

MEDIA RELEASE

21 March 2025

NUH STRENGTHENS PALLIATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE CARE ACROSS SPECIALTIES

NUH integrates nursing-led initiatives, paediatric support and home-based care to meet evolving needs

SINGAPORE — A serious illness can be a challenging journey for both patients and their loved ones. For patients, comprehensive palliative and supportive care means relief from symptoms and emotional stress, maximising their quality of life while living with their illness. For caregivers and families, it translates to crucial support through coordinated care, ensuring their loved ones receive comfort while navigating the complexities of care.

Redefining supportive and palliative care to improve access and reach

Recognising this, the National University Hospital (NUH) continues to expand its palliative and supportive care services, ensuring patients receive compassionate and holistic support at every stage of illness. This commitment was highlighted at the “**NUH Showcase: Empowering Living Well & Leaving Well**” exhibition on 21 March 2025. The event brings together healthcare professionals and community partners to explore ways to improve accessibility and quality of palliative care.

Empowering nurses to lead in palliative care

At the forefront of NUH’s efforts is the **Palliative Care Nursing Network (PCNN)**, a nurse-led initiative launched in early 2024. This programme equips and empowers frontline nurses across inpatient and outpatient settings to conduct comprehensive assessments of palliative needs and manage symptoms using evidence-based protocols.

For complex cases, specially trained Palliative Care Resource Nurses provide advanced interventions, ensuring timely and effective symptom relief. This tiered system leverages nurses’ close position at the patient’s bedside, enabling more immediate and continuous palliative care interventions.

Another key milestone is the development of the Compassionate Removal of Mechanical Ventilator (CRMV) protocol¹, led by Advanced Practice Nurses in collaboration with doctors and other healthcare professionals. Now implemented across all Intensive Care and High Dependency units in NUH, this standardised approach simplifies the complex aspects of CRMV with a greater emphasis on

¹ The protocol includes a guide with clear directions to nursing staff in delivering compassionate care during the CRMV process, as well as medication guidelines to address symptoms management.

compassionate care, empowering nursing staff to conduct the CRMV process with enhanced focus on respecting patients' wishes, comfort and dignity.

Adj A/Prof Karen Koh, Chief Nurse, NUH, explained, "Nurses play a pivotal role in palliative care, offering both clinical expertise and emotional support. Our nursing team spends the most time with patients and their families, allowing us to develop deep understanding and build trusting relationships. The PCNN harnesses this unique position, empowering nurses with specialised training and resources to deliver compassionate care and advocate for their patients' needs, when they need it the most."

Paediatric palliative care: Supporting families with compassion and continuity

At the Khoo Teck Puat - National University Children's Medical Institute at NUH, the **Paediatric Palliative Care Service (PPCS)** provides family-centred, multidisciplinary support for children with serious illnesses, starting from the prenatal stage through infancy and young adulthood.

PPCS distinguishes itself with its collaborative approach, providing care for a broad spectrum of ages and medical conditions, including unborn babies, newborns, toddlers and young adults. By working closely with obstetricians, neonatologists, and other specialists, the PPCS team supports parents in making informed decisions about care and helps prepare families for the medical and emotional challenges ahead.

Since its inception in late 2020, the PPCS has seen a steady increase in its patient numbers from 29 in 2021 to 53 last year. This is partly attributed to a rise in early referrals from diverse specialties, allowing for timely development of personalised care plans together with the family. Beyond symptom management, the team addresses psychological and emotional well-being, recognising the profound impact of illness on the entire family.

Through extensive collaboration with charity and community partners, PPCS enhances emotional and social support, offering meaningful experiences both in and out of the hospital, such as art therapy and family bonding activities.

A key feature of NUH's model is the seamless transition for young patients entering adulthood. Adolescent with life-limiting conditions can continue to receive high-quality medical and palliative care within the same institution, ensuring continuity and stability during a critical life stage.

Enhancing comfort through a holistic approach

At NUH, holistic palliative and supportive care extends beyond medical treatment to involve vital contributions from the **allied health and operations teams**. For instance, dietitians and speech therapists work in tandem to enhance patients' quality of life by maintaining comfort and managing symptoms like nausea, appetite loss or difficulties with swallowing. Dietitians design individualised meal plans that balance clinical needs with patient enjoyments. Speech therapists ensure patients can safely and comfortably consume these diets, using techniques such as modification of food textures to enable patients to savour flavors even when swallowing is a challenge.

To support families transitioning to home care, NUH's inpatient operations team launched the **EquipRENT service** in November 2024. This one-stop, in-house

programme provides hassle-free access to essential medical equipment such as hospital beds, wheelchairs, oxygen concentrators, and commodes. By eliminating deposits and upfront payments, the programme ensures quick access to vital equipment. While available to all patients, the programme especially benefits those transitioning to home or community palliative care, reducing delays due to equipment wait times and facilitating smoother post-discharge care for families. In its pilot phase, EquipRENT has served 21 patients with positive feedback. NUH will continue to review the programme's effectiveness and explore ways to expand its reach.

