

Centre gets \$3m endowment to boost mental health research

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Mental health research and clinical practice in Singapore will benefit from a \$3 million endowment by the D.S. Lee Foundation to the Yeo Boon Khim Mind Science Centre (MSC), with a majority of the gift dedicated to establishing a new professorship.

Of the total amount, an endowment gift of \$2 million will go towards the Della Suantio Lee Professorship in Mental Health and Digital Science, where the appointed academic will lead efforts to bring artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics into mental health research and clinical practice.

Some examples include AI-powered mental health screening tools for Singaporean youth, and digital phenotyping, which includes using data from smart devices to understand user behaviour, and in turn can be used to detect and diagnose mental health

conditions.

The professor will also help translate research discoveries into practical tools that clinicians, patients and the broader community can use. For example, new insights into cognitive processes could lead to better therapeutic techniques for mental health conditions, enhancing the effectiveness of current therapies.

Associate Professor John Wong, the centre's director, said this ensures that advancements in AI and big data bridge the gap between mind science and its application in everyday practice, ultimately improving patient outcomes.

Summing up the impact of the professorship, he said: "Using AI and big data to understand, diagnose and treat mental health conditions is a game-changing approach. The professor will play a key role in pushing this innovation forward and shaping the future of mental health care."

The remaining \$1 million of the donation will go towards MSC's mental wellness centre in Alexandra Hospital, which will now bear



A musical fund-raiser at the Esplanade Concert Hall, which raised \$350,000 via ticket sales and donations, followed the cheque presentation from the D.S. Lee Foundation to Yeo Boon Khim Mind Science Centre on Aug 25. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

the name of the donor and be renamed the D.S. Lee Foundation Mind Art Experiential Lab (MAE-Lab).

Opened in 2021, MAELab is a space for discovery of creative and

integrative interventions through art, mindfulness and transdisciplinary research to promote mental wellness, enhance cognitive functions, improve quality of mind and mental resilience.

It hosts various activities such as mindfulness practice, curated exhibitions, horticulture therapy and choral singing. This endowment gift will be used to support academic, research and outreach programmes for MAELab.

The MSC is a research centre of National University Health Systems and National University of Singapore (NUS).

On Aug 25, Dr Astrid Suantio presented a \$3 million cheque on behalf of her aunt, Dr Della Suantio Lee, who is the chairwoman of the foundation. It was jointly received by Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, chairman of MSC, and Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

Minister for Health Ong Ye Kung and Prof Wong witnessed the cheque presentation, which was held at the foyer of the Esplanade Concert Hall.

Dr Astrid Suantio said the donation is "more than just a financial contribution", calling it a commitment to the future of mental health research and education.

"We believe that by investing in

the mind, we are investing in the well-being of countless individuals and communities. The gift is a testament to our deep respect for the work being done here, and our hope that it will fuel ground-breaking discoveries and support those in need," she said at the cheque presentation ceremony.

The cheque presentation was followed by a musical fund-raiser at the Esplanade Concert Hall, which was watched by a 1,500-strong audience.

Titled *I'MPERFECT*, the musical drama focused on the role parents, family and friends need to play in encouraging young people to open up, and the message that it is all right to be imperfect.

It also tackled the impact of social media and societal pressures on mental health and the emotional needs of young people as they navigate their aspirations and deal with anxieties.

Through ticket sales and donations, \$350,000 was raised from the one-night performance.

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