take more than 12 seconds to complete the task," explains Dr Lim.

Doctors may also do more tests on anyone who is diagnosed with sarcopenia, so as to check for other medical conditions. "These may be underlying causes of sarcopenia, and these include hyperthyroidism, undiagnosed diabetes, or mental health conditions that lead to poor appetite and low physical activity," says Dr Lim.

As Singapore ages, data like this become commonplace: a 10-year study by IGA found that the prevalence of sarcopenia in Singapore ranged from 13 to 25 per cent, compared with 5.5 to 25.7 per cent for Asia as a whole. This information is especially important, as the disease, if left unchecked, could challenge the country's healthcare system, given its fast-ageing population — one in four Singaporeans is expected to be over the age of 65 by 2030.

ADVERSE BUT AVOIDABLE

Sarcopenia can be slowed down and potentially reversed. Taking active steps to fight the condition will prevent many of its negative impacts, such as reduced balance and mobility, and the overall ability to perform daily tasks.

Resistance training remains an important pillar in fending off sarcopenia. Such training refers to exercises where you hold or work muscles against a weight, which can be a resistance machine, free weights, resistance bands, or even one's own body weight. Dr Lim says that seniors should adopt a progressive approach to resistance exercises, by starting slowly and gradually increasing the muscle load. They should also incorporate



Studies have shown that tackling sarcopenia with resistance training and good nutrition can be beneficial, even for the frailest patients."

DR LIM JUN PEI, CONSULTANT, DEPARTMENT OF GERIATRIC MEDICINE, TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL, AND TRANSLATION & PRACTICE LEAD, INSTITUTE OF GERIATRICS AND ACTIVE AGEING



strength training twice a week and do exercises that work both the lower and upper limbs.

Proper nutrition is also key. Older people should consume the right amount of calories for their weight and age. Also crucial is protein intake. The Health Promotion Board (HPB) recommends that adults above 50 years old consume 1.2g of protein per kg of their body weight every day. For example, someone who weighs 50kg should try to get 60g of protein every day — roughly two palm-sized portions of lean animal protein like chicken or fish.

Essentials such as fruits, vegetables, and wholegrains provide a range of nutrients with antioxidant properties, as well as essential fatty acids and Vitamin D, which are important for muscle function.

With regular exercise and proper nutrition, those with sarcopenia can often see swift improvements in their overall well-being. "They will feel more energised and less fatigued. Their walking speed may also increase and they may have

less difficulty climbing stairs," says Dr Lim. "As patients build muscle strength and mass, they gain the ability to perform tasks independently, which previously might have required upper limb assistance." They should also be able to complete these tasks in a shorter time.

Tackling sarcopenia is made easier thanks to national initiatives like *Age Well SG*, which encourages seniors to be more mindful of their diet and activity. However, like so much related to our health, a lot lies in our own hands. "Studies have shown that tackling sarcopenia with resistance training and good nutrition can be beneficial, even for the frailest patients. They were useful in improving muscle mass and daily functions, like hand-grip strength and gait speed," says Dr Lim. "But these improvements disappeared when the interventions were discontinued, which goes to show the importance of keeping to good habits." **LW**

↘ FIVE FOR YOUR MUSCLES

Here are some simple resistance exercises that use your own body weight:



1 ▶ BODYWEIGHT SQUAT
Simple and effective for building lower body strength.



2 ▶ ASSISTED PUSH-UP
If a regular push-up is too challenging, try this assisted version using a sturdy surface like a countertop or a wall to help. This builds upper body strength.

3 ▶

BODYWEIGHT LUNGE
Step forward or backward, alternating legs. A beginner-friendly way to strengthen the lower body and improve balance.



4 ▶

MODIFIED PLANK
Start with a forearm plank rather than a full plank. This builds core strength while being less challenging than a full plank.



5 ▶

CHAIR DIP
Use a sturdy chair or bench for support. This targets the triceps and helps build upper body strength.



OVERACTIVE GLAND

BY ANNIE TAN

IN CONSULTATION WITH
DR ABEL CHEN WEILIANG
CONSULTANT //
DEPARTMENT OF ENDOCRINOLOGY //
TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL



HYPER

ALERT

Women are more likely to be diagnosed with hyperthyroidism, but early detection and management can prevent serious health complications.

About a decade ago, when she was 40 years old, Ms Chua Mei Ling started losing weight. She was not dieting and was in fact eating more than usual because she was always hungry. "I was reaching for food every two to three hours, even after having had a full meal. My friends commented that I looked very tired and my face appeared sunken in," she recalls. The 1.69m-tall Ms Chua dropped 5kg over a year, and her weight plummeted to 50kg.

She was also perspiring more than usual. Despite these visible changes to her well-being, Ms Chua did not consult a doctor as she was busy with work and preparations for her wedding. She did have an inkling of what was ailing her though, as a female cousin with similar symptoms had been

diagnosed with hyperthyroidism — a condition in which the thyroid gland goes into overdrive.

It was only a year after her symptoms first surfaced that Ms Chua consulted a doctor. A blood test confirmed what she had suspected all along — she had hyperthyroidism.

Dr Abel Chen Weiliang, an Endocrinology Consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), explains that globally, hyperthyroidism is a common condition, affecting around one per cent of the world's population. Women are eight or nine times more likely to develop it than men.

HYPERTHYROIDISM EXPLAINED

The thyroid gland, located at the front of the neck, produces thyroid hormones that control the metabolism and functioning of our body's cells and organs — including those of the heart, brain, and liver. When this gland becomes overactive and produces too much of the hormone, the body's processes speed up abnormally, leading to the clinical signs and symptoms of hyperthyroidism.

Common signs of an overactive thyroid include unexplained weight loss even when you are eating as per normal, your body feeling warm when others have no issue with the prevailing temperature, as well as needing to move your bowels frequently. Your neck might also appear swollen. If you are a woman, your menstrual cycles might be irregular.

Women are more likely to be affected during their reproductive years. The reason for this remains unclear. "The female hormone, oestrogen, appears to have an effect on thyroid growth and function, but we don't yet fully understand how this happens," says Dr Chen.

The most common cause of hyperthyroidism is Graves' disease. Those with a family history of Graves' disease are more at risk of developing the condition. Graves' disease is an autoimmune condition in which the body produces antibodies that target the thyroid gland. These antibodies stimulate the thyroid gland to produce excessive amounts of thyroid hormones, and this leads to hyperthyroidism.

"Women, in particular, are four times more likely to contract autoimmune diseases — which includes Graves' disease — and this makes them more vulnerable to hyperthyroidism," says Dr Chen.

Other less common causes of hyperthyroidism include a toxic nodule, which is a benign thyroid growth or lump that produces excess thyroid hormones. Inflammation of the thyroid gland, which in turn may sometimes be triggered by a viral infection, can also lead to hyperthyroidism.

“A diet high in iodine from foods like shellfish and seaweed can make an overactive thyroid worse,” cautions Dr Chen. Smoking has also been known to aggravate hyperthyroidism in those with Graves’ disease.

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUICK ACTION

Excessive thyroid hormone levels can affect the body in many ways. “Hyperthyroidism increases the risk of developing heart rhythm disorders and heart failure, increases the risk of osteoporosis and hence fractures, and leads to irregular menstrual cycles and infertility in women,” says Dr Chen. Timely treatment is important.

If left unchecked, hyperthyroidism can escalate to a critical state. “In severe situations — particularly among those who are frail or have developed another serious illness as a result of their current condition — hyperthyroidism may cause life-threatening multi-organ failure,” says Dr Chen.



Hyperthyroidism often develops gradually over weeks to months, so symptoms may be overlooked. Go for routine screening if you are in a high-risk group.”

DR ABEL CHEN WEILIANG, CONSULTANT, DEPARTMENT OF ENDOCRINOLOGY, TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL

He recounts how an elderly patient who had severe osteoporosis complicated by multiple vertebral fractures and a recent hip fracture was found (as part of an evaluation for osteoporosis) to be suffering from hyperthyroidism as well. Her bone loss and fractures were likely largely contributed by her prolonged and undiagnosed hyperthyroidism.

Hyperthyroidism may go undetected for a long time in some patients. “As hyperthyroidism often develops gradually over weeks to months, such symptoms may be overlooked,” says Dr Chen. He advises those in high-risk groups, such as those with a family history of autoimmune thyroid problems, to go for routine screening and be alert for symptoms, so that they can be properly diagnosed and get early treatment.

MANAGING AN OVERACTIVE THYROID

Figuring out if you have hyperthyroidism usually starts with a blood test. Once diagnosed, medication that lowers thyroid hormone levels will be prescribed to

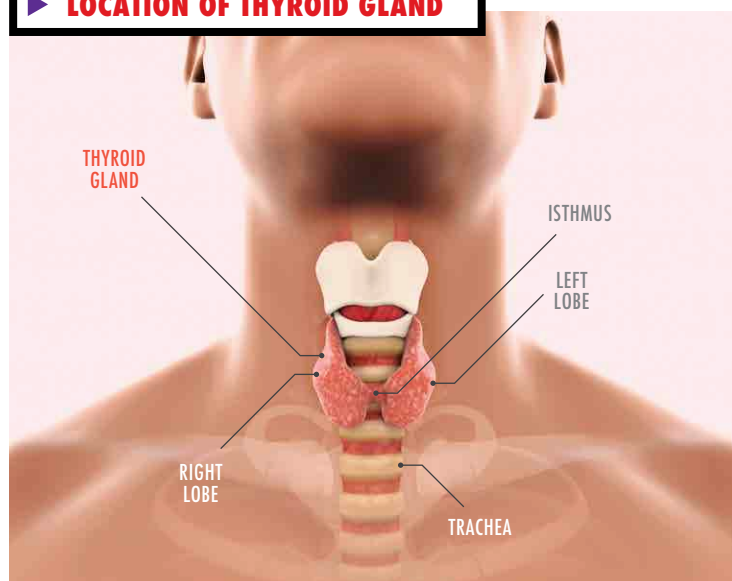
help relieve symptoms. Your doctor will schedule regular blood tests to monitor if your thyroid function has returned to normal so that the drug dosage can be adjusted accordingly to avoid under- or overtreatment.

In cases where anti-thyroid medication is ineffective, your doctor may consider radioiodine as a second-line treatment. Radioiodine comes in a pill form and when ingested, is able to target and calm overly active thyroid areas. The goal of radioiodine treatment is to deliberately bring about hypothyroidism, a condition in which the thyroid gland produces too few hormones. This is because hypothyroidism is safer and easier to manage than hyperthyroidism. Dr Chen says that compared to anti-thyroid drugs, thyroid hormone replacement medication for hypothyroidism has no side effects and does not require frequent follow-ups when used at the correct dose.

