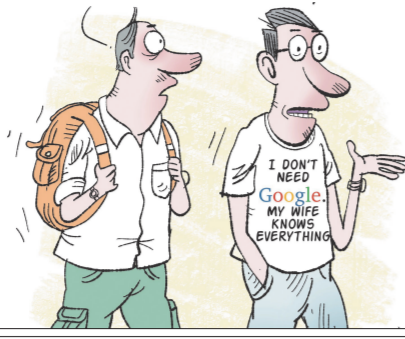


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THE STRAITS TIMES

All HDB towns will be highly liveable, despite varying popularity: PM

Chin Soo Fang
Senior Community
Correspondent

Whichever Housing Board town they live in and its relative popularity, Singaporeans can be assured that each town will be well planned, well maintained, and have up-to-date amenities that meet their living needs, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Sunday.

It is inevitable that some towns are more popular than others, but the Government strives very hard to make every HDB town highly liveable, with schools, clinics, food places, sports facilities and good transport connectivity within the town and also with the rest of the island, said PM Lee.

"This is the PAP government's promise to all Singaporeans: that your HDB flat will be both a good home for you and your family, and a valuable nest egg for your retirement," he said.

Singaporeans know the country's public housing system works, he added. "With your support, we will continue to keep this system running well, and we will deliver on our promise to Singaporeans for many more years to come."

PM Lee was speaking at the ground-breaking ceremony for Chong Pang City, a new 0.9ha, seven-storey integrated development in Yishun.

When completed in 2027, the community hub will rejuvenate the 40-year-old neighbourhood with new facilities such as swimming



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, with Law and Home Affairs Minister and Chong Pang MP K. Shanmugam, viewing a model of Chong Pang City on Sunday. Agencies like the Singapore Land Authority and People's Association had solicited residents' feedback on the features they wanted for the hub. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

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Hospitals resume elective surgery held up by Covid-19

Some also take steps to cut duration of stay through home recovery, keyhole procedures

Zhaki Abdullah

Non-urgent elective operations that were deferred during the pandemic have resumed in the past year as the Covid-19 situation here improved, said the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Hospitals cut back on elective procedures amid an increase in Covid-19 hospitalisations caused by the BA.4 and BA.5 sub-variants, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said in July 2022.

Hospitals had first deferred non-urgent or elective procedures in February 2020 before these were gradually resumed after the April-June circuit breaker.

Hospitals and specialist outpa-

tient clinics were again asked by MOH to free up their capacity in May 2021 by postponing non-urgent operations and appointments.

Urgent medical attention was still given to those who required it.

Hospitals in Singapore reported a bed crunch during the coronavirus pandemic. Data from MOH shows demand for beds remains high.

MOH told The Straits Times that most public hospitals and national specialist centres reported around 3 per cent to 5 per cent postponement of non-urgent procedures in 2021, based on available data.

Singapore's three healthcare clusters - SingHealth, the Nation-

al Healthcare Group (NHG) and the National University Health System (NUHS) - said they are now performing elective procedures that had previously been deferred.

They did not specify how many non-urgent elective procedures were delayed due to Covid-19, or how many have since been performed.

However, NHG medical board group chairman Lim Tock Han said the group has attended to most of its non-urgent elective operations by increasing its capacity for day surgery and short stay ward beds.

Professor Terrance Chua, group chairman of the SingHealth medical board, said SingHealth institutions have progressively rescheduled such procedures.

Some hospitals that evolved their procedures during the pandemic continue to use these to

keep ward capacity and resources available to meet any surge in demand, such as in another outbreak or pandemic.

NUHS said it developed new initiatives supported by technology and service innovations, such as teleconsultations and its NUHS@Home recovery programme, which offers some patients the option of receiving acute hospital care and services at home instead of at the hospital.

Other hospitals have ramped up the use of minimally invasive methods for elective procedures, which require patients to stay in the hospital for less than a day, thus helping to free up beds for those facing more serious conditions.

During the pandemic, Alexandra Hospital expanded the use of keyhole surgery, where procedures are performed through a small incision in the skin, for more

complex operations.

Retired warehousing executive Nah Siow Khoon said he had felt some discomfort in his bladder area in early 2020, and was diagnosed with groin hernia in February that year.

The 86-year-old, who has a history of pneumonia, was scheduled to undergo surgery in March 2020, but this was pushed back due to the Covid-19 situation.

He eventually had a keyhole procedure done in October 2020, which alleviated his pain and left him with just a small scar, which he compared to the size of a mosquito bite.

Most complex groin hernia cases are typically done as traditional open operations, which entail longer post-operation hospital stays, taking up inpatient beds and resources, said Alexandra Hospital deputy head of general surgery Sujith Wijerathne.

But new less invasive procedures allow for 95 per cent of cases to be discharged on the same day with no surgical complications, he added.

"We are doing more and more complex cases as day surgery nowadays," Dr Sujith said. "Patients are benefiting from that, and it decreases the burden on the inpatient set-up that our restructured hospitals have."

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Rent scams • \$1.7m lost since January

Singapore's hot property market has sparked a flood of rental scams, with fraudsters taking advantage of people desperate to secure a place to rent.

At least 305 people have fallen prey to scammers who pretended to be property agents since January, said police. The victims lost more than \$1.7 million in total.

The scammers placed fake property listings on sites like Facebook and Carousell, while impersonating property agents.

Some of the scammers have been caught. Police on March 14 said 13 people were arrested for their suspected involvement in 480 rental scams.

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