

100,000 healthcare workers to get \$4,000 award each

Minister says it recognises their courage and invaluable contribution in a difficult year

Clara Chong

About 100,000 healthcare workers involved in the national response to the pandemic will receive a special award amounting to \$4,000 each for their courage and invaluable work in a difficult year, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said yesterday.

The Covid-19 Healthcare Award will go to all staff of public healthcare institutions, such as acute hospitals, community hospitals and polyclinics, as well as staff

from community care organisations that deliver front-line healthcare services.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) will also award a grant of \$10,000 to each of the Public Health Preparedness Clinics (PHPCs), to be shared among their staff.

Announcing the award at the National Medical Excellence Awards ceremony, Mr Ong said: "I know a monetary award does not fully reflect the contribution of healthcare workers, neither is it the main motivator of a healthcare worker.

"But it is an appropriate thing for MOH to do, to recognise your

contribution in this very exceptional year," he said.

The award will also be extended to nursing homes and dialysis centres that have expanded their capacity and worked tirelessly to keep vulnerable elderly folk in need of nursing care out of hospitals, freeing up hospital beds, MOH said in a statement yesterday.

The award will be given to public healthcare institution staff next month, and to PHPCs and eligible staff of community care organisations in the first quarter of next year.

MOH, the Agency for Integrated Care and the public healthcare clusters – National Healthcare Group (NHG), National University Health System and SingHealth – are working through the imple-

mentation and more details will be communicated to eligible staff when ready.

Mr Ong noted that in recent weeks, stress levels among healthcare staff have gone up a few more notches, as the Covid-19 transmission wave was sustained at a high level, with more patients falling seriously ill and needing intensive care unit (ICU) care.

Public hospitals had to set up more isolation and ICU beds, requiring nurses and doctors to be redeployed, and stretch already-long working hours even longer.

"This work is not for the faint-hearted. I have seen, with anger and shame, the disgraceful behaviour of those who shun nurses and healthcare workers, who turn away from you near your homes,

who refuse your journeys," he said, adding the great majority of society deeply appreciates their work.

"The front line stands between the virus and us. You are our last line of defence – standing between us and the abyss. When vaccination, safe management, therapeutics and the patient's last bodily resistance are all breached, you still refuse to yield. You stand next to the patient as his last hope."

Mr Ong said Covid-19 had turbocharged the process of innovation in healthcare, which must be a top priority in the coming decade, together with transformation.

Associate Professor Yong Keng Kwang, Group Chief Nurse at NHG, welcomed the award.

"The pandemic has tested our healthcare system and resilience, especially our nurses on the front lines who form the majority of the healthcare workforce," he said.

"The Covid-19 Healthcare Award recognises their hard work and sacrifices, and will boost and encourage them further to give their best to the patients they serve and our population."

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Guests, both in person and virtual, celebrating the efforts of outstanding clinicians, clinician scientists and other healthcare professionals at the Ministry of Health's National Medical Excellence Awards. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO

Clinicians, healthcare professionals lauded at medical excellence awards

Clara Chong

A familiar name in news reports over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic and internationally recognised infectious diseases expert Dale Fisher received the National Outstanding Clinician Award yesterday.

Professor Fisher, a senior consultant at the National University Hospital's (NUH) Division of Infectious Diseases, began his career in Singapore during the severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) outbreak in 2003.

He was among the four individuals and two teams to receive the Ministry of Health's National Medical Excellence Awards (NMEA) this year.

The NMEA recognises the efforts of outstanding clinicians, clinician scientists and other healthcare professionals.

Among his numerous contributions, Prof Fisher is also one of three founding members of NUH's Division of Infectious Diseases.

His aggressive stance against Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infection saw its infection rates in NUH and nationally drop significantly.

On winning the award, Prof Fisher said he felt flattered and humbled: "You can't help but re-



Professor Dale Fisher receiving the National Outstanding Clinician Award from Health Minister Ong Ye Kung yesterday. He was among the four individuals and two teams to receive the National Medical Excellence Awards.

flect on all the people that have supported me... through my career and continue to do a lot of work, such as my infectious disease colleagues, who have covered a lot of my hospital duties to enable me to do my other sort of national and international roles."

He also works with international organisations such as the World Health Organisation.

He was involved in the Ebola response in Liberia from 2014 to 2015, and has assisted governments in several countries during

H1N1 influenza outbreaks for over a decade.

He was one of 12 international experts selected for the first WHO-China Joint Mission on Covid-19 to China early this year to investigate and advise on interventions to guide the global response.

Another award winner was Professor Chong Siow Ann, a senior consultant in the research division and department of psychosis at the Institute of Mental Health. He won the National Outstanding

Clinician Scientist Award.

Prof Chong initiated the first Singapore Mental Health Study in 2007, which provided a comprehensive insight into the mental health status of adults aged 18 and above in Singapore.

The three-year study established the prevalence of common mental disorders here, their associated factors, the treatment gap of the disorders, as well as the help-seeking behaviour of the local population.

In the international arena, Prof Chong led a team of researchers from Singapore, the United States, Australia and Hong Kong, on a cutting-edge five-year Translational Clinical Research in schizophrenia and related psychoses in 2008 to identify the biomarkers for this group of disorders.

The findings of this \$25 million project provided significant insights into schizophrenia and related psychosis, and also placed Singapore on the world map.

Other winners were Associate Professor Wong Kok Seng from SingHealth Community Hospitals, who won the National Outstanding Clinician Mentor Award, and Professor Tan Hak Koon from KK Women's and Children's Hospital, who picked up the National Outstanding Clinician Educator Award.

The Covid-19 Research Workgroup from the National Centre for Infectious Diseases and the team behind the GPFIRST Programme from Changi General Hospital both won the National Clinical Excellence Team Award.

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