Doctors may conduct further blood tests or ultrasound tests to determine other underlying causes of hyperthyroidism. For complex situations — such as when there is a significant swelling in the thyroid (affecting breathing and swallowing), or if there is a likelihood of a cancerous thyroid tumour — surgery may be recommended to remove the thyroid gland. Surgery may also be required for patients for whom anti-thyroid drugs and radioiodine are unsuitable. In such cases, patients will be put on lifelong thyroid hormone replacement medication after removing their thyroid gland.

Yet, for many such as Ms Chua, who is now 50, heavy treatments like surgery or radioiodine were not needed. “I was initially prescribed an anti-thyroid medication which helped to manage my condition. After a few years, my doctor gradually decreased the dosage until I was taken off the drug completely,” says Ms Chua, who is now within a healthy weight range and symptom-free. **LW**

▶ LOCATION OF THYROID GLAND



**BIGGER AND
BETTER**

BY TINA WANG

**IN CONSULTATION
WITH
PROFESSOR
TAN SUAT HOON**
DIRECTOR // NATIONAL
SKIN CENTRE



DR YEW YIK WENG
DEPUTY HEAD //
RESEARCH DIVISION //
NATIONAL SKIN CENTRE



A WIDER CANVAS FOR SKIN HEALTH



NSC general clinics' waiting area.

Here in Singapore, where the sun is a constant companion, taking care of our skin is especially important.

Good skin does not just enhance our appearance; it is our body's first line of defence against all sorts of germs and health troubles.

Lately, doctors are seeing more skin problems cropping up, especially among the elderly. Dr Yew Yik Weng, Deputy Head of the Research Division at the National Skin Centre (NSC), points out that with an increasingly ageing population, conditions like asteatotic eczema (dry, itchy skin due to water loss) and skin infections are becoming more common.

In response to these evolving dermatological needs, NSC has broadened its facilities to offer top-tier medical solutions. Officially launched on 25 October 2023 by Minister for Health, Mr Ong Ye Kung, the new centre serves as an all-encompassing speciality hub designed with everyone in mind, especially seniors, who require more complex skin care due to their vulnerability.

This upgrade is part of a bigger picture — the HealthCity Novena master plan — which aims to bring health services, research, educational initiatives, and public spaces together in one place. NSC's Director, Professor Tan Suat Hoon, hails the centre's growth as "a culmination of 35 years of hard work to advance dermatology and provide better health outcomes for our patients".

NEW FACILITIES FOR CARE

A key addition is the **Skin Allergy and Therapy Clinic**, which provides patients the convenience of receiving intravenous (IV) treatments in an outpatient setting. This approach is quicker, smarter, and means hospital beds stay free for those facing more serious health issues. The facility also provides a safe and comfortable setting for evaluating patients for any adverse reactions to IV medications.

NSC also features a new **Ultraviolet A1 phototherapy cabin**, which offers efficient, full-body treatment for patients with skin conditions such as eczema, scleroderma (an autoimmune condition leading to inflammation and skin thickening), and mycosis fungoides (a rare type of skin cancer).

NSC has rethought clinic design to promote a team-based care approach. There are now

dedicated spaces that adjoin doctors' consultation rooms, to allow residents, nurses, and pharmacists to come together to co-manage patients alongside doctors. It has also allocated more rooms for day care services, where nurses support patients with the application of topical medications.

PART OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH MOVEMENT

The opening of the new NSC enhances facilities for dermatology training and education, driving the continuation of *Healthier SG*-aligned efforts, such as the Graduate Diploma in Family Practice Dermatology programme. This course, jointly offered by NSC and the Division of Graduate Medical Studies, NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, provides formal dermatology education to General Practitioners. This brings dermatology expertise closer to the community, where familiar neighbourhood physicians would have sufficient expertise to manage skin conditions that may not require specialist attention.

As part of NHG's efforts in integrating care across its institutions, NSC has also equipped clinics for tele dermatology with National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP)'s physicians, facilitating communication



The National Skin Centre is located at 1 Mandalay Road. It opens Monday to Friday, 8am to 11.15am and 1pm to 4:15pm. To schedule a visit, call **6350 6666** or email appointment@nsc.com.sg. For those experiencing urgent or severe skin issues, NSC also accommodates walk-in consultations. Visit its website here: www.nsc.com.sg



and collaboration with doctors who see dermatology cases in the primary care setting.

Furthermore, NSC screens for conditions not directly related to dermatology (such as diabetes mellitus) during psoriasis clinic visits. Psoriasis makes it hard for the body to produce and use the hormone insulin, so patients who have the condition are more likely to get type 2 diabetes. This proactive approach, as emphasised by Dr Yew, means doctors can identify and address other health issues promptly, facilitating referrals and ensuring patients receive all-round care that extends beyond skin health.

Meanwhile, NSC pharmacists are taking a holistic approach to skin health by providing assistance to smokers looking to quit the habit. Smoking can stain the fingers, nails, and teeth. Over time, it can cause dryness and uneven tone in the skin, as well as contribute to eye bags, a sagging jawline, and more pronounced wrinkles.

To empower Singapore residents to take charge of their health, NSC is rolling out a series of educational initiatives – including public discussions, videos, and social media content – to raise awareness on skin care and disease prevention. Additionally, the new Patient Education Lounge at its premises offers an interactive experience with multimedia displays and exhibits that are open to both patients and the public.

NSC has also initiated programmes for patients managing chronic skin conditions. For instance, the Active Living – Healthy Skin Badminton Camp is designed for children with eczema, who may avoid exercise for fear of worsening their skin condition. This session teaches the benefits of staying active and provides advice on skin care before, during, and after physical activity.

MEETING FUTURE HEALTHCARE NEEDS

Among NSC's other significant upgrades are facilities that enhance research capabilities, furthering the efforts of clinician-scientists to bring real-world health improvements to patients and the wider community. These include purpose-built areas for bio-banking and cell culture to create ideal conditions for preserving research samples.

The new **Skin Research Clinic** is a hub for pioneering patient-focused research and clinical trials. It houses sophisticated imaging technology that the Centre uses for research purposes. It also provides a discreet environment for those participating in the studies.

Additionally, NSC is set to prescribe advanced medications endorsed for their long-term benefits by the Ministry of Health (MOH)'s Agency of Care Effectiveness (ACE). These treatments will be made available to patients who meet specific health criteria, with added support to access them.

Reflecting on NSC's evolution, Prof Tan says, "This is a milestone for NSC and for Singapore. We have

NATIONAL SKIN CENTRE'S EXPANSION IN NUMBERS

- **25,300 SQUARE METRES IN SIZE** – more than double its previous premises
- **10-STOREYS TALL**
- **6 ROOMS** for topical medication application, to promote self-care
- **69 CONSULTATION ROOMS**, up from 40
- **OVER 20 SUBSPECIALTIES**, up from 8
- **30 PER CENT** more phototherapy resources



come a long way since we started out in 1988 at Mandalay Road."

In 2022, the NSC saw nearly 280,000 outpatient visits. Looking ahead, Prof Tan anticipates a 30 per cent increase in patient numbers by 2030. She foresees that the centre would be capable of supporting a 50 per cent rise in patient visits, assuming manpower keeps pace.

To ensure NSC meets these future demands, Prof Tan emphasises the need for strategic development. "To match the projected growth, we must not only scale up resources, including our skilled manpower, but also continue to innovate to maximise these resources efficiently," she says. **LW**



Phototherapy nurse opening the new Ultraviolet A1 Cabin.

TAKE AS
PRESCRIBED

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Sticking strictly to your medication schedule isn't just good practice — it's vital to improve health outcomes for your condition.



BY TINA WANG

IN CONSULTATION WITH
MS LOW SUAT FERN
DEPUTY HEAD // PHARMACY
// YISHUN HEALTH //
PRINCIPAL CLINICAL
PHARMACIST (SPECIALIST)
// YISHUN COMMUNITY
HOSPITAL



I forgot." "I did not follow my usual routine." "I was too late with my dose."



These are the top three reasons why patients,

especially seniors — do not take their medications as prescribed or on time.

This information is part of the findings from the Patients' degree of Adherence, Challenges and preferences towards medicine Taking (PACT) study, conducted between May and November 2022. Involving a sample size of almost 1,300 patients from the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH), National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), National Skin Centre (NSC), Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH),

and Yishun Community Hospital (YCH), the study found that 56.4 per cent did not consume their medications as prescribed.

In Singapore, where the ageing population is growing fast, medication-related problems will increasingly become a cause for concern. Failure to consume medications as prescribed can lead to a patient's inability to manage their medical condition, particularly for chronic illnesses.

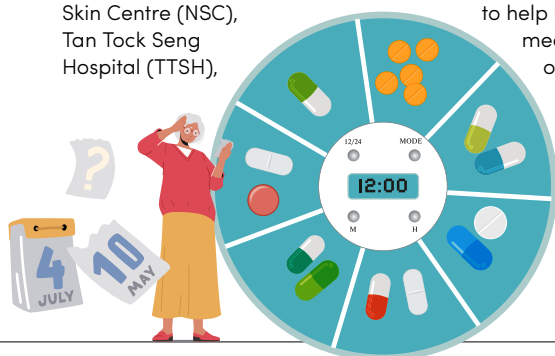
As Ms Low Suat Fern, Deputy Head of Pharmacy at Yishun Health, who is also the Principal Clinical Pharmacist at YCH, stresses, "Medication compliance is important to help us manage a patient's medical condition, be it acute or chronic. As it is a primary determinant of treatment success, it helps to improve health outcomes."

FEELING THE IMPACT

Primary care practitioners in Singapore face a number

of challenges in ensuring patients adhere to their medication regimens. Ms Low points out that doctors often have back-to-back appointments, which may make it tough for them to check with every patient if they are taking their medicine correctly. They also may not always have the chance to ask detailed questions about whether patients are following their medication schedules.

At the same time, if patients do not tell their doctors they are skipping doses, they may get prescribed more medicine than they actually need. "Each medicine dosage is individually tailored, sometimes according to factors like your age and weight, as well as kidney and liver function," says Ms Low. "Taking too much medicine can cause side effects and problems." These can lead to an exacerbation of their illness, and in turn, serious health complications.



