

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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NEW NUHS RESEARCH FACILITY TO PLAY KEY ROLES IN SEARCH FOR NEW TREATMENTS AND CURES

A facility to test the efficacy of new medicines, procedures and medical devices in people opened today at the National University Health System, enhancing the capability of the academic medical centre to conduct in-depth, clinical studies of greater complexity across medical disciplines and adding to Singapore's growing international stature as a biomedical centre.

The NUHS' Investigational Medicine Unit (IMU) will focus on early research in humans, including Proof of Concept, Phase 1 (including First in Man) and Phase 2a clinical trials for novel drugs and diagnostics, research on biomarkers and disease mechanisms as well as bio-imaging studies. Proof of Concept studies look at whether a new therapy or medical device can be effective for its intended purpose; Phase 1 (First in Man) trials are the initial tests done in human subjects to assess pharmacology and safe dosing, while Phase 2a trials refer to tests on larger groups of people, and are specifically designed to assess dose-response relationships.

Based within the National University Hospital on Kent Ridge, the IMU will facilitate the translation of basic science discoveries from Singapore's biomedical initiatives into potential clinical applications. It will also contribute to the development of the National Specialty Centres for cancer and cardiovascular medicine on the NUHS campus. The IMU will have access to clinician-investigators, clinical pharmacologists, biostatisticians, and other research support staff. Apart from clinical trials, the IMU also supports academic clinical research which will add to the body of scientific knowledge, providing opportunities for the development of new and novel therapies.



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Speaking at the launch of the Unit, NUS President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan said, “A critical bottleneck in developing new diagnostic tests and treatments is proof-of-concept and early phase clinical studies. This requires a highly skilled team with a deep understanding of disease biology and the expertise to carry out complex clinical studies. The NUHS IMU brings these capabilities together and thus is a vital part of Singapore’s overall biomedical services efforts. It will also serve as an important training site for clinician-scientists.”

Supportive environment for translational medical research

Fully equipped with the latest equipment and a full complement of 18 inpatient beds, a team of experienced and well-trained research staff provide both clinical, research and administrative support to enable the IMU to conduct clinical studies which meet international and pharmaceutical industry standards. In 2011 it will move to the new Centre for Translational Medicine building, a NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine facility that is currently being constructed.

A crucible for groundbreaking research, innovative thinking

As a clinical investigative centre, the IMU will serve talented clinician-investigators, pharmacologists, biostatisticians, doctors-in-training, research nurses, and other staff critical for early phase clinical trials and investigational medicine. Eventually, added IMU director, Associate Professor Goh Boon Cher, sufficient critical mass should enable the Unit to be recognized as a key resource centre for clinically relevant translational studies in the region, and contribute to innovative thinking and research on novel therapeutics and disease mechanisms.

“We intend to position this centre as the umbrella under which strategic areas, critical to the development of the NUHS as a centre of excellence for experimental therapeutics, will be nurtured and developed to full strength. These include activities in the established campus strengths of Cancer, Clinical Pharmacology, Infectious Diseases, Cardiovascular and Metabolic Medicine, and Neurocognition, to anchor drug research in the IMU.



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“Strategic links with other renowned Clinical Trial/Investigative Medicine groups, pharmaceutical companies and academia will be established. By bringing in new expertise, integrating the strengths of established groups, and nurturing emerging groups, the IMU hopes to achieve its overall objective to be an internationally competitive centre of excellence for drug development in the therapeutic areas and diseases relevant to Singapore and the world,” he added.

Combining clinical research with imaging technology

In addition to therapeutic treatments, another new area of exciting technological advancement and research involves more precise imaging of human disease. This is an area the IMU will work closely on with the Clinical Imaging Research Centre (an A*Star and NUS facility) to focus on this aspect of diagnostics.

“Furthermore, as imaging becomes more important not only in diagnostics but also high-quality research, there will be an opportunity for collaboration between IMU and CIRC in research projects for translational medicine. State-of-the-art equipment housed in CIRC will combine with cutting edge clinical research practices at the IMU to realise efforts at making the concept of “bench to bedside” a reality. Combined with access to top scientists and clinicians on campus, the research activities will be truly integrated resources for NUHS and Singapore. In addition, the services provided by both IMU and the CIRC will be attractive to industry for drug development activities,” Associate Professor Goh said.

For a start, the IMU is embarking on four key strategic research programmes.

- Clinical pharmacology studies to develop better probes for drug metabolism, which will help researchers to better understand drug interactions and predict drug concentrations for improved therapeutics.
- Experimental therapeutics/predictive oncology programme from the Cancer Science Institute, Singapore and the National University Cancer Institute,



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Singapore, which will run studies through the IMU to develop new drugs in various cancers and to research the genetics of drug response.

- Translational Clinical Research Metabolic Medicine research project on Developmental Pathways to Metabolic Diseases. This programme investigates the growing epidemic of metabolic disease and will provide a scientific base to design prevention and intervention strategies to reduce the burden of chronic diseases like diabetes and obesity. The IMU is involved in the adult studies, which are scheduled to begin shortly.
- Competitive Research Project on stroke, scheduled to begin later this year. This programme will enhance the understanding of the most common stroke sub-type which is also pre-dominant in Asian populations. The goal is to apply the best technology available in clinical studies conducted at the IMU to understand the causes and pathology of the disease in order to achieve the best prevention, diagnosis and treatment strategies.

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The National University Health System

Established in January 2008 and jointly owned by the Ministry of Health Holdings and National University of Singapore (NUS), the National University Health System groups the National University Hospital (NUH), NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and NUS Faculty of Dentistry under a common governance structure to create synergies to advance health by integrating excellent clinical care, research and education.

The enhanced capabilities and capacity will enable the NUHS to deliver better patient care, train future generations of doctors more effectively and bring innovative treatments to patients through groundbreaking research.



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The National University Hospital

The National University Hospital (NUH), a member of the National University Health System, is a tertiary specialist hospital that provides advanced, leading-edge medical care and services. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities as well as dedicated and well-trained staff, the NUH is a major referral centre that delivers tertiary care for a wide range of medical and dental specialties including Cardiology, Gastroenterology & Hepatology, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Oncology, Ophthalmology, Paediatrics and Orthopaedic Surgery. It is the principal teaching hospital of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

With combined resources (from the teaching hospital and NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and Faculty of Dentistry), the NUH will be able to meet the healthcare needs of patients, train future generations of doctors more effectively, and help develop solutions to our healthcare problems through research.

Backed by substantive expertise and experience, the NUH was chosen by the Ministry of Health to develop two new national specialist centres, the National University Heart Centre, Singapore and National University Cancer Institute, Singapore to meet the growing need for cardiac and cancer treatments.

In 2004, the NUH became the first Singapore hospital to receive Joint Commission International (JCI) Accreditation, an international stamp for excellent clinical practices in patient care and safety. It was also the first hospital in Singapore to receive a triple ISO certification concurrently for Quality, Environmental, and Occupational Health & Safety Management Systems in 2002.

For more information, please visit www.nuh.com.sg



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