

Want a body that feels 10 years younger?

Healthy Longevity Clinic at Alexandra Hospital, touted as a world's first in a public hospital, helps "young seniors" draw a road map to delay ageing

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Senior Correspondent

It is now possible to walk into the newly opened Healthy Longevity Clinic at Alexandra Hospital (AH) as a "young senior" in one's 50s or early 60s, go through a personalised long-term programme and emerge with a body at least 10 years younger.

Or so claims the clinic, launched on Thursday, billed as the first in the world to offer a public hospital a specialism in applying evidence-based medical treatments integrating geroscience and other disciplines of medicine to optimise health throughout one's life.

Geroscience, a field of research that studies the biology of ageing, has seen an acceleration in research over the last two decades, according to the United States National Library of Medicine, the world's largest medical repository.

What was once the preserve of the rich and famous who could afford to take a month at private clinics to delay ageing is now available in the public Singapore as the clinic says, a fraction of the cost.

A baseline assessment and customised year-long care plan at the clinic costs \$5,000, or 10 per cent of what it would cost at top private longevity clinics worldwide. The clinic is designed to be scaled up to accommodate more than 3,000 individuals.

Dr Lauren Wang helms the clinic with a multidisciplinary team of specialists that includes longevity physicians, nurses, medical technicians, dietitians, a counsellor, a dietician and an exercise physiologist.

She adds that the idea of longevity medicine is still new here and the individuals that the clinic sees are early adopters. They are referred to as "patients" or "outpatients".

"Singapore's younger generation below the age of 35 are less concerned about ageing and health, but it is often only during times such as trying to conceive or when approaching midlife that people realise their bodies have changed," says Dr Wang, 35, a practising cardiologist with AH and National University Health System (NUHS).

Pointing to the spartan backdrop of the clinic with its utilitarian furnishings, unlike most private designer lounges, she says: "We may not be located in a glamorous setting as there are less frills with a public hospital, but our long-term programme will help individuals learn how to invest in health long after visiting the clinic, so he or she will be able to continue doing things at age 80 or 90, such as carrying grandchildren or walking up the stairs, which are a big boost for the quality of life."

HEALTHSPAN VERSUS LIFESPAN

The focus of the clinic is on increasing healthspans through holistic, evidence-based programmes, rather than focusing on longevity, which refers to the number of years from birth to death, healthspan is measured by the number of years a person remains in good health without a chronic or terminal disease, well into their senior years.

The last nine to 10 years of a senior's life are usually burdened by disease and poor quality of life, according to a 2021 report by the *Generative Medicine* journal, a medical publication that has been reviewed publicly widely referred to by clinicians and policy-makers.

It says that while lifespan was an important metric of health and well-being in the past, healthspans are now increasingly being measured because that impacts longevity including self-care, exercise, nutrition, sleep and exposure to the environment such as weather, pollution and noise.

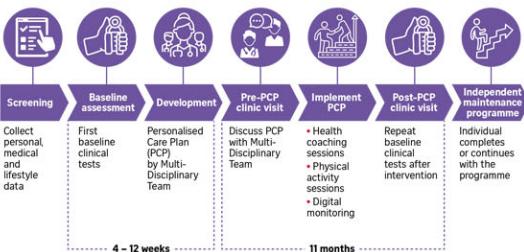


We may not be located in a glamorous setting... but our longevity medicine teams will draw up a longevity road map to help individuals learn how to invest in health long after visiting the clinic, so he or she will be able to continue doing things at age 80 or 90, such as carrying grandchildren or walking up the stairs, which are a big boost for the quality of life.

DR LAUREN WANG (above, left, with the writer), head of the Healthy Longevity Clinic at Alexandra Hospital

Individual's journey at the Healthy Longevity Clinic at Alexandra Hospital

Those aged 35 to 70 can access a full suite of medical services designed for healthy ageing



Source: NUHS CENTRE FOR HEALTHY LONGEVITY AND ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

HOW IT WORKS

Keeping costs low while making medical advances in geroscience available to the public is a priority for the team at AH's Healthy Longevity Clinic.

