Six senior clinicians, geriatric care team lauded for medical excellence

They boost healthcare and patient safety standards, drive research and education

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An interventional cardiologist who has performed a whopping 8,000 procedures and elevated Singapore’s cardiology service to world-class standards, and a neurologist who has helped to advance the education and training of clinicians here and abroad are among the winners of this year’s National Medical Excellence Awards.

In all, six senior clinicians and one team were lauded for their achievements in advancing healthcare, improving the standards of patient safety, and driving research and education, which ultimately improved people’s lives, said the Ministry of Health (MOH) on Thursday.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung gave out the awards at a ceremony held at Four Seasons Hotel Singapore.

He said the six individuals and the team personify the spirit of excellence, innovation and dedication, and their achievements were also made possible by the support from their organisations.

Hence, he hopes healthcare leaders will continue to foster such a culture.

For Professor Tan Huay Cheem, a senior consultant and senior adviser at the National University Heart Centre, Singapore, who took home the National Outstanding Clinician Award, this is the second time he has received a national medical excellence award.

In 2007, he initiated a project that reduced the time taken for a patient to have his blocked arteries “opened up” with balloon treatment from the time he arrives at the hospital (door-to-balloon time) to 68 minutes within six months and to 37 minutes by 2008, down from the internationally recommended 90 minutes.

The team won the National Clinical Excellence Team Award in 2011.

The treatment time has since dropped further to 42 minutes, he said.

The outstanding clinician award also went to Professor William Hwang, chief executive of the National Cancer Centre Singapore and senior consultant at Singapore General Hospital’s (SGH) Haematology Department.

MOH lauded him for his sterling contributions in helping to advance haematology and stem cell transplantation, steering the centre to new heights in clinical service and research excellence, and his dedication to serving his patients.

Prof Hwang serves in several national roles to help shape healthcare for the benefit of Singaporeans, it said.

This year’s outstanding clinician scientist award went to Associate Professor Madhesh Choolani, a radiologist consultant who heads the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department at the National University of Singapore’s Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, for establishing a community of clinician scientists and leading various organisations that focus on foetal diagnosis and therapy.

Thanks to him, pregnant women here and in the region can now use a non-invasive test for three common genetic disorders, including Down syndrome, in their unborn babies.

Previously, screening tests for these common foetal disorders used to be done via an invasive procedure that carries a risk of miscarriage.

The outstanding clinician mentor awards were given to Adjunct Associate Professor Brenda Ang Sze Peng, executive consultant and clinical director of the Infection Prevention and Control Department at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and Professor Julian Thumboo, a senior consultant at SGH’s Rheumatology and Immunology Department and research director and director of the Health Services Research Unit there.

Prof Ang has spent the past 20 years developing the infection control departments at the hospital and at several overseas clinics, according to MOH.

For Prof Thumboo, the success of his mentors reflects his passion in guiding them to their full potential, his citation said. He believes there is no successor without a successor, and mentoring junior helps mentors leave behind a legacy.

Associate Professor Nigeil Tan Choon Kiat, a senior consultant at the National Neuroscience Institute and SingHealth’s group director of education (undergraduate), was conferred the outstanding clinician educator award for helping to advance the education and training of clinicians here and abroad.

The epilepsy neurologist dedicated the award to the late Professor Loong Siu Chin, who called “sil-fu” (Mandarin for master), as it is as much an inspiration to him as it is for the foundation that Prof Loong laid that allowed educators like him to do their work, he said.

Prof Loong, who died in 2012 at the age of 87, was known as a superb and passionate educator who conducted legendary grand rounds at the hospital.

As a role model and senior educator, he knew how to zsuen (the burning desire) shown by others, to teach them, to be enthusiastic, to be connoisseurs of the values of education.

The clinical excellence team award went to a group behind the EAGLECare programme, established by Changi General Hospital (CGH).

Under the programme, staff of nursing homes in the east are trained to provide geriatric and end-of-life care to their residents, in partnership with acute and community hospitals and general practitioners.

As a result, the nursing homes have seen a fall in hospital admissions and length of stay for their residents, MOH said.

Clinical Assistant Professor Christopher Lien, a senior consultant and the director of community geriatrics at CGH, led the EAGLECare team, which includes Ms Yee Yeun Ling and a team of acute and community hospital’s immediate and long-term care integration; Dr Shaun Gerald Nathan, senior resident physician at St Andrew’s Community Hospital; and Ms Jeslyn Ang, a CGH senior staff nurse.

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