

Community hospital subsidies to be enhanced from Oct: Ong

Judith Tan
Correspondent

From October, subsidies at community hospitals will be enhanced to align with those of acute hospitals, and allowed to be used for advanced diagnostics, said Health Minister Ong Ye Kung.

This will minimise delays in the transfer to step-down care, he added.

He was speaking on Sept 24 at the National Medical Excellence Awards ceremony, where outstanding clinicians, clinician scientists and other healthcare professionals were recognised.

In the debate on the Ministry of Health's budget in March, Mr Ong had said the community hospital subsidy framework would be aligned with the acute hospital subsidy framework so that patients receive the same subsidy rate of 50 per cent to 80 per cent throughout their inpatient stay.

He had also said that more diagnostic services, such as CT and MRI scans, and relevant drugs would be subsidised at community hospitals.

In his speech at the awards dinner, Mr Ong said that driven by the ageing population with changing healthcare needs, "care is increasingly anchored in communities, health is being built up outside of hospitals, and new care models involving partnership between hospitals and community partners are emerging".

To recognise these changes, the Ministry of Health introduced the new National Community Care Excellence Team Award at this year's event. The award recognises teams that have contributed significantly to improving community health and raised awareness of preventive health in the community care setting.

The first recipient in this category is the SingHealth Community Hospitals (SCH) team leading the Social Prescribing Programme, in partnership with the Agency for



The SingHealth Community Hospitals team that won the National Community Care Excellence Team Award at the National Medical Excellence Awards ceremony on Sept 24, comprising (from left) Ms Eunice Chin Khoon Eng, Ms Clara Poh Chui Yin, Ms Adeline Kwan Li Feng and Associate Professor Lee Kheng Hock. Speaking at the event, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said subsidies at community hospitals will be enhanced to align with those of acute hospitals, and allowed to be used for advanced diagnostics. This will minimise delays in the transfer to step-down care, he added. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Integrated Care, SkillsFuture Singapore and several active ageing centres.

The team integrates social prescriptions with clinical care as a novel approach to improving health outcomes for seniors. The seniors are prescribed social support programmes or activities to supplement medical treatments.

The team's work aligns with the objectives of Age Well SG, a national programme to help seniors age well at home and in the community.

Associate Professor Lee Kheng Hock, SCH's deputy chief executive officer overseeing education and community partnerships, told *The Straits Times* that social prescribing addresses a senior's social needs, such as loneliness, housing and other social issues, "which can

significantly affect patient well-being and recovery".

Running a similar initiative called the Neighbours for Active Living Programme, Changi General Hospital (CGH) taps the close-knit ties fostered with volunteers and neighbours to provide companionship and social support to vulnerable seniors.

Pioneered by CGH in tandem with the South East Community Development Council in 2013, the programme has provided place-based care and personalised support to more than 14,000 residents of 18 communities in eastern Singapore over the last 10 years.

Led by Ms Shirlyn Su Chang, assistant director of CGH's department of health and social integration, the team received the National Clinical Excellence Team

Award. This is the fourth time that CGH has been given the award; it has won it with different teams since 2021.

Both teams and six individuals received their respective awards from Mr Ong at the dinner at Pan Pacific Singapore on Sept 24.

Singapore General Hospital (SGH) chief quality officer Tan Ban Hock took the National Outstanding Clinician Award for his work in elevating the hospital's infectious diseases service to world-class standard.

Professor Tan is particularly interested in immunocompromised patients and established the treatment of transplant infectious disease into SGH's infectious disease department. He was also involved in the writing and revision of protocols in various transplant pro-

grammes.

The National Outstanding Clinician Scientist Award went to two recipients – Professor Jerry Chan, director of KK Research Centre at KK Women's and Children's Hospital and director of the SingHealth Duke-NUS Maternal and Child Health Research Institute; and Professor Jodhbir Singh Mehta, the Singapore National Eye Centre's deputy chief executive officer overseeing research.

A clinician scientist in obstetrics and gynaecology, Prof Chan has made contributions including in research on foetal stem cells and gene therapies targeting inherited diseases.

Prof Mehta, one of the world's leading specialists on corneal diseases and refractive surgical procedures, was involved in projects that developed new surgical instruments, devices and laser procedures for corneas.

Meanwhile, Professor Tan Suat Hoon from the National Skin Centre received the National Outstanding Clinician Mentor Award.

In a career spanning more than three decades, she mentored young clinicians and created a fertile environment for dermatological research.

She not only established the sub-speciality of dermatopathology (the study into structural and compositional changes that occur in skin disease) and developed a training programme, but also grew the unit to a team of five highly trained dermatopathologists.

The National Outstanding Clinician Educator Award went to Associate Professor Gerald Chua of Ng Teng Fong Hospital and Adjunct Professor Lau Tang Ching from the National University Hospital.

The Ministry of Health lauded them for their contributions to the education and training of clinicians and healthcare staff, and support in developing skills and competencies for high standards of care and treatment.

juditht@sph.com.sg