

Centre launched to treat allergic diseases across different disciplines

It trims amount of time and money patients spend to see specialists at different facilities

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The SingHealth Duke-NUS Allergic Diseases Centre (SDADC) was launched on April 17 to cut down the amount of time and money patients spend to consult various specialists at different hospitals.

As allergic diseases “rarely occur in isolation”, a coordinated, patient-centred approach across specialities is essential to optimise care for a full spectrum of the disease, said Associate Professor Lee Haur Yueh, who helms the centre. Prof Lee, who is a senior consultant at the Department of Dermatology in Singapore General Hospital (SGH), said SDADC is “a platform for doctors in the different disciplines within the (SingHealth) cluster to come together to provide coordinated care and address the increasing prevalence and complexity of allergic diseases in Singapore”.

One in four Singaporeans suffers from conditions such as asthma, allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and eczema; as well as from food and drug allergies.

Many of them see different doctors while dealing with their various hypersensitivities, often duplicating resources; and there are some with more severe symptoms who still remain undiagnosed or receive inadequate treatment.

The system was launched at the two-day 26th SGH Annual Scientific Meeting on April 17 by Senior Minister of State for Health Tan Kiat How.

In his speech, Mr Tan said: “True healthcare excellence emerges

not from isolated efforts, but from coordinated action across institutions, disciplines and care settings.”

Unlike the traditional speciality-based approach, “which leads to fragmented treatment and resource duplication as patients navigate various specialists”, Mr Tan said, SDADC aligns services and research across institutions.

“This means a child with chronic severe eczema first seen at KKH (KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital) can seamlessly transition to adult care at SGH, and a patient with multiple allergic conditions can receive integrated treatment rather than navigating various specialities that could span dermatology, rheumatology and respiratory medicine,” he added.

Mr Tan said SDADC will develop an allergy database “empowered by smart data and analytics, to identify high-risk patients (and) track treatment outcomes”.

Although allergies often occur during childhood, they may develop later in life as a person’s immune system can suddenly change its response.

Doctors have noticed a growing number of adults developing new allergies, but there is very little public data on the trend.

Speaking to reporters after the centre’s opening ceremony, Prof Lee said: “One of the key aims is really for us to have that data, a repository to be able to glean information on individuals who are likely to develop allergies, those who actually outgrow their allergies, and those who respond to treatment well.

“By establishing this, we will be able to ensure continuity of care



Associate Professor Lee Haur Yueh, who helms the SingHealth Duke-NUS Allergic Diseases Centre, said a coordinated, patient-centred approach across specialities is essential to optimise care for the disease. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO



A patient taking an allergy test. One in four Singaporeans suffers from conditions like asthma, allergic rhinitis and eczema; as well as from food and drug allergies.

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from paediatric to adult services for the different allergic conditions such as severe eczema, asthma and food allergies.”

The centre will also be embarking on a programme to review and remove inaccurate allergy labels.

Only 10 per cent of patients said to be allergic to antibiotics are actually allergic to antibiotics, Prof Lee said.

“The rest (of them presented) adverse reactions as diarrhoea and (these) were wrongly labelled as an allergy. At the centre, we want to proactively evaluate using skin-prick or blood tests to ascertain and rid inaccurate labelling.”

He added that the centre will not only develop an allergy database within the SingHealth cluster and advance research that will transform laboratory discoveries into clinical tools in allergies, but it will also build competency among the doctors through education.

The other two healthcare clusters in Singapore have different approaches to treating patients with allergic diseases.

Under NHG Health, the National Skin Centre sees patients with drug-induced adverse skin reactions and food allergies, while the Department of Rheumatology, Allergy and Immunology at Tan Tock Seng Hospital provides care to patients with various allergic and immunologic disorders, including anaphylaxis, drug allergy, food allergy and intolerance.

National University Health System’s (NUHS) adult and paediatric allergy clinics provide allergy assessment and treatment for both adults and children with allergic diseases, a spokesperson said.

The clinics provide individualised treatments for these conditions, including immunotherapy in patients whose conditions are not sufficiently controlled with standard treatment.

NUHS also said that transition of care for adolescents with allergic diseases into the adult allergy service occurs seamlessly within one institution.

Its allergy team’s clinical services are integrated with the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and conducts research in drug and food allergies.

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