LENDING A HELPING HAND

Ms Low suggests that at every consultation, doctors and pharmacists should try to take the time to remind patients how crucial it is to follow their medication instructions and offer tips on how to do it right. They could also give a heads-up about any common side effects and how to handle them. "For those juggling a bunch of different medications, the goal is to make the instructions as clear and straightforward as possible, making it easier for patients to stick to their treatment plan," she says.

The team at NHG Pharmacy (NHGPh) knows how tricky it can be to keep track of medication, so they recommend handy tools like pill boxes for better organisation, and setting alarms or phone reminders so patients do not miss a dose. "We may also provide patients with a printed medication list to help them stick to their prescribed treatment," says Ms Low.

The NHG Cares App has a helpful feature that allows doctors to send reminder notifications to patients who may forget to take their medicine. This personal touch aims to keep patients on track with their health routine.

If there is a language barrier, Pharmacy staff ensure patients or their caregivers get advice from a staff member who speaks their language. The medication labels or boxes that are usually in English can also be changed to Chinese, Malay, or Tamil. This ensures that everyone can understand how to use their medicines correctly.



If the cause is due to financial difficulties, patients can seek help from their medical social worker to obtain Medifund assistance. "Subsidies on chronic medications will be extended to patients who are consulting GPs, as a component of the Healthier SG initiative," says Ms Low. **LW**

EXTENDING WIDER ASSISTANCE

With *Healthier SG's* focus on general practitioners (GPs) becoming more involved in a patient's health journey, plans are in place to help patients remember to take their medicines the right way.

Ms Low explains: "If patients are having trouble following their medication schedule because they have too many different kinds to take, their primary physician or pharmacist could review the indication, dose, and frequency of each medication, and consider stopping, reducing the dose and frequency, or simplifying the medication schedule."



Medication compliance is important to help us manage a patient's medical condition, be it acute or chronic. As it is a primary determinant of treatment success, it helps to improve health outcomes."

MS LOW SUAT FERN, DEPUTY HEAD OF PHARMACY, YISHUN HEALTH, PRINCIPAL CLINICAL PHARMACIST, YISHUN COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

▶ MAKE YOUR DOSAGE COUNT

More important facts about medication adherence.

1 Complete your antibiotics course

Doctors prescribe a course of antibiotics treatment to ensure elimination of bacterial infection. If you do not complete your course of antibiotics, the bacteria can develop resistance against them. This means the prescribed antibiotics may not work if you get infected again.

2 Handling missed doses of blood pressure medicine

The efficacy of some blood pressure medicine will wear

off after one day. If you miss a dose the following day, your blood pressure might not stay under control for that day.

It is okay if you miss your morning dose and take it in the early afternoon. You should carry on your dose as usual the next day. But if it slips your mind and you take your first dosage much later in the day, the timing on the following day should be brought to the early afternoon. Go back to your regular morning routine thereafter. If you are confused about what to do after missing a dose, consult your pharmacist or doctor.

3 Timing is everything with insulin injections

Getting the timing right for

insulin injections is crucial, especially since most of them should be taken around meal times. This does not apply to basal insulin (a slow-acting insulin), which works throughout the day. Incorrect timing may lead to blood sugar levels that are too high or too low. If you miss your insulin shot but it has been only a short while after eating, it is generally safe to take it. If you are unsure about when to take your insulin, consult your pharmacist or doctor.



Dr Loh Kok Chi

FAMILY MEDICARE CLINIC & SURGERY

MEET YOUR
FAMILY
DOCTOR

A SHARP SENSE OF CARE

“General Practitioners (GPs) are like the Japanese *santoku* knife,” says Dr Loh. This all-purpose tool can be used to chop, slice, dice, and mince. “Similarly, GPs have a broad knowledge base that goes deep enough for us to impact various aspects of our patients’ health,” he says. “These include treating illnesses such as common colds and emerging viruses, promoting disease prevention, supporting psychological well-being, and so much more.”

“I SET UP MY FAMILY MEDICINE PRACTICE BACK IN 1991.

> It was a year of new beginnings, as that was when my daughter — the eldest of my three children — was born.

WHILE MY EARLY INCLINATION WAS TOWARDS SURGERY, I FELT A CALLING TOWARDS A MORE PERSON-CENTRIC DISCIPLINE WHEN I STARTED MANAGING PATIENTS DURING MY HOUSEMANSHIP*.

> Family Medicine offered that opportunity to care for people across the different seasons of their lives, and I took on a two-year traineeship where I was posted to a broad range of surgical and medical specialties.

AFTER WORKING FOR VARIOUS GENERAL PRACTITIONERS (GPs), AN OPPORTUNITY CAME FOR ME TO TAKE OVER A FORMER SPECIALIST CLINIC IN ANG MO KIO AND TURN IT INTO A FAMILY PRACTICE.

> It was an estate that I was

familiar with, having grown up in nearby Upper Thomson. I took over the practice and have been working here since then.

I TREATED MANY CHILDREN AND EVEN ASSISTED IN ANTENATAL CARE.

> At that time, Ang Mo Kio was an up-and-coming neighbourhood with many young families. Now, a large proportion of my patients are seniors. But once the Build-to-Order (BTO) flats in the estate are completed in 2028 and new residents move in,

I anticipate a demographic shift back to younger patients. But young or old, all residents want the same thing; a doctor they can communicate well with, and who can help them with any health issues.

EACH DAY STARTS HALF AN HOUR BEFORE THE CLINIC OPENS.

> That’s when I review the day’s appointments and update my staff, where necessary, about any new health guidelines by the Ministry of



IN GOOD HANDS

To long-time residents of central Ang Mo Kio, Dr Loh Kok Chi, 62, is a trusted healthcare provider at all times. BY KEENAN PEREIRA PHOTOS AIK CHEN

Health (MOH), or as in recent times, any COVID-19 case clusters that could affect our workload.

I OFTEN ENCOUNTER OPPORTUNITIES TO PICK UP HIDDEN HEALTH ISSUES IN APPARENTLY HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS.

> Take, for instance, the time a 65-year-old senior visited me for the standard check-up needed to renew his driving license. He said, 'I'm really healthy; no medical problems!', but the results of his examination told a different story. His blood pressure was high, and subsequent tests showed that he had high cholesterol levels. He was also unknowingly living with diabetes. Thankfully, we detected these issues early, and could start to manage them right away.

GPs ALSO PLAY THE ROLES OF CONFIDANTE AND FRIEND.

> One case stands out in my mind: a long-time patient had come to see me about a cough. I sensed that something else was troubling her and asked if there was anything she wanted to talk about. She eventually opened up and told me that her daughter was going through a difficult time in her marriage and was considering divorce. While I couldn't advise her on what she should do, I lent a listening ear and gave her the space to talk about what was on her mind which helped her feel better.

IT IS AN EXCITING TIME TO BE A GP.

> With *Healthier SG*, our primary healthcare approach is undergoing a pivotal transformation from one that focuses on *treating* ill-health to one that *prevents* it. The family doctor will be able to draw on allied health support, novel initiatives, and community programmes to help his/her patients attain not just a *longer* life but a *healthier* one too. There are huge challenges involved and lots of work ahead, but there is definitely much to look forward to.

BEYOND A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH PATIENTS, GPs ARE FORGING NEW PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS.

> Being plugged into the National Healthcare Group (NHG) Central-North Primary Care Network (CN-PCN) has expanded our resources



ABOUT THE NHG CENTRAL-NORTH PRIMARY CARE NETWORK (CN-PCN)

SET UP IN APRIL 2018, THE NHG CN-PCN IS A NETWORK OF GPs SUPPORTED BY NURSES AND CARE COORDINATORS VIA A VIRTUAL TEAMLET APPROACH, AND RUN BY THE NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS (NHGP). IT BRINGS CARE CLOSER TO THE COMMUNITY BY PROVIDING ANCILLARY AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC CONDITIONS.

and support for patients. It was quite a mindset shift for me, as I was used to operating independently until the CN-PCN lead invited me to be part of a larger community of healthcare providers.

JOINING A LARGER HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY HAS BEEN INCREDIBLY BENEFICIAL.

> Healthcare providers in Central and North Singapore can now reach out for help from each other with ease. This sharing of knowledge and resources benefits patients as well, as they then receive more comprehensive care. CN-PCN members also help each other navigate guidelines and policies, and support one another in operationalising national healthcare initiatives, be it pandemic measures, vaccination programmes, or *Healthier SG*.

RECENT CHANGES TO THE WAY GPs WORK HAVE SPARKED NEW FRIENDSHIPS.

> We learn from one another, vent our frustrations, and share joyful moments

in our informal CN-PCN chat groups and gatherings. This is important because the new journey in primary care calls for helping one another, and having good relationships to create a strong foundation and structure for the future. However, what I am most excited about is not so much what CN-PCN has accomplished, but what it is capable of doing and becoming. With good vision, capable leadership, and appropriate funding, the CN-PCN is a powerful tool for healthcare possibilities.

GPs NEED TO MOVE OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE AND GET CONNECTED.

> Joining the CN-PCN is one way of doing this. With a collective voice, we can engage more cohesively and meaningfully with other healthcare stakeholders in Singapore. "LW

NURTURING WELLNESS

"As healthcare providers, staying healthy in our own body and mind is as crucial as looking after the well-being of our patients. I try to bring my own light lunch to work so I can watch what I eat."

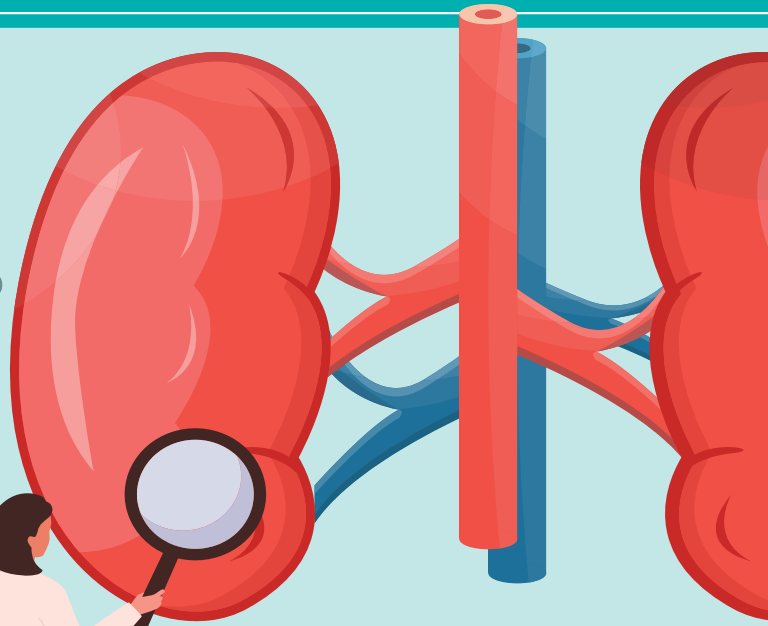
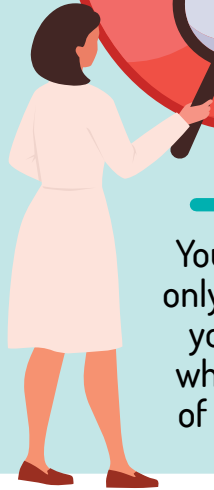
"When it's time for a holiday, I really 'shut off' from work. My wife and I are planning a trip to a small town somewhere in the Arctic Circle later this year, which should prove invigorating!"