To get a consult, there is no need for a doctor's referral as the clinic is designed to be a walk-in medical centre. The public needs to call for an appointment or send an email (details at the end).

The higher the biological age, the higher the risk of chronic, age-related diseases, she says.

Initiatives to help Singaporeans age well and remain in gainful employment longer were key highlights of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day speech on Aug 20, when he announced financial help for the retirement needs of lower- and middle-income Singaporeans aged 50 and above, whom he termed "young seniors".

More seniors are also looking to stay economically active as long as possible as Singapore's life expectancy at birth now ranks among the top 10 in the world.

According to the Department of Statistics, it was 64.5 years in 1965 and rose to 78 in 2000. Since 2022, Singaporeans can expect to live up to 83 years on average.

By 2030, one in four citizens

are expected to be aged 65 and above, Singapore became an "aged" society in 2017, according to the United Nations, and will attain "super-aged" status by 2026.

Costs are determined after the physician has spoken to the individual's body, which may not be the same as one's chronological age. For instance, a person aged 50 may be in better health than a person aged 40, or a person aged 60 may be lumbering around with a body of a 75-year-old.

The higher the biological age, the higher the risk of chronic, age-related diseases, she says.

The diagnostic clinic works closely with the Centre for Healthy Longevity (Singapore) at NUHS to come up with a customised programme that improves the life of the individual. This includes coaching sessions, which last about a year. This usually includes biomarker testing to determine the state of health at the outset, regular monitoring, and lifestyle modification changes on exercise and dietary needs.

With regular health coaching sessions, we can identify and manage conditions to include healthy habits in line with our treatment plan, which includes a combination of lifestyle interventions, such as dietary, exercise and sleep modifications, on top of medical interventions, such as medicines and

supplements as recommended by physicians," she says.

Through providing ongoing support and guidance, Dr Tan encourages individuals to take ownership of their health and well-being, rather than just focusing on the chronic disease, she adds. "It depends on the type of chronic disease that the person has. For example, if they have diabetes, we can focus on helping them change their diet, exercise and medication," she says.

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Cutting-edge tools to determine 'real' age

1 Advanced Glycation End-products (AGEs) Reader

The AGEs Reader is a non-invasive device that uses ultraviolet (UV) light to detect autofluorescence in human skin, which, while a common term, refers to the interaction of light with molecules in the skin such as proteins, lipids and collagen.

By measuring the level of AGEs in the skin, it is possible for clinicians to estimate an individual's biological age. AGEs are formed when sugar molecules react with proteins and lipids in the body. They are a marker for a number of chronic diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and kidney disease.

There is a 12-second exposure to UV light during this procedure, which is less exposure than standing outdoors under the sun for a few minutes.

The AGEs Reader is not a diagnostic test as it is used primarily to assess the risk of developing chronic diseases.

It is a simple and quick way to measure muscle strength in the hands and forearms. It is a reliable test that can be used to assess physical fitness and to quantify those at risk of frailty and falls.

It is performed using a dynamometer, a hand-held device that measures the amount of force one can apply with the grip. The device is held with the hand bent at a 90-degree angle while holding the device handle and squeezing with the hand.

While the grip strength varies depending on age, gender and body mass, in general, a grip strength of less than 18kg for women and less than 28kg for men is considered to be low.

Low handgrip strength can be a sign of frailty, a condition characterised by a decline in physical function and an increased risk of falls and other health problems.

Frailty is a key public health problem, estimated to affect more than 20 per cent of adults over the age of 65.

The resistance of the body to the current is then measured and used to calculate the total body composition. The reader gives the doctor information about the individual's tissue anatomy and physiology which can indicate degeneration or accelerated ageing.

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