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New NUS students in healthcare to take common modules

Dentistry, medicine, nursing and pharmacy freshmen targeted in preventive care push

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Starting from August 2023, freshmen joining the National University of Singapore (NUS) to study dentistry, medicine, nursing and pharmacy will take a common set of modules in their first two years, alongside their current individual programmes.

NUS on Tuesday announced that about 870 first-year students across the four healthcare disciplines will take five courses together, as part of a new common curriculum for healthcare professional education that has been designed with Singapore's preventive care strategy Healthier SG in mind.

The aim is to imbue in students a greater awareness of social issues and their impact on health, as well as cultivate teamwork, communication skills and digital literacy.

The five courses – each of which will be completed within 13 weeks – will cover topics such as how social and environmental factors influence health outcomes, and data literacy for healthcare.

Students will also learn about working and communicating in multidisciplinary teams, as well as the legal and ethical principles underpinning the practice and delivery of health services.

They will also explore aspects such as computational thinking, data science, artificial intelligence and machine learning in the healthcare context.

Lessons will be conducted through a mix of online and in-person classes.

Students from the four healthcare disciplines will also form mixed teams to visit patients in their homes regularly over a year so that they can apply concepts they learn in class about providing holistic patient care as well as fostering empathy.

Second-year NUS students (from left) Hilary Moh, Muhammad Amir Mohamed Imran, Kanesananthan Yahrliny and Yunn Honey Aye Kyaw, who are studying dentistry, nursing, pharmacy and medicine, respectively, took common curriculum courses in a 2022 pilot. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Professor Aaron Thean, NUS deputy president for academic affairs and provost, said the changes are a big step in reforming healthcare education to make it more relevant for Singapore's needs. This is the first time that all four healthcare disciplines are working together.

Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, said: "Health and well-being are more than just caring for the sick. To help people stay healthy as long as they live, and better care for them when they are ill, we need to look beyond the traditional confines of medicine and science, and draw upon other disciplines."

Adjunct Professor Lau Tang Ching, vice-dean for education at NUS Medicine, said: "This is something that we have dreamed of since about 10 or 15 years ago – the different schools and faculty have actually always wanted our different professional student groups to come together to learn together.

"But it was very difficult to organise common time for them."

All first-year medical students in the current academic year 2023/2024 will also need to complete a Minor in Biomedical Informatics during their undergraduate years.

The curriculum combines healthcare, data science, artificial intelligence and information technology to equip students in using data effectively to improve patient outcomes and information flow across healthcare IT systems.

Prof Chong said this minor was made compulsory to underscore the importance of medical students being equipped with digital skills.

From the current academic year, undergraduates from other NUS faculties, schools and colleges can also take up a new Minor in Integrative Health offered by NUS Medicine to learn more about modern healthcare systems.

Second-year dentistry student Hilary Moh, 21, who took one of the common curriculum courses – social and behavioural determinants on health – as part of a pilot in 2022, said she is better able to see how her field fits into the bigger picture of healthcare.

Ms Yunn Honey Aye Kyaw, 19, who is in her second year of NUS Medicine and also took the course, said: "It is eye-opening to see the non-medical factors that affect patients' health."

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