THE SILENT KILLER

BY EVELINE GAN

IN CONSULTATION WITH
DR ALLEN LIU
SENIOR CONSULTANT //
GENERAL MEDICINE (RENAL) //
KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL



DON'T KID YOURSELF

Your kidneys may be functioning at only 10 per cent of their capacity, and you may not even know it. That is why prevention and early diagnosis of chronic kidney disease is crucial.

PREVALENCE OF
CHRONIC KIDNEY
DISEASE AMONG
SINGAPORE RESIDENTS
HAS JUMPED BY
MORE THAN

50%

FROM 7.3%
(2019 TO 2020)
TO 11.4%
(2021 TO 2022).

EVERY DAY, THE
KIDNEYS OF

5

PEOPLE STOP
WORKING.

AT 32, Anne* was facing kidney failure, a condition she would never have associated with someone her age. Previously diagnosed with hypertension — a leading cause of kidney disease — Anne had tried to manage her high blood pressure with a low-sodium diet, but did not consult healthcare professionals for medical treatment.

Anne's health took a turn for the worse in December last year. She had to be admitted to the emergency department of Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH) with 'fluid overload', a medical condition where her body was retaining too much fluid. A frequent issue for those with failing kidneys, fluid overload can cause serious health issues, like lung congestion and even heart failure.

Anne was unaware that her kidneys had stopped working properly. "She was in a critical condition, and

was rushed to intensive care for life-saving dialysis," recounts Dr Allen Liu, Senior Consultant in General Medicine (Renal) at KTPH.

A RISING CONCERN

Our kidneys are vital organs that play several crucial roles, including that of filtering out waste and excess fluids, producing red blood cells, and maintaining an optimal balance of water, salts, and minerals in our blood. Chronic kidney disease occurs when kidneys are slowly damaged over time and lose their function. Any damage is irreversible.

The disease is becoming increasingly common in Singapore, turning stories like Anne's into a stark reality for many. Alarming, the rate has risen sharply, with the National Population Health Survey 2022 indicating a more than 50 per cent increase in cases — up from 7.3 per cent between 2019 and 2020 to 11.4 per cent in the following two years.



Chronic kidney disease occurs in older people, but it does not mean that younger adults are not also at risk.

The National Population Health Survey 2022 reveals a worrying trend: not only is the disease getting more common among older citizens, but younger groups are increasingly affected as well.

Lifestyle-related conditions such as diabetes and hypertension are also risk factors for chronic kidney disease. The number of people with hypertension has doubled over the past 10 years. Data from the National Population Health Survey 2022 indicates that hypertension is a growing concern, with more than a third (37 per cent) of Singaporeans diagnosed with the condition in 2021 and 2022 – a significant increase from 19.8 per cent in 2010.

Dr Liu highlights another stark reality: the incidence of chronic kidney disease among patients with diabetes has quadrupled. In fact,

IN SINGAPORE, HYPERTENSION RATE HAS NEARLY DOUBLED AMONG RESIDENTS, FROM 19.8% IN 2010 TO 37% IN 2021 AND 2022. HYPERTENSION IS A LEADING CAUSE OF KIDNEY DISEASE.

two-thirds of those requiring dialysis due to end-stage kidney disease are diabetics.

Among patients with chronic kidney disease that he sees, many have pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and obesity. “As our population ages and people live longer, often with conditions like hypertension, the number of chronic kidney disease cases is unfortunately on the rise,” he says.

A HIDDEN DANGER

Chronic kidney disease quietly unfolds through five stages, often remaining asymptomatic in the early stages. This means that there are no clear symptoms and people may be unaware that their kidney function is declining. Dr Liu points out that it is possible for individuals to lose as much as 90 per cent of kidney function without any obvious symptoms.

As the condition worsens, signs like reduced appetite, foamy urine, swelling in the ankles, and a general sense of tiredness can emerge.

During the late stages, more severe symptoms appear, including breathing troubles, unconsciousness, confusion, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, nausea, and vomiting, as well as an ammonia-like smell on the breath.

“Without addressing underlying risk factors and making necessary lifestyle changes, kidney health can deteriorate to the point of kidney failure, necessitating dialysis or a transplant,” warns Dr Liu. He also notes that those with advanced chronic kidney disease have an increased risk of heart-related illnesses.

PROACTIVE STEPS TO LOWER RISK

Although chronic kidney disease is irreversible, detecting and

managing it early can help to slow the damage.

Chronic kidney disease can be detected through a simple urine test or blood test. A urine test checks if there is any protein in the urine, while the blood test measures the level of creatinine in the blood. Healthy kidneys filter creatinine, a chemical compound, out of the blood. A large amount of protein in the urine suggests an issue with kidney function.

Given that the disease usually has no clear symptoms in the early stages, Dr Liu advises individuals with risk factors to go for regular screening tests, regardless of age. “Screening helps to diagnose early chronic kidney disease. Identifying and managing patients with early stages may slow or prevent the progression to end-stage kidney disease and reduce cardiovascular complications,” he explains.

ARE YOU AT RISK OF CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE?

Get your kidney function checked if you have one or more of the high-risk factors below:

- YOU HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE.
- YOU HAVE DIABETES.
- YOU HAVE OBESITY.
- ONE OF YOUR PARENTS OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS SUFFER FROM KIDNEY DISEASE.



Source: Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

THE SILENT KILLER

In addition to regular screening, adopting a healthier lifestyle and diet is also beneficial. Staying active, embracing a diet rich in nutrients, staying hydrated, and avoiding smoking can all contribute to better kidney health.

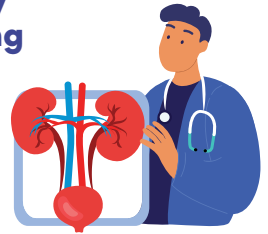
Dr Liu references a comprehensive study from Singapore, which found a link between lower red meat consumption and decreased kidney failure risk. The research, which appeared in the *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology* in 2016, indicated that reducing red meat intake in favour of alternative proteins like chicken, fish, eggs, or plant-based options could reduce the risk of developing end-stage kidney disease by as much as 62 per cent.

At a national level, health authorities are addressing the high rates of hypertension by promoting a reduction in sodium consumption. Initiatives to increase the availability of lower-sodium products in restaurants and markets are part of a strategy to make healthier options more accessible for everyone.



Screening helps to diagnose early chronic kidney disease. Identifying and managing patients with early stages may slow or prevent the progression to end-stage kidney disease and reduce cardiovascular complications.”

DR ALLEN LIU, SENIOR CONSULTANT, GENERAL MEDICINE (RENAL), KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL



Dr Liu said that while research has shown salt intake to be associated with a 21 per cent increase in the risk of developing chronic kidney disease, relying solely on a lower salt intake has not been shown to prevent the disease or slow its progression.

“Managing your diet is crucial, but it’s just part of a bigger picture,” says Dr Liu. Those with existing health issues such as diabetes and high blood pressure need to vigilantly manage their conditions. Dr Liu stresses the significance of following medical guidance and sticking to prescribed treatments and medications.

“Individuals who consume over-the-counter medications such as pain medicine on a regular basis, or are on certain antibiotics, as well as those who take herbal medicine regularly, are also advised to seek medical advice as regular consumption of such medications increase their risk of kidney disease,” adds Dr Liu.

For those at a more advanced stage of kidney disease who need dialysis, Dr Liu offers a clear directive: adhere to your healthcare team’s advice to effectively prepare for dialysis and reduce further health risks associated with kidney disease. **LW**

9 IN 10

PEOPLE IN SINGAPORE CONSUME ALMOST DOUBLE THE RECOMMENDED DAILY LIMIT OF SODIUM BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (2,000MG – EQUIVALENT TO 5G OR SLIGHTLY LESS THAN A TEASPOON OF SALT).

THE NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEY 2022 SHOWED THAT THE DAILY SODIUM INTAKE OF SINGAPORE RESIDENTS ROSE FROM 3,480MG IN 2019 TO **3,620MG** IN 2022.





BY JOYCE LIM

IN CONSULTATION WITH
MS LEE YI PING
PRINCIPAL CASE MANAGER
& PROGRAMME LEAD //
CHAT, CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH //
INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH



HELP IS A STRENGTH

Connecting with others can improve mental well-being in young people.

Each generation faces its own struggles with mental health, but Gen Z and young millennials appear to be struggling with these challenges more than the generations born before 1980. The statistics in the National Population Health Survey 2022 (NPHS 2022) point to a rising trend of poor mental health in Singapore, especially among those aged between 18 to 39 years old. The findings of the Singapore Mental Health Study, conducted in 2010 and 2016, reinforce this: young people aged 18 to 34 years old are more likely to have mood and anxiety disorders.

A FRAGILE STATE OF MIND

There are many reasons why young people today are more susceptible to developing mental health issues than previous generations. A hyper-

connected world that propagates knowledge but also breeds misinformation and a pandemic that has upended job security and weakened the economy are some changes that have amplified the stress for young people.

"The global forces that we face today are very different from 10 to 20 years ago," says Ms Lee Yi Ping, Principal Case Manager & Programme Lead for CHAT, the Centre of Excellence for Youth Mental Health. CHAT is a national mental health assessment and outreach initiative for youth which comes under the care of the Institute of Mental Health (IMH).

"Given the significant improvement in population mobility and communications on a global level over the years, our youths today face greater competition in education and at work. With the advancement in technology, many jobs are also at risk of being displaced. These inevitably put greater pressure on youths to excel

and be equipped with high-level skills for a stable future."