Expanding care through strategic collaborations

To broaden access to palliative care, NUH signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 21 March 2025 with five insurers and six home care service providers (please see Annex A for full list), to initiate collaborations to broaden supportive and palliative care services.

One potential area of focus is to enable more terminally ill patients to receive care at home, addressing concerns about out-of-pocket expenses and access to professional home-based palliative care. This aims to provide patients with greater control over their end-of-life journey, allowing them to spend their final days in the familiar comfort of their own home, surrounded by loved ones.

Adj A/Prof Mark Puhaindran, Chairman, Medical Board, said, "Palliative and supportive care is not just about medical treatment – it is about ensuring patients and families receive the care and dignity they deserve in life's most difficult moments. This requires strong partnerships and a commitment to continuous improvements. By working together with insurers and home care providers, we can expand access to home-based care, reduce financial concerns, and strengthen the support system for patients and their families at every stage of their journey."

The ongoing initiatives reflect NUH's commitment to optimising the quality of life for patients with serious illnesses by providing accessible, coordinated and compassionate palliative care. The exhibition further highlighted key programmes from Emergency Medicine, Intensive Care, Nephrology, and Geriatric Medicine, alongside contributions from the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore and the National University Heart Centre, Singapore (please see Annex B for more details). Together, these programmes demonstrate NUH's holistic approach to addressing the evolving needs of patients and their families.

Chinese Glossary

National University Hospital (NUH)	国立大学医院 (国大医院)
NUH Showcase: Empowering Living Well & Leaving Well	国大医院展示会：赋能慈怀, 善生善终
Palliative Care Nursing Network	慈怀疗护护理网络
Compassionate Removal of Mechanical Ventilator (CRMV) protocol	安宁机械通气移除程序
Paediatric Palliative Care Service	小儿慈怀疗护服务
EquipRENT	医疗器材租借计划
Adj A/Prof Mark Puhaindran, Chairman, Medical Board, NUH	Mark Puhaindran 客座副教授 国立大学医院医疗委员会主席
Adj A/Prof Karen Koh, Chief Nurse, NUH	许慧玲客座副教授 国立大学医院护理总监

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About the National University Hospital (NUH)

The National University Hospital (NUH) is Singapore's leading university hospital. While the hospital at Kent Ridge first received its patients on 24 June 1985, our legacy started from 1905, the date of the founding of what is today the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. NUH is the principal teaching hospital of the medical school.

Our unique identity as a university hospital is a key attraction for healthcare professionals who aspire to do more than practise tertiary medical care. We offer an environment where research and teaching are an integral part of medicine, and continue to shape medicine and transform care for the community we care for.

We are an academic medical centre with over 1,200 beds, serving more than one million patients a year with over 50 medical, surgical and dental specialties. NUH is the only public and not-for-profit hospital in Singapore to provide trusted care for adults, women and children under one roof, including the only paediatric kidney and liver transplant programme in the country.

The NUH is a key member of the National University Health System (NUHS), one of three public healthcare clusters in Singapore.

MOU Partners

S/N	Category	Company/organisation name
1	Insurers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. AIA Singapore Private Limited b. Great Eastern c. Income Insurance Limited d. Prudential Assurance Company Singapore (Pte) Limited e. Singapore Life Ltd.
2	Home care service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assisi Hospice b. HCA Hospice Limited c. Home Nursing Foundation d. Jaga-Me Pte Ltd e. Methodist Welfare Services f. Vickycare Pte Ltd

NUH Showcase: Empowering Living Well & Leaving Well

S/N	Name	Write-up
1.	Advance Care Planning (ACP) and Serious Illness Conversations (SIC)	<p>The ACP and SIC programmes at NUH are complementary initiatives that provide structured tools for healthcare professionals to guide patients in exploring and articulating their personal values, life goals, and preferences for medical treatment. This is especially crucial for patients with life-limiting conditions as it helps them to better understand their illness, raise prognosis awareness, and aid them in psychological, practical, and financial preparations. The resulting plans also guide patients' healthcare teams and loved ones during medical emergencies. ACP and SIC are now integrated into NUH's electronic patient medical record system, allowing healthcare teams to easily record and share the information to guide shared decision-making.</p>
2.	Emergency Medicine Department (EMD)	<p>The NUH EMD is Singapore's first Emergency Department to establish dedicated End-of-Life (EOL) Care plans, which prioritises maximising patient comfort and dignity during their final days, while offering emotional and practical support to families. Its services include a team of 24/7 nurse specialists trained in EOL care and a dedicated quiet room with flexible visitation hours, to allow patients and families to share meaningful time together in a supportive environment.</p>
3.	Division of Nephrology	<p>The Nephrology team offers comprehensive management for chronic kidney disease through all stages till kidney failure, when eventual palliation and supportive care become increasingly important. This is done via two specialised programs, the Kidney Failure Board (KFB) and the Kidney Supportive Care Clinic (KSC).</p> <p>The KFB is a monthly multidisciplinary forum where medical, nursing, and allied health collaborate to address complex medical and social issues affecting patients with kidney failure, advanced comorbidities and frailty; an individualised care plan is provided for each patient regarding dialysis modality, if any, or conservative kidney management, as well as</p>

