

The Straits Times says

# Retaining nurses is a medical lifeline

**N**ot only nurses but also the public at large will be gratified by the announcement that about 29,000 nurses are set to receive up to \$100,000 each in payouts under a new long-term retention scheme for nurses working in the public healthcare system. The Award for Nurses' Grace, Excellence and Loyalty (Angel) scheme starts in September. Of the 29,000 nurses who stand to benefit from the scheme, almost 24,000 will be from public healthcare institutions. The other 5,000 are expected to be from publicly funded community care organisations and social service agencies, if their employers apply to participate in the scheme. These employers will need to co-fund the awards, with the majority of the funding

coming from the Government.

The new scheme fits into a complex combination of social needs. Health Minister Ong Ye Kung has acknowledged that nurses at certain ages or after a certain number of years in service are particularly likely to contemplate leaving for personal and family reasons. A retention scheme signals to these officers the need to reconsider their decision and give their careers and the healthcare system a chance.

The healthcare system has recovered from the coronavirus pandemic, which took a toll on nursing numbers by way of the higher-than-usual attrition of foreign nurses. The authorities have managed to plug that deficit, but nurses continue

to be in short supply as healthcare demands rise, particularly in an ageing society. Currently, a tight bed situation in hospitals demonstrates the need to gear up the healthcare system so that it answers to current demands while remaining attuned to future demands. Nurses, who belong to a profession which cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence, deserve particular attention in Singapore's inexorable transition to an ageing society whose welfare will rest a great deal on the quality of its sustaining healthcare.

It is in that context that the Ministry of Health seeks to highlight nursing as a profession that touches the lives of the sick and infirm irreplaceably. In their learning experiences and contribu-

tions to clinical care for patients, nurses can choose to progress along clinical, management, education, academic and research career paths. This diversity of career options needs to be broadcast even more clearly to nursing aspirants so that they know that the profession offers manifest routes to recognition, success and financial well-being. The occasional burnout from the workload is to be expected: it is present in other professions as well. What the Angel scheme does is to add a financial incentive to the decision by nurses to stay on in their jobs. Demand for nurses is a global one. Singapore must continue to attract foreign nursing personnel, but it must become even more attractive for its own nurses.