

More nurses will be trained to anchor care in community settings

They will also take on leadership roles in nursing homes, offer end-of-life care

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More nurses will be trained to anchor care in community care settings, take on leadership roles in nursing homes as well as deliver end-of-life care in the community to cope with a rapidly ageing population, said Mr Ong Ye Kung, Health Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies.

"If community care is effective... I think we will be able to detect health concerns as early as possible. And if we can detect (them) early, the conditions will be less severe, intervention will be as simple as possible," he said.

He was speaking at the 2025 Nurses' Merit Award ceremony held at the Shangri-La Hotel on July 7. There, he conferred the award on 141 nurses who have performed exceptionally well and contributed to raising the nursing profession.

Three nursing roles will be scaled up to strengthen care in the community, where there is a growing need, including nurses at community health posts (CHPs).

Right now, some 90 per cent of active ageing centres (AACs) have CHPs – nurses are stationed there once a week.

Mr Ong said the extensive outreach of AACs needs to be tapped for preventive or continual care to reach seniors, through the CHPs.

This will complement hospital acute care and strengthen Singapore's preventive care strategy Healthier SG and the work of family doctors.

Each day, there are six new kid-



Health Minister Ong Ye Kung and Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower Koh Poh Koon (back row, centre) posing for a selfie with attendees at the 2025 Nurses' Merit Award ceremony at Shangri-La Hotel on July 7, where 141 nurses received awards for their contributions to the profession.
ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

ney failure patients and 60 new heart attack and stroke patients in Singapore, and if the CHPs can help those who are unaware of their condition or reluctant to seek help, the numbers can be lowered, Mr Ong pointed out.

"Nurses in CHPs will need to establish (themselves) as the first point of contact for residents with chronic conditions, preventive health needs or emerging symptoms," he said.

They will be able to conduct assessments, provide health counselling to patients, and ensure that patients are adhering to the health plans prescribed by their Healthier SG doctor.

"They (patients) see their Healthier SG doctor maybe once or twice a year. In between, they can see our nurses at CHPs," said Mr Ong.

With training, CHP nurses can also conduct social prescribing (helping patients to improve their health and well-being by connecting them

to community services), provide referrals and manage patients with stable mental health conditions, he said.

A system is needed to provide community nurses with the relevant back-end information and advisory support so that they can operate independently, and with as much autonomy as possible, he said.

In long-term care, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has been upskilling the nurses in nursing homes to better care for patients to minimise the chances of patients having to move to acute hospitals and back.

Now, it wants to strengthen the process by training more nurse clinicians to lead the care in long-term residential care settings.

Mr Ong said nurse clinicians need to be empowered, particularly advanced practice nurses (APNs) who are practising at the apex of the profession.

MOH is working towards allow-

ing nurse clinicians, starting with APNs, to assess patients and initiate first-line treatments or medications and conduct six-monthly chronic reviews within defined protocols in nursing homes.

This will help to minimise hospital admissions and emergency department visits, resulting in fewer transitions and improving quality of care, Mr Ong explained.

More nurses will also be trained to deliver end-of-life care in the community.

To scale up the three roles, not only will training need to be enhanced, but a more flexible regulatory approach will also be needed, he said.

For example, if the vision is to enhance the role of community nurses to provide more comprehensive care as early and as close to home as possible, then MOH will need to review the nurses' scope of practice, equip them with advanced skills and create clear patterns for collab-

orative care.

"If, as regulators, we disallow this evolution of practice, then the needs of an ageing population will not be met," said Mr Ong.

Also, manpower upgrading will be made easier, with working nurses able to take up courses lasting a few weeks or a couple of months, and then applying what they have learnt at the workplace immediately.

The two polytechnics delivering three advanced and specialist diploma programmes in palliative nursing, in both part-time and full-time formats, will be shifting these programmes to a work-study format in 2027, Mr Ong said.

There is also the ITE work-study diploma in nursing for working enrolled nurses to upgrade to be registered nurses, he said.

"This is just a different way of training, and it is actually a very well-established alternate pathway. Instead of a big buffet, we are now

serving dish by dish. At the end, you are still full," said Mr Ong.

Ms Megawati, 39, a nurse clinician from the NUHS Regional Health System Office, believes in upskilling, having spent two years studying part-time for a bachelor's degree in nursing that she obtained in 2024.

Nurses today must move beyond the status quo and embrace evidence-based practices to improve the health of residents, she said.

On July 7, she was one of the 141 nurses who were awarded the 2025 Nurses' Merit awards. They each received a medal to wear on their uniform and a cash prize of \$1,000.

Ms Megawati, whose name has only one word, has contributed to improving transitional care for patients moving from the community to nursing homes, reducing the frequency of their hospital readmissions.

As a community nurse, on any given day, she might be heading to a patient's home to assess for risk of falls or help the patient manage his chronic issues, for instance, or to a CHP to carry out the same duties.

"When you step inside the home, you can see their challenges and how to help them better," said the mother of two.

She currently heads a team of 11 nurses who are focusing on helping residents in Choa Chu Kang with their health.

Another awardee is Mr Azhar Mohd, a 56-year-old nurse clinician from Singapore General Hospital with 34 years of nursing experience.

Based at the hospital's Ambulatory Endoscopy Centre, he has developed training programmes for new endoscopy nurses.

He has also been a lecturer for the Specialist Diploma in Nursing (Endoscopy) programme at Nanyang Polytechnic since 2018.

Endoscopy is a procedure in which an instrument is inserted into the body to examine internal parts and look out for diseases.

Ms Tan Nengping, 61, a senior nurse manager from the Health Promotion Board (HPB) who leads three school health screening teams, also received the merit award. She led efforts to develop a more efficient system for equipment and surgical inventory such as for swabs for HPB's Youth Preventive Health Service department.

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