		<p>downstream transition to KSC for dialysis patients facing rapid decline in overall wellness.</p> <p>The KSC is a one-stop clinic providing integrated care for patients with end-stage kidney failure nearing the end of life. It offers access to medical, nursing and allied health professionals in a single setting, and the Division also partners community care providers including home hospice and National Kidney Foundation to focus on symptom relief, quality of life management, and social support for patients, as they transit from life sustaining treatment to palliative care. These services embody the Division's commitment to have every patient to live well with kidney failure, and when their needs arise, to leave well from their illness.</p>
4.	Adult Intensive Care Unit/High Dependency (ICU/HD)	<p>Integrating palliative care into the critical care settings is challenging. However, NUH ICU did this through having a team of Palliative Care Resource Nurses (PCRN) to improve the delivery of quality palliative care to critically ill patients. Every PCRN plays a vital role in the early identification of patients who may benefit from palliative care services, facilitates timely conversations with patients and families on goals of care, and aligns treatment options with medical team.</p> <p>By initiating early communication, the PCRN ensures that patients' preferences are respected, easing the transition from curative to comfort care when appropriate. In addition, the PCRN optimises symptom management, in order to maximise patients' comfort.</p> <p>Beyond physical care, the PCRN works alongside social workers to offer psychosocial support to both patients and families, guiding them through difficult decisions with empathy and clarity. This proactive, nurse-led palliative care approach fosters a compassionate intensive care unit environment for patients to die with dignity, and the delivery of patient-centered, care.</p>
5.	Division of Geriatric Medicine	<p>The Division of Geriatric Medicine at NUH provides specialised, patient-centered care for frail older adults and individuals with advanced dementia. The Division's acute care for the elderly (ACE) unit delivers holistic,</p>

		<p>interdisciplinary care aimed at optimising function, preventing complications, and aligning treatment with patient goals.</p> <p>Through comprehensive geriatric assessments, the team focuses on individualised care planning, medication optimisation, early rehabilitation, and discharge planning to prevent deconditioning, reduce hospital stays, and ensure safe transitions of care. At the same time, they emphasise goal-directed management, prioritising dignity and comfort while minimising distressing interventions.</p> <p>Recognising the vital role of caregivers, the Division works closely with families to provide guidance and support, enhancing the quality of life for both patients and their loved ones.</p>
6.	National University Heart Centre, Singapore (NUHCS)	<p>NUHCS strengthens its palliative care approach to ensure patients with advanced heart disease receive compassionate and dignified end-of-life (EOL) care. A key initiative is the implementation of compassionate discharge protocols, which support patients who choose to spend their final days in a preferred setting, such as home or hospice care. These protocols facilitate a smooth transition, ensuring comfort while minimising unnecessary interventions. In addition, NUHCS has also introduced compassionate withdrawal protocols for life-sustaining treatments and devices. These guidelines prioritise patient autonomy in decisions regarding the deactivation or discontinuation of medical interventions that may no longer align with their goals of care. By focusing on symptom relief and comfort, the approach supports a dignified and peaceful end-of-life experience.</p> <p>Furthermore, to equip healthcare professionals with the necessary skills, NUHCS has developed a cardio-palliative multidisciplinary teaching module. This programme brings together cardiologist, palliative care specialists, nurses and allied healthcare professionals to foster a collaborative approach to EOL care. Topics include symptoms management, ethical considerations, shared decision-making, communication strategies and psychosocial support for patients/families. Through these initiatives, it allows delivery of patient-centered and holistic care that prioritises dignity, comfort,</p>

		and respect for patients' wishes, ensuring they receive the best possible support in their final journey.
7.	National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS)	NCIS provides specialist palliative care consult service in NUH to co-manage cancer patients with the primary physicians to enhance patients' quality of life, respect their choices, and alleviate suffering. Its multidisciplinary team addresses not only medical needs but also the emotional and psychological well-being of patients and their families, empowering them to make informed decisions regarding their treatment and future care plan. Through close collaboration with community partners, NCIS aims for seamless transition of care of patients to home hospice service or inpatient hospice service, when appropriate. Besides cancer patients, the team also provides specialist palliative care consult to NUH patients with non-cancer life-threatening illnesses, and supports medical and surgical disciplines in NUH to strengthen their generalist palliative care capabilities to initiate their own palliative care provision for their patients.