

New courses to boost education, training of nurses

MOH also working to increase cohort sizes at nursing schools, says Ong Ye Kung

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Local tertiary institutions are launching new courses in 2024 to improve the education and training of nurses, even as the Ministry of Health (MOH) is working with them to create opportunities for nurses to enhance their skills and continue learning throughout their career.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung announced this at the 2024 Nurses' Merit Award ceremony on July 12.

The ministry is also working to increase cohort sizes in the nursing schools at the Institute of Techni-

cal Education (ITE), polytechnics and universities, he said.

"It cannot be a big jump, but it should be an addition that helps fulfil the wishes of our students who want to become nurses," he said.

The National University of Singapore will be launching two new postgraduate programmes in August.

The graduate certificates in Integrated Health and Critical Care Nursing are work-study programmes. They give nurses the opportunity to develop their professional competencies through on-the-job training at the workplace, while concurrently advancing their



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professional development.

The Singapore Institute of Technology is starting in September a new five-year integrated Bachelor of Science in Nursing – Master of Science in Nursing programme.

Graduates will have to go through a three-year bachelor's-level study followed by a two-year master's-level study to prepare them for specialist nursing roles and to be future nursing leaders.

They can go for further training in one of four specialisations: medical or surgical; high acuity care,

which is short-term care provided to patients who need special supervision while recovering from a serious illness or injury; perioperative nursing; and community care nursing.

In October, a three-year work-study diploma in nursing will begin at ITE, giving enrolled nurses who are working the opportunity to obtain a nationally recognised diploma and take on more complex nursing tasks as registered nurses.

Mr Ong told healthcare professionals at the ceremony to never believe the assertion that nobody wants to join nursing.

He said every year during application season, he and other MPs get numerous appeals from Singaporeans who want to get into nursing but could not.

"Last year, we set a national target to hire 4,000 new nurses, after experiencing high attrition in 2021 and 2022 due to Covid-19 (when) many of our nurses were poached. We have since turned the tide."

About 4,500 nurses were newly registered in the public healthcare clusters in 2023.

Apart from bolstering formal education, Mr Ong said the training of nurses in primary care has taken on greater importance, especially with preventive care and Healthier SG being key thrusts of Singapore's long-term healthcare plans.

He lauded Nurses' Merit Award recipient Marine Chioh, assistant director of the Primary and Com-

munity Care Development Division at the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), who was "instrumental in developing the role of nurses working in the primary care network (PCN) setting".

A nurse by training, Ms Chioh, 62, was seconded from AIC in 2012 to work with general practitioners in private practice on the PCN concept.

"I (worked) for 12 years to understand the challenges faced by both the GPs and nurses before we could build a team successfully for PCN. Many of the nurses hailed from different parts of hospitals," she told *The Straits Times*.

Today, there are 10 PCNs that duplicate what Ms Chioh started with nine Frontier GP clinics.

Another recipient who played a critical role in educating the next generation of nurses was Ms Maslinna Abdul Rahman, 39, a nurse clinician at the Singapore General Hospital.

As a faculty and module lead, she was instrumental in establishing the Master of Health Sciences – Organ Transplant Nursing, which was originally a renal transplant nursing course at the hospital. It has evolved into a master's programme for nursing students specialising in solid organ transplant nursing.

Ms Chioh and Ms Maslinna were among the 150 nurses who received the Nurses' Merit Award from Mr Ong.

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