According to Ms Lee, the three areas of stress that consistently surface in Gen Z and young millennials are:

- **School, vocational activities, and work.**
- **Relationships, such as interpersonal difficulties or conflicts with peers in school or at work, or with romantic partners; and strained relationships with parents or siblings.**
- **Finance-related concerns, for those who are transitioning from studying to working, or who have taken on or are sharing the responsibility of providing for the family.**

SUFFERING IN SILENCE

Many people, especially youths, struggle with mental health on their own because of the stigma surrounding it. "Youths have a desire to achieve a sense of independence and therefore, prefer to rely on themselves when it comes to managing their own mental health difficulties," says Ms Lee. "They fear being judged and labelled as 'weak' or 'attention-seeking', and may shy away from sharing their emotional difficulties or asking for help."

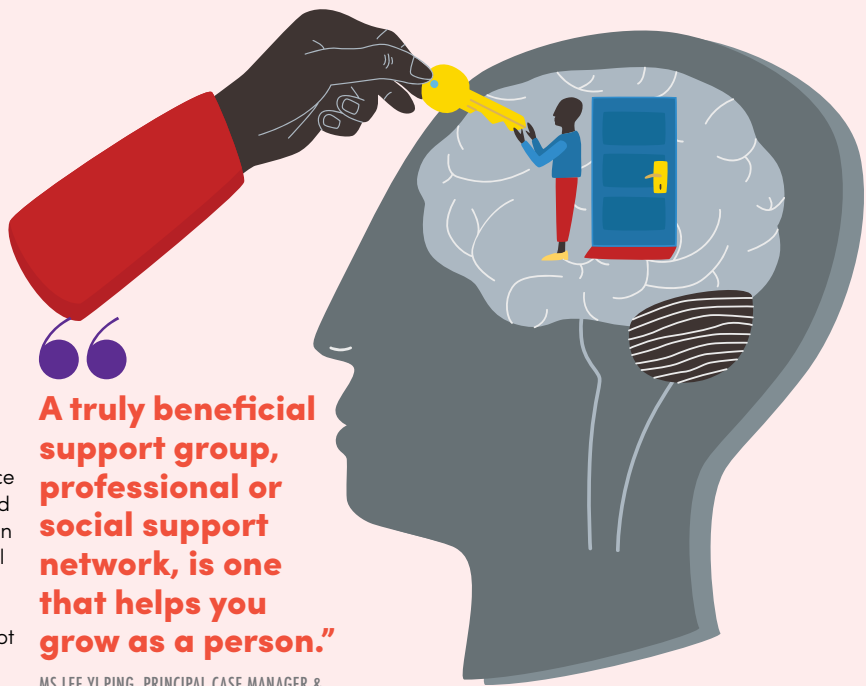
Other reasons may include past negative experiences with help-seeking, concerns about not being able to commit to treatment due to time or financial constraints, or fear of jeopardising studies or work. Some believe that their mental health issues are not serious enough to warrant

professional help, or that these issues will resolve with time.

Ms Gek Wan Sing, 24, was one of those who believed her depression was just a phase during secondary school. Her mental condition seemed to improve after she enrolled in polytechnic. But being in a new environment aggravated Ms Gek's social anxiety to the point that she could not even eat during mealtimes at her orientation camp because she thought people were staring at her.

Immersion in a negative workplace culture during her internship worsened Ms Gek's state of mind, at a time when she was already struggling with social anxiety. "I cried every day," she said in a previous interview with IMH's publication, *Imagine*. Yet, she could not leave the workplace as her internship was tied to her grade point average. "I am someone who relies heavily on external validation," she revealed. "I am very affected by setbacks and doubt myself a lot if I don't get the approval of others."

Ms Gek knew she needed help beyond what her family or friends could offer. She found out about CHAT through her mother and made an appointment for an assessment. She was then referred to a psychiatrist and counsellor. "Meeting my psychiatrist was the turning point. He was very reassuring, and when I was diagnosed with depression and social anxiety, I felt like there was finally hope," she shared. "I knew now, at least, what I was going through, and the medication helped



A truly beneficial support group, professional or social support network, is one that helps you grow as a person."

MS LEE YI PING, PRINCIPAL CASE MANAGER & PROGRAMME LEAD, CHAT, CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

my mood. Eventually, I was referred to a psychologist, whom I speak with to sort out my thoughts."

The help of therapy and medication has eased Ms Gek's social anxiety, even though she occasionally feels apprehensive in larger groups with unfamiliar faces. "I don't doubt myself so much now, and I don't dwell on negative thoughts," she said. Instead, she has decided to help others like her by joining CHAT's team of youth ambassadors.

As a CHAT Ambassador, she participates in mental health outreach events

and supports peers in distress. The lived experiences of Ambassadors like Ms Gek, and their personal stories, can be a powerful tool in encouraging others who are facing similar problems.

There is still a lack of understanding of what constitutes mental well-being and mental illness, observes Ms Lee. "Mental health is a continuum — a person experiences varying degrees of wellness depending on their interactions with the external environment. This is separate from mental illnesses, which are health conditions that affect the brain, resulting in changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour. These changes may worsen over time and affect the individual's ability to perform day-to-day tasks and even his or her interactions with others. Poor mental health increases one's risk of developing mental illnesses," she explains.

Ms Lee also debunks the myth that people with good mental health do not experience distress. "From time to time, we encounter challenges at school, work, or from relationships that cannot be resolved easily. People with good mental health can also experience distress in the face of such challenges. A key to maintaining good mental health

How can CHAT help

CHAT supports distressed young people by providing a confidential mental health check for young people aged 16 to 30, to help them better understand what they are experiencing and how to make things better. Their youth case workers, who are qualified allied health professionals, can also assist with referrals to mental health support services within the community, such as family service centres, social service agencies, and counselling centres, or school-based counsellors.

If the individual requires more help, the case workers can also initiate a referral letter to a restructured hospital (at subsidised fees) for professional psychiatric assessment, as

well as provide supportive work to the young person until he/she attends the first psychiatric assessment at the recommended restructured hospital.

CHAT also offers webCHAT, a real-time, text-based online messaging platform where young people can get in-the-moment support for their mental health-related concerns. With the young person's consent, it can link young people in need to professional help.



is to learn or refine our strategies to manage new challenges and their associated distress," she says. "There is no quick fix to resolve distress and mental health issues."

FIND YOUR SUPPORT SQUAD

One of the things that does have a positive impact on mental well-being is social support. Fortunately, young people between the ages of 18 and 29 are more willing to share about their mental health struggles, according to the findings in the NPHS 2022. Nine out of 10 respondents said they were willing to tap on informal support networks such as friends, relatives, colleagues, religious leaders, and teachers; and six out of 10 would seek professional help.

Social support falls into three categories:

- **EMOTIONAL.** Showing care and concern, listening with empathy, or offering a shoulder to cry on helps the person remember that he/she matters and is not alone in facing the challenges.
- **INFORMATIONAL.** Providing guidance, advice, and feedback can be helpful in expanding the person's perspective and options when he/she is stressed or anxious about making decisions or big changes in his/her life.
- **INSTRUMENTAL.** Such support is often tangible and addresses a person's immediate needs. For instance, it could take the form of delivering a hot meal when the person is ill or offering a ride when his/her car is at the workshop.

It is important to widen our social networks as diverse individuals provide various forms of social support. Having a diverse network ensures we are more likely to receive the type of support that we need in different situations and at different times.

Ms Lee recognises that not everyone has access to family support. "At CHAT, we have encountered young people who have no support from family due to estranged relationships. This reinforces the importance for one to grow his or her social network beyond just family members."

Also, young people are typically more receptive to advice from peers in the same age group as they share the same values, experiences, and lifestyle, and thus are able to relate their concerns better than their parents or even experts.

BEYOND FRIENDS AND FAMILY

It is important to realise when the support we need is beyond the ability of our social and familial circle. Sudden changes in thinking, feeling, and behaviour that progressively affect the ability to handle academic or work demands, and changes in interactions with others are signs that one needs to talk to a professional. In her experience, Ms Lee has found that young people seek help when they feel that poor mental health has significantly affected their interpersonal or professional life.

She adds, "With timely and appropriate medical and psychosocial interventions by formal sources of support like healthcare professionals – coupled with informal sources of support like family and friends – young people stand a better chance with recovery and can regain their capability to pursue their ambitions in life."

There are many mental health services available today, from free counselling services to community-based organisations offering counselling and case management support services to young people and their families. These services may be available via phone and face-to-face sessions, as well as text-based support through WhatsApp, email, and video chats.

- Professional counselling services provide a non-judgmental, safe space with mental health professionals who can help individuals gain clarity about their mental health concerns.
- Faith-based support groups can provide coping resources and a means to connect with others with shared religious beliefs. Such support can be beneficial if there is a good fit between the person's needs and what such initiatives offer. It is important to remember that it is one's prerogative to stop participating in these groups if it feels uncomfortable or does not make a positive difference.
- Online services offer round-the-clock accessibility, convenience, and anonymity. With online communities on forums, chat rooms, and social media platforms, it is important to recognise that insights shared come from personal experiences and do not represent professional standards of advice and treatment. What works for one person may not necessarily work for another.

"A truly beneficial support group, professional or social support network, is one that helps you grow as a person," advises Ms Lee. "It is also important to learn to be our own greatest supporter as it serves as a back-up during times we experience unsupportive friends and family. Employ positive self-talk and practise being kind and gentle with yourself." LW



AVENUES OF CARE

Where young people can go for support.

- **CHAT**
www.chat.mentalhealth.sg
6493 6500/6501
chat@mentalhealth.sg
- **TOUCHline (TOUCH Youth)**
1800 377 2252
- **Care Corner's Mental Health for Youth (INSIGHT)**
www.carecorner.org.sg/services/insight
6978 4217
insight@carecorner.org.sg
- **Resilience**
www.shine.org.sg/resilience
9740 1489 (WhatsApp)
resilience@shine.org.sg
- **Singapore Association for Mental Health**
1800 283 7019
- **ec2.sg**
fycs.org/ec2-sg
- **Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)**
1767
9151 1787 (WhatsApp)
- **www.Mindline.sg**
- **IMH's Mental Health Helpline**
6389 2222 (24-hour hotline)



WORKOUT

ROW, ROW, ROW

INDOOR ROWING
ENGAGES

86%

OF THE
BODY'S MUSCLES



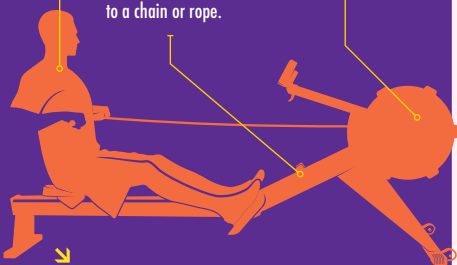
ABOUT INDOOR ROWING

Indoor rowing is an exercise where you use a stationary machine – known as an indoor rower or ergometer – to simulate the motion of rowing a boat.

