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A 'change agent' who has widened role of nurses

45-year-old from Alexandra Hospital among seven awarded highest accolade for nurses

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Becoming a nurse was not a profession Ms Margaret Lee Kwee Hiang, 45, had aspired towards when she was young, but she has managed to rise through the ranks to become chief nurse at Alexandra Hospital (AH), where she has transformed the nursing practice.

She started a system that allows nurses to take the lead in caring for certain groups of patients, such as those who are undergoing certain treatments, those in rehabilitation, and patients who are almost ready to be discharged.

Yesterday, Ms Lee was one of seven nurse leaders who received this year's President's Award for Nurses from President Halimah Yacob at a virtual award ceremony.

Since 2000, 84 nurses have been conferred this award – the highest

accolade in Singapore's nursing profession.

Madam Halimah said: "Beyond clinical achievements, many nominees also have a big heart in serving others in their community."

In her speech, she praised nurses for their "high level of dedication, determination and courage" amid the coronavirus pandemic, and called out the "abhorrent and unacceptable" harassment and abusive treatment that some nurses have received from people frustrated with Covid-19 measures.

In its press statement, the Ministry of Health (MOH) described Ms Lee, who started out as a staff nurse in 1996, as "an outstanding change agent in healthcare leadership today".

Last year, when Covid-19 measures led to restrictions in hospital visitorship, the mostly elderly patients at AH were left without caregivers by their side.

The immediate solution was to al-



low virtual visitations so that the patients would not feel isolated from their loved ones, she added.

Ms Lee, who has a master's in health sciences, is now piloting a project in which caregivers are involved in the patient's hospital care.

"The whole episode in the hospital is transient; it's to prepare the patient for the eventuality of a home setting," she told The Straits Times. This means even allowing the caregiver to stay overnight, as some patients do better when they have someone familiar by their side, she said.

Two other chief nurses were also awarded: Ms Christina Lim Poh Ying, 51, from Sengkang General Hospital, and Ms Lim Voon Hooi, 48, from National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, who have both

made notable contributions to nursing.

Two advanced practice nurses (APNs) also won the award.

The first, Dr Huang Fang, 54, became an APN in 2009. Since then, she has trained and developed eight more APNs in women's service at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH).

Dr Huang, who is now KKH's assistant director of nursing, obtained her doctorate in nursing practice in 2015 and can prescribe certain medications to patients, after having completed the 14-week prescribing programme that MOH introduced in 2018.

A certified traditional Chinese

Alexandra Hospital chief nurse Margaret Lee Kwee Hiang, 45, and six other nurse leaders received the President's Award for Nurses from President Halimah Yacob at a virtual award ceremony yesterday.
ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

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