

Budding docs use podcast to talk about health impact of climate change

Fortnightly episodes involve discussions with various experts on healthcare issues

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A group of fledgling doctors is worried that in the future, hospital emergency departments and clinics will be flooded with patients suffering from heat exhaustion and mosquito-borne diseases – victims of climate change.

Ms Anbudurai Manisha, 22, a fourth-year student at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, said: "We are concerned about this because, with the escalation of climate-change impacts or heat-related disasters, the first responders would be us healthcare workers."

Ms Manisha is part of a group of healthcare students here who run a podcast called *Third Spacing*, which delves into healthcare issues.

In each fortnightly 30-minute episode, the students speak to a professor or subject expert about topics such as medical education, and draw from social contexts to understand illnesses.

The podcast's latest season, which started in mid-October, covers the close links between health and the environment.

With gradually rising temperatures, Singapore is not impervious to future heatwaves, flooding and more dengue outbreaks. Local temperatures are 1.8 deg C higher than they were in 1948. In contrast, global temperatures have risen by 1.1 deg C from pre-industrial times before the 1850s.

The team behind *Third Spacing* is particularly concerned about how a much hotter Singapore will impact the vulnerable, which in-



Some of the students behind the podcast *Third Spacing* include (clockwise, from far left) Mr Srivamsi Pappu, 21, Ms Phoebe Aw, 22, Ms Anbudurai Manisha, 22, Mr John Joson Ng, 27, Ms Yuki Ong, 23, and Ms Ching Ann Hui, 24. All are studying at the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, except Mr Ng, who is at Duke-NUS Medical School. The podcast's latest season covers the close links between health and the environment.
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clude those who work outdoors, the elderly, and people with comorbidities.

Ms Ching Ann Hui, 24, a final-year student at NUS medicine who leads *Third Spacing*, said: "Heat itself is a physiological stressor, and it could compound existing chronic diseases."

Some patients with end-stage renal disease and who are on fluid restrictions have shared that hotter days make it tough for them to limit their water intake, added Ms Ching. For these patients, excess fluid can enter their lungs, causing breathing difficulties.

Realising these future risks prompted the *Third Spacing* team

to sign an open letter – called the Healthy Climate Prescription – urging global governments to drive down carbon emissions faster to reduce the worst health risks, which include malnutrition and mental health issues caused by climate anxiety.

Topics in the current podcast season on environment and health include reducing the carbon footprint of the healthcare sector, and how hospital design can aid patient recovery.

This environment edition spans six episodes and was done in collaboration with environmental communicator Woo Qiyun, who runs a climate advocacy Instagram page.

Third Spacing began in late 2019 as a one-woman show by Ms Ching. She used audio editing software she had learnt to use in secondary school and YouTube tutorials to start her podcasts.

Her interest in climate and health began during her hospital postings, when she saw the amount of waste generated from medical procedures.

"For blood-taking, you have the gloves, needles, needle attacher, Ziploc bags and disposable packaging. It's a lot of waste from a single procedure," said Ms Ching.

But she also highlighted a few positive steps: Some operating theatres, for instance, have recy-

cling initiatives.

The podcasts' listeners include medical students, junior doctors and members of the public.

Ms Ching also noted that although medical care is heavily focused on biomedical aspects, 80 per cent of health outcomes are caused by social and psychological factors. "We wanted to broaden students' understanding of disease and health so that we can be better healthcare professionals."

The team hopes that each podcast will trigger conversations among listeners, and eventually lead to impact and change.

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