➤ To exercise, pull on the handle while sliding back and forth on the seat. Performing this movement repeatedly provides a full-body workout that involves the legs, core, and upper body – making indoor rowing an effective cardiovascular and strength-training exercise.

➤ There is a wheel with settings to determine the intensity of your exercise when you pull on the handle i.e. to simulate rowing in calm or choppy water.

➤ The ergometer comprises a sliding seat, footrests, and a handle that is connected to a chain or rope.



➤ An ergometer measures about 240cm x 60cm, and the cost starts from S1,500. Some fitness centres offer rowing classes; The Row Space is a gym dedicated to the workout.

➤ The 1st Singapore Indoor Rowing Championship by the Singapore Rowing Association is held in March 2024.

YOUR BOAT

BY CHERYL TAY PHOTOS DILLON TAN

Embracing an active lifestyle opens up a world of benefits, and indoor rowing is a novel way to get started.

For Ms Lim Tien Ling, indoor rowing is more than just an exercise; it has been a transformative experience. The 50-year-old homemaker has been suffering from chronic back pain for the past five years, but her condition has improved after she started indoor rowing about 18 months ago. Ms Lim says she now feels “fitter and stronger”.

How did you get started with indoor rowing?

My husband does powerlifting and mountain biking, and he took up indoor rowing to boost his cardiovascular endurance. He could see the positive changes, and after mastering the proper techniques, he bought

an ergometer for use at home. Over time, I found myself drawn to the exercise.

Years of bad posture and a weak body core has resulted in me suffering from bad chronic pain. But with my physiotherapist's approval, I decided to try indoor rowing. In November 2022, I had an initial session with my husband's trainer at his gym.

I realised then that there is more to indoor rowing than simply getting onto the ergometer and rowing away. You need to adopt the correct posture and really focus on using the right muscles so that your whole body is involved in the exercise.

Indoor rowing was more challenging than I had anticipated, but it kept me wanting more. I was



My goal is to maintain robust health well into my 80s. Exercise, for me, is the ultimate youth elixir – I always come out of a workout feeling energised.”

MS LIM TIEN LING, 50, HOMEMAKER



a busy mum, and I wasn't very physically active. I felt great after the first session, and realised indoor rowing was totally doable for my then-fitness level.

I've been rowing weekly ever since. I use the home indoor rower sometimes but it's easy to get distracted at home. Being at the gym gives me no excuse not to work out.

What do you appreciate most about this exercise?

It's an indoor activity, so you can do it anytime regardless of the weather. Plus, indoor rowing caters to how you are feeling or your energy level, and what you want to achieve that day... whether you just want a leisurely row while catching up on podcasts or Korean dramas, or a quick 20-minute intense workout before heading out.

How has indoor rowing benefitted you?

My cardiovascular fitness has improved and the back pain I used to struggle with has decreased considerably. I'm motivated to row every week even though the exercise is physically challenging.

What is your overall fitness routine now like?

Besides meeting my trainer for indoor rowing and high-intensity workouts weekly, I commit to two or three strength-training sessions each week, and swim two days a week. Recently, I've added cycling and running to my regimen to prepare for a triathlon in October.

My goal is to maintain robust health well into my 80s. Exercise, for me, is the ultimate youth elixir – I always come out of a workout feeling energised. **LW**

UNDERSTAND THE EXERCISE

Mr Jeremy Tan, co-founder of The Row Space, a gym dedicated to indoor rowing, on how this workout can boost fitness and overall health.

> ROWING INDOORS VS OUTDOORS

Outdoor rowing in natural surroundings is undeniably scenic, and offers a tranquil, almost meditative quality. You would, however, need to be able to balance on water. Indoor rowing bypasses the balance challenge. Just step onto the machine and you're ready to row.

> HEALTH BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH INDOOR ROWING

Rowing is a low-impact activity that spares weight-bearing joints – such as the knees and ankles – from excessive stress. A study by the English Institute of Sport (now known as the UK Sports Institute) showed that indoor rowing engages 86 per cent of the body's muscles with each stroke, delivering a comprehensive workout. This exercise builds strength and also enhances cardiovascular fitness, and leads to efficient use of oxygen by the body.

> WHO CAN PICK UP THE EXERCISE

It's a versatile activity suitable for all ages, body types, and fitness levels. But you must get the go-ahead from your doctor for such an activity. Beginners can start with one or two sessions per week and work up to three or four times as their endurance and strength improve.

> WHAT A SESSION ENTAILS

Warming up with static exercises, such as the 'inchworm crawl' and 'standing hip opener', is essential, and you must tell your trainer of any injuries or existing medical conditions. A safe way to ensure that enthusiasts are not over-pushing themselves would be for them to wear a heart rate monitor. Rowing workouts vary in intensity, and a heart rate monitor can provide immediate insight, alerting the rower if they should slow down or increase their effort.

Younger rowers should focus on learning how to row properly, and not rush into increasing the speed or resistance level. Like all exercises, rowing regularly is what really helps to improve fitness. Older people in their 50s and beyond should enjoy indoor rowing as a way to stay active.

Always consult a doctor before you start any exercise regimen, especially if you have pre-existing health conditions.

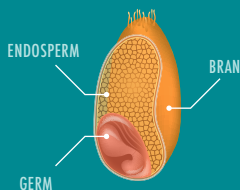


EAT
WELL

Get the scoop on the world of grains, and their role in fostering good health.

DECODING 'WHOLE'

'Wholegrain', 'wholemeal', and 'wholewheat' may seem interchangeable, but these terms describe different aspects of grain processing. By understanding these labels, you can make informed choices to maximise the nutritional value of the grains.



WHOLEGRAIN

This term describes the entire seed of the grain, which includes the bran, germ, and endosperm. Only products labelled as '100 per cent wholegrain' are made entirely from wholegrain flour. Meanwhile, those just marked 'wholegrain' may contain a mix, sometimes with as much as 49 per cent refined flour.

WHOLEMEAL

Often a term for flour, 'wholemeal' refers to flour that is milled from the entire grain kernel, keeping all its nutritional goodness.

WHOLEWHEAT

Specifically relates to wheat grains and products that are made without removing any part of the grain during the milling process.

GO WITH THE GRAIN

BY KOH YUEN LIN

From breakfast oats, pasta, corn kernels in a cup to *prata*, barley drinks and, of course, that ubiquitous bowl of rice, grains are part and parcel of our daily diet. These seeds are the single biggest source of food energy in the world. Yet, how much do we really know about this diverse food category that we consume so much of — whether in whole or processed forms — and the role they play in a balanced diet?

GAIN OR DRAIN?

Grains are the seeds of grasses like millet, spelt, sorghum, and wheat. Then there are their close cousins, the 'pseudo grains' such as quinoa, amaranth, and buckwheat, which come from broadleaf plants. These are not true grains by definition but are just as nourishing and have similar appearances and nutritional properties.

Grains are made up of three parts: the bran, germ, and endosperm. The bran is the seed's protective hard outer skin, and it is packed with fibre, minerals, and antioxidants. The germ — the embryo that grows into a new plant — is the nutrient-rich core containing carbohydrates, fats, and proteins, along with a suite of vitamins and antioxidants. Then there is the endosperm, the largest part and the energy provider, primarily composed of carbohydrates. Together, these form a whole grain that is a tiny powerhouse of nutrition, complete with complex carbohydrates for energy, fibre for digestion, and essential vitamins and minerals for overall health.

While grains are often lauded for their nourishing properties, some — such as wheat, barley, and rye — also contain gluten, a protein that can be difficult to digest. Gluten acts like a glue to hold foods together, enabling them to maintain their shape. It provides elasticity to dough, giving



bread the ability to rise when baked, and contributes to the chewy texture of other baked goods.

However, gluten can trigger a range of symptoms in individuals with gluten sensitivity. They include digestive issues such as bloating, gas, diarrhoea, and constipation. Gluten sensitivity can also cause headaches, fatigue, skin rashes, joint pain, and even neurological symptoms like brain fog and numbness in the limbs.

For those with celiac disease, consuming gluten triggers an immune response that damages the lining of the small intestine. In turn, this can lead to nutrient malabsorption and a variety of other complications.

Anti-grain advocates also cite the presence of antinutrients, which are naturally-occurring substances that can interfere with the body's ability to digest and absorb other nutrients.

Some primary antinutrients found in grains include:

- **PHYTATES (PHYTIC ACID)** ▶ These can bind to minerals like iron, zinc, magnesium, and calcium, and reduce their absorption by the body.
- **LECTINS** ▶ These proteins can resist digestion and potentially affect nutrient absorption.
- **TANNINS** ▶ These polyphenols can inhibit digestive enzymes and reduce iron absorption.
- **OXALATES** ▶ These bind to minerals, particularly calcium, and form insoluble salts, making them unavailable for absorption.
- **SAPONINS** ▶ These are known to affect normal nutrient absorption in the gut.

However, it is important to note that the impact of antinutrients is often mitigated by various food preparation techniques, such as soaking, sprouting, fermenting, and cooking. These methods can significantly reduce the levels of antinutrients and minimise their potential negative effects.

In contrast to these concerns, extensive research has highlighted the numerous health benefits associated with wholegrain consumption. These benefits include improved weight management due to increased feelings of fullness, a lowered risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, and a reduction in the likelihood of heart disease, stroke, and colorectal cancer.

The health benefits of consuming wholegrains include a lowered risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and colorectal cancer.

It is also crucial to distinguish that health benefits typically associated with grains are specific to whole grains, not their refined counterparts. Refining grains means stripping away the bran and germ to give the seeds a smoother texture, but this also significantly reduces their nutritional value. For example, turning brown rice to white rice. This process leaves the grain with mostly starch, and depletes the levels of dietary fibre, vitamins, and minerals, all of which are essential for a balanced diet.

WHOLE AND HEARTY

Despite their lack of nutritional value, refined grains dominate our diets – from polished rice to white bread, as well as processed cereals and those snacks we often munch on. Meanwhile, wholegrains – the healthiest choice – do not make it onto our plates as frequently as

they should. The Health Promotion Board (HPB) recommends filling a quarter plate with whole grains at each meal.

Transitioning to wholegrains may not be as difficult as one might think. When cooking, HPB suggests opting for brown rice instead of white rice; choosing wholegrain pasta or brown rice vermicelli; and using crushed wholegrains as breading for fish or chicken. These methods can significantly boost whole grain consumption.

You can also experiment with the wide variety of grains available in the market. From a spelt soup or a farro salad for desk lunches; a hearty beef stew with a handful of toothsome barley grains added in for a comforting one-dish meal; to even a vegetable stir-fry accented with millet for meals with the family, the possibilities of healthy eating are endless. **LW**

▶ UNPACKING THE LABEL

Navigate wholegrain product labels with these practical tips.

READ THE FINE PRINT

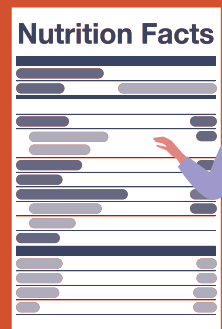
▶ Beware of ambiguous claims like 'double-fibre' or 'stone-ground'. To ensure you are getting wholegrain, scrutinise the label for details beyond the marketing hype.

PUT THINGS IN ORDER

▶ Ingredients are listed on a label in decreasing order by weight, so pick products with wholegrain at the beginning of the list. Also, choose foods that list the grains used as 'whole' or 'wholegrain' (e.g. 'wholewheat flour' or 'wholegrain barley').

FIGURE IT OUT

▶ The phrase 'Made with wholegrain' does not reveal the actual amount of wholegrains. For example, those labelled as 'good source of wholegrain' could contain just 15 per cent to 25 per cent wholegrain ingredients. Seek out labels that specify the percentage of wholegrain contents for a clearer picture of what you will be consuming.



UNWANTED BEDFELLOWS

BY **MORGAN AWYONG**

Awareness and proactive checks for bed bugs go a long way to avoid the distress of being infested.

Post-COVID 'revenge travel' has its joys, but these definitely do not include close encounters with a certain reddish-brown insect with an appetite for human blood — the dreaded bed bug.

DISSECTING THE BUG

Bed bugs are tiny, blood-feeding insects belonging to the *Cimex* genus. There are more than 90 types of such bugs, but only two species are known to bite humans: the *cimex lectularius*, found in temperate regions, and the *cimex hemipterus*, which are found in tropical regions and are particularly active at night.

For seasoned traveller Mr Bino Chua, 39, who has visited 72 countries and shares his experiences on Instagram (@iwanderrr), there are a few steps he diligently follows to minimise the risk of bringing home unwanted pests from abroad. "Opt for a hard case instead of a fabric suitcase," he advises, noting the difficulty in tracking the various surfaces our luggage touches after we check it in for a flight.

Mr Chua also segregates his worn clothes in sealable laundry bags to prevent any potential spread of bugs. Upon his return home, he takes an additional precaution. "I clean all surfaces of my suitcase with disinfectant wipes before storing it," he says. "I also make sure to keep my worn clothes in a distinct pile for washing."

AFTERMATH OF A BITE

To feed, bed bugs pierce the skin with their elongated beak to draw blood. The bite is usually painless but itchy welts — often arranged in a line or cluster — can soon develop.

Bed bugs do not transmit diseases, but their bites can cause discomfort, anxiety, and sleep disruption. Scratching a bite can lead to secondary skin infections or even scars. Less fortunate victims may experience intense allergic reactions. Beyond physical discomfort, bed bugs can damage and stain belongings with their bloodstains and droppings.

In a news report, a Singaporean known as Ms Drea experienced this ordeal first-hand during a trip to Bangkok in February 2023. She recounted how she initially mistook the bite marks for pimples, until they became itchier and multiplied. Despite applications of an anti-itch cream to alleviate the symptoms, her daily routine was disrupted with the relentless itching. "I just wanted to scratch my face off at night and couldn't sleep," she shared.

FLAT AND OVAL-SHAPED BODY.



ADULTS GROW TO ABOUT 5MM LONG (SIZE OF AN APPLE SEED).

COLOUR VARIES FROM REDDISH-BROWN TO ALMOST TRANSPARENT DURING DIFFERENT LIFE STAGES.

ITS PRESENCE IS LESS ABOUT CLEANLINESS AND MORE ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY AND CONCEALMENT.

DWELLS NOT ONLY WITHIN THE SEAMS OF MATTRESSES BUT ALSO IN A VARIETY OF SMALL SPACES, INCLUDING HOTEL BEDS, THEATRE CHAIRS, SUITCASES, AND THE SEATS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT.

UNDETERRED BY LIGHT, SO SWITCHING ON THE BEDSIDE LAMP IS NOT GOING TO HELP.





The psychological impact should not be underestimated either – long-term infestations can lead to stress and disrupted sleep. The ordeal took a hit on Ms Drea’s self-esteem. “Everyone kept staring at my face due to it being covered in bites,” she said.

ACT FAST

Swift attention is necessary if you spot a single bed bug or sustain a bite. Their life cycle can range from 45 days to a year, and studies have shown that a pregnant bed bug can produce rapidly, leading to an infestation in weeks.

Evidence of a bed bug infestation include small blood spots where they have fed, alongside

dark specks of excrement on fabric such as bedsheets. You may also discover their shed skins or rice-like eggs in hidden areas.

Bed bugs can survive for months without feeding. Methods, such as washing laundry above 50 degrees Celsius (°C), using a hairdryer’s heat to lure the insects out, and vacuuming may help to some extent but these solutions are limited in their efficacy.

Bed bugs’ resistance to traditional pesticides also makes them tough to eliminate without professional help. Should fumigation be required, make arrangements for temporary accommodation to ensure a thorough and effective treatment. Larger items such as mattresses and furniture ought to be replaced. **LW**



PREVENTION IS ALWAYS BETTER THAN CURE

Take proactive steps to significantly reduce the risk of unintentionally inviting bed bugs into your home after a trip away.

BE INFORMED ▶ Before your stay, check recent news and guest reviews for any reports of bed bugs at your accommodation.

SAFEGUARD YOUR LUGGAGE ▶ Upon arriving at your place of stay, put your luggage in the bathroom or bathtub – areas less likely to harbour bed bugs – while you inspect the room.

THOROUGH INSPECTION ▶ Carefully examine the bed, stripping it down to the mattress to inspect seams and hidden areas. Do also scrutinise other upholstered items and dark corners. Use a flashlight to leave no crevice unchecked.

POST-BITE PROTOCOL ▶ If you notice bites but have not seen any pests –

which may happen in transit areas – isolate the potentially affected garment. Purchase new clothing if necessary, seal the suspected items in a plastic bag, and wash these at a temperature above 50°C as soon as possible.

POST-TRAVEL VIGILANCE ▶ Once home, avoid placing your luggage on or near upholstery. Before unpacking, re-examine your luggage for any tell-tale signs of bed bugs.



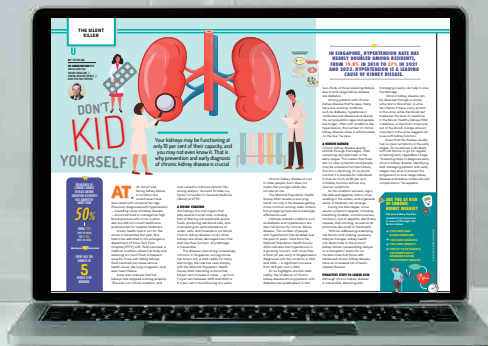
Suspected items should be washed in hot water at 50°C to 60°C, steamed at 100°C, or frozen at -18°C to ensure any stowaways are eradicated.

Sources: CNA, Business Insider, Wired

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SPOTLIGHT

▶ SEMBAWANG POLYCLINIC OPENS IN BUKIT CANBERRA

NHGP's first polyclinic located in an integrated hub with community and social services.



From left: Mr Vikram Nair, MP, Admiralty Division; Prof Philip Choo, Senior Advisor, NHG Board of Advisors; Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health; Dr Karen Ng, CEO, NHGP; Dr Irwin Chung, Head, Sembawang Polyclinic, NHGP; and Ms Mariam Jaafar, MP, Woodlands Division, commemorating the official opening of Sembawang Polyclinic.

Sembawang Polyclinic in Bukit Canberra was officially opened by Minister for Health Mr Ong Ye Kung on 25 November 2023. The eighth and newest polyclinic managed by the National Healthcare Group PolyClinics (NHGP) is the first to be located in an integrated hub within a network of community and social partners.

Sembawang Polyclinic's location enables it to collaborate with neighbouring agencies to provide health and social support for patients, so that they can take proactive steps to manage their health, prevent the onset of chronic diseases, and lead a healthy lifestyle, in alignment with the *Healthier SG* initiative.

wheelchair-friendly weighing machine. Patients can remain seated in their wheelchairs while their weight is being taken. Innovations like Tele-Health consultations also ensure that patients with diverse needs have greater accessibility to healthcare services.



From left: Mr Chan Yeng Kit, Permanent Secretary (Health), Ministry of Health; A/Prof Chong Phui-Nah, Senior Advisor, NHG; Dr Irwin Chung, Head, Sembawang Polyclinic, NHGP; Prof Philip Choo, Senior Advisor, NHG Board of Advisors; Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health; Dr Karen Ng, CEO, NHGP; Ms Mariam Jaafar, MP, Woodlands Division; Mr Vikram Nair, MP, Admiralty Division; and Prof Kenneth Mak, Director-General of Health, MOH, at the lobby of the newly-opened Sembawang Polyclinic.

STRONG PARTNERSHIP

The NHGP care team has teamed up with coaches at Active Health Lab, run by Sport Singapore (SportSG), to provide tailored exercise programmes at the polyclinic.

BETTER FAMILY SUPPORT

Sembawang Polyclinic features the first Family Nexus in the Central and Northern region of Singapore. Family Nexus is a one-stop health and social services hub aimed at strengthening familial ties and enhancing childhood development.

PATIENT EMPOWERMENT

Sembawang Polyclinic is the first NHG polyclinic to roll out a

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN HEALTH PROMOTION

To encourage individuals to adopt practical healthy lifestyle habits, the polyclinic's Health and Wellness Studio features health promotion activities, including resistance training fitness activities and cooking workshops.

Recognising the importance of the patient's voice in care delivery, NHGP has set up the Patient Advisory Council (PAC). Volunteers, who are patients and caregivers, work with the clinic management team to co-design and enhance the patient care journey at Sembawang Polyclinic.

▶ ELEVATING SKIN HEALTH

The National Skin Centre unveils its new 10-storey building to further dermatology care.

The National Skin Centre (NSC) celebrated the official opening of its new building on 25 October 2023, with Minister for Health Mr Ong Ye Kung as the Guest-of-Honour. With an expanded floor area of 25,300 square metres, this facility is more than double the size of its former premises.

Operational since June 2023, this state-of-the-art 10-storey building features 69 consultation rooms, which is a substantial increase from the 40 available at the previous site. One of the largest dermatology centres globally, NSC has developed some 20 subspecialties over the years, including adult eczema, skin cancer, and itch.

The redevelopment of NSC is part of the HealthCity Novena master plan, a 17-hectare mega-project that aims to create an integrated eco-system encompassing health services, research and education, as well as public areas. The expansion also aligns with NSC's role as the principal provider of outpatient dermatology services in Singapore, handling around 70 per cent of such visits. In 2022, NSC recorded approximately 280,000 outpatient



attendances. With the capacity enhancements, it is well-prepared to support a projected 30 per cent rise in patient visits by 2030.

MEETING GROWING SKINCARE NEEDS

With Singapore's rapidly ageing population, the incidence of chronic skin diseases will inevitably rise in tandem. Elderly patients are also more likely to experience co-morbidities and require complex care. "Take for instance, Singapore's higher life expectancy, which would lead to increased cumulative lifetime sun exposure, thus, resulting in an upward trend of skin cancers among those of advanced age," said Professor Tan Suat Hoon, Director of NSC. "The new building's expanded facilities will enable NSC to better care for this vulnerable segment of our population."



Innovation testing in the new Skin Research Clinic.



Learning is made fun for patients and visitors to the Patient Education Lounge at NSC.



From left: Mr Tan Tee How, Chairman, NHG; Minister for Health Mr Ong Ye Kung; Prof Tan Suat Hoon, Director, NSC; and Prof Philip Choo, Senior Advisor, NHG Board of Advisors.



Prof Tan Suat Hoon, Director, NSC (7th from extreme left) standing beside Mr Tan Tee How, Chairman, NHG, with current and former NHG Board of Directors and NHG senior management.



▶ WOODLANDS HEALTH STARTS SERVING NORTH WEST RESIDENTS

The premises of Singapore's newest hospital include NParks' first purpose-built park for healing and the city's largest therapeutic garden to-date.



Woodlands Health (WH) welcomed its first patients on 22 December 2023, marking a significant milestone in its journey of caring for patients who require rehabilitative and sub-acute care services.

In addition to 40 community hospital beds, WH currently offers selected specialist outpatient services at its Medical Centre for patients with conditions such as asthma and diabetes. Its allied health team provides rehabilitation services, including speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and podiatry, as well as psychology and nutrition and dietetics services. Pharmacy services are also available.

The rest of the hospital, including the Emergency Department and acute wards, will progressively open from May 2024. When fully operational, WH will have about 1,000 beds in its integrated acute and community hospital, along with almost 400 beds in its Long-Term Care Tower. Provisions are in place to expand to a total of 1,800 beds to meet future needs.

"Our vision from the beginning was to develop a welcoming space for everyone — patients, residents and our healthcare family — to recover, rehabilitate, or engage in recreational activities," said Professor Jason Cheah, Chief

Executive Officer of WH. "In order to do that, we garnered expert opinions from across a range of industries — such as hospitality and architecture — and sought the views of Woodlands residents as to what they envisioned the Hospital Campus should be."

A GREEN HOSPITAL

The WH campus is designed to be open and inviting, with green spaces located around and within it to bring people closer to nature. It has also been recognised with the Green Mark Platinum certification by the Building and Construction Authority for its environmentally-friendly features.

Furthermore, WH is seamlessly integrated with the 1.5-hectare Woodlands Healing Garden, the National Parks Board (NParks)'s first



From left: Prof Jason Cheah, CEO, WH; Minister for Health Mr Ong Ye Kung; and Ms Jennie Chua, Chairman, WH Development Board Committee, commemorating the Medical Centre's opening with hand imprints.

park purpose-built for healing and the largest therapeutic garden to-date. Created in close collaboration with WH, the Woodlands Healing Garden provides visitors and patients with an array of nature-based experiences in four distinct zones: Nature Playgarden; Activity and Wellness Lawns; Healing Forest; and Wildflower Terraces.



Minister Ong visits the first few patients admitted to the community hospital beds.



Ms Jennie Chua, Chairman, WH Development Board Committee, and WH nursing colleagues presenting Minister Ong a memento.

▶ STRENGTHENING SINGAPORE'S SPINAL CARE

NHG brings together clinician leaders in spinal care to launch its Spine Centre.

In a landmark move for enhanced spinal care, Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH), Woodlands Health (WH), and the National Neuroscience Institute (NNI) got together on 26 January 2024 to herald the inauguration of the NHG Spine Centre.

This centre represents a pivotal advancement in the National Healthcare Group (NHG)'s commitment towards clinical excellence and the health of Singapore's population. The NHG Spine Centre initiative consolidates the expertise of some



From left: Prof Lim Tock Han, Group Chairman Medical Board, NHG; Mr Joe Sim, Group CEO, NHG; and A/Prof Jacob Oh, Deputy Head of Department, Head of Service (Spine Surgery), Senior Consultant, TTSH, and Centre Director, NHG Spine Centre.

15 Spine Surgeons from across NHG institutions, streamlining coordination with primary healthcare and community allies, and promoting the nation's research and educational endeavours in spinal health.

Associate Professor Jacob Oh, Deputy Head of Department, Head

of Service (Spine Surgery), Senior Consultant, TTSH, and Centre Director of the NHG Spine Centre said, "NHG is always looking at how we can improve access to care for our patients. I look forward to this journey where we learn from each other, to help our spine patients enjoy more years of healthy life."

▶ A MILESTONE FOR LUNG HEALTH AWARENESS

At NHG World COPD Day 2023, attendees gained insights into chronic lung diseases.

Tao Payoh West Community Club was a centre of knowledge and support for nearly 90 individuals who participated in NHG World COPD Day on 2 December 2023. This community outreach initiative, organised by the National Healthcare Group (NHG), aimed to shed light on chronic lung diseases — particularly Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) — and to reinforce the network of support for patients and their families.

The event featured educational booths and talks by NHG medical and nursing staff; spirometry screening (a test to assess how well the lungs work); as well as underscored the significance of

early detection in COPD management. NHG physiotherapists also led a workout session to demonstrate that exercise is key to managing lung health.



NHG staff sharing knowledge as a resident engages in a game at the occupational therapy booth.



Representatives from various NHG institutions supporting the NHG World COPD Day 2023.



NHG staff helping the nursing booth.



▶ BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CHRONIC CARE

Lien Foundation and TTSH have introduced Air Master, a holistic service that helps patients better manage breathlessness.

In Singapore, 60 to 90 per cent of patients with chronic lung and heart diseases are afflicted by breathlessness. Such a condition leads to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and deters them from exercising. Lack of exercise, in turn, can result in decreased muscle strength, reduced mobility, and self-isolation. Additionally, up to a third of these patients experience depression or anxiety.

The Air Master service was launched by Lien Foundation and Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) to tackle this issue. The initiative aims to empower patients with chronic lung and heart conditions to better manage their breathlessness, pain, and other symptoms. The service has started with three community care partners: AWWA, St Luke's ElderCare (SLEC), and Ren Ci Hospital (RCH).

BRINGING TARGETED REHABILITATION CLOSER TO PATIENTS

Air Master is part of a broader Breathlessness Ecosystem – a network of care services developed to assist patients in managing chronic symptoms and enhancing their overall quality of life. With



From left: Dr David Ng, Clinical Director, RCH; A/Prof Lester Leong, Clinical Director, SLEC; J R Karthikeyan, CEO, AWWA; Dr Violet Hoon, Head, Cardiac Rehabilitation Service, Consultant, Department of Cardiology, TTSH; Dr Xu Huiying, Senior Consultant, Department of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, TTSH; Asst Prof Neo Han Yee, Head and Senior Consultant, Department of Palliative Medicine, TTSH; Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO, Lien Foundation; and Maheswari, Senior Manager AWWA Health & Senior Care.

funding support of \$5.8 million, this ecosystem is projected to unfold over five years. Once fully operational, Air Master will serve patients throughout the National Healthcare Group (NHG), including those referred by TTSH, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH), Woodlands Health (WH), National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), and an expanding network of general practitioners (GPs).

Air Master's comprehensive rehabilitation service in partnership with community care providers includes:

- ▶ Cardiopulmonary rehabilitation sessions that gradually build patients' physical strength and endurance.
- ▶ Educational resources to help patients better understand and



Mdm Wong Siew Sin@Wong Siew Kin and an AWWA physiotherapist demonstrating an exercise from the programme.

- manage their conditions, ease anxiety, perform daily tasks comfortably and safely, and enhance their quality of life.
- ▶ Nurse-led assessments to address often-overlooked physical and psychological issues associated with chronic breathlessness.
- ▶ Referrals to GPs and specialists for further treatment as needed.
- ▶ Peer support activities designed to foster social interaction and prevent isolation.

To improve accessibility, the Air Master service is fully subsidised, including transport vouchers for patients. The goal is to enrol approximately 800 patients over the next five years.



The Air Master service aims to help participants build strength to better manage their symptoms.

▶ A NEAR-CENTURY OF CARING FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH

IMH's 95th anniversary celebrations culminated in a charity extravaganza.

Individuals with mental health conditions often need comprehensive support that extends beyond medication and therapy. Many of them face societal stigma, complicating their quest for employment, meaningful relationships, and a fulfilling life. Such challenges can lead to marginalisation for some.

Highlighting this critical concern, the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) marked its 95th anniversary with a charity show, *Balls of the Belles*. Organised in collaboration with local theatre company, Dream Academy, this event aimed to raise awareness and support for those facing mental health challenges, with proceeds going to the Woodbridge Hospital Charity Fund (WHCF).

Staged at the Capitol Theatre on 9 December 2023, the charity showcase was a resounding success, attracting nearly 900 attendees. The audience included Guest-of-Honour Madam



Balls of the Belles featured a medley of songs and dance by IMH staff.

Halimah Jacob, Chancellor of the Singapore University of Social Sciences and former President of Singapore; and Mayor of Central Singapore District, Ms Denise Phua. Approximately \$790,000 was raised through ticket sales as well as generous contributions from corporations and individuals.

ABOUT THE WHCF

WHCF, administered by IMH, directs its resources towards a variety of programmes that extend psychosocial, vocational, and recreational support to patients in need, alongside their caregivers and children. It also supports clinical trials and research

endeavours aimed at enhancing the understanding of mental health impacts and spearheading new medical treatments.

For more information on how you can make a donation, scan the QR Code:



Madam Halimah Jacob (with microphone) and Mayor Denise Phua (3rd from left) showing their support for WHCF.

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