

COMMUNITY CARE STARTS AT HOME



By Agency for Integrated Care



Photo credit: Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities

Dr Lai Junxu on a house visit, extending care to the community

Governments all over the world are increasingly facing the challenges of increased longevity. By 2050, the world will have about twice the number of elderly as today.

Globally, different ways to care for the elderly are being studied. Hong Kong's administration for example, promotes a policy of "ageing in place" for a senior population that is expected to rise from 15 percent in mid-2014 to 32 percent in mid-2041. The concept aims to empower seniors to live at home with the proper support with institutional care exercised as a secondary option. Denmark also encourages its elderly to age at home and promotes community care over institutionalised care through a long-term care system, which includes free home care.

Singapore's white paper on population reported that the population of 440,000 senior citizens is projected to increase to 900,000 by 2030. More importantly, the number of seniors in Singapore living alone has risen. The General Household Survey 2015 showed that 41,200 seniors live by themselves, up from nearly 21,500 seniors documented in 2005.

With such a large elderly population, Singapore is making a concerted effort to care for seniors at home.

PREPARING FOR THE SILVER WAVE

One crucial way Singapore is preparing for the growing ageing population is to involve the country's general practitioners (GPs) in addressing the different needs of seniors.

Seniors generally require a higher level of medical and nursing care, especially after discharge from public hospitals. Home care, for example, is an important care option for clients that are bed-bound or require palliative care towards the end.

In addition, home care can reduce unnecessary hospital readmissions and save on healthcare costs. The wider availability of home care resources also lessens the burden and stress on live-in caregivers, such as family members.

For these reasons, the Community Care — GP Partnership Training Award supports and encourages interested GPs to further their work in the community care sector.



Handmade gifts of appreciation from a patient to Dr Lai

A scheme introduced in partnership between the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Award funds graduate diplomas in studies related to the care of our seniors. Course fees are co-funded by the Award. AIC will link interested GPs to Community Care institutions to whom they will provide services to after completing their training. This gives them an opportunity to apply their knowledge and serve a larger pool of patients in need.

PUTTING LESSONS INTO PRACTICE AT HOME

Dr Lai Junxu is one awardee who has found helping elderly patients in their homes greatly rewarding. After receiving his Graduate Diploma in Palliative Medicine, Dr Lai joined the Home Care team of his sponsoring institution, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities.

"Studying palliative medicine has helped me understand how to help patients on their last journey (both the young and the old). Through this course, I have been equipped with the practical knowledge on how to care for palliative cancer and end-organ disease patients at home. I have

also learnt how to manage psycho-geriatric issues in palliative patients which have some overlap with a frail elderly patient. This is especially useful for end-of-life care for patients who have requested maximum home care," says Dr Lai. He is also the director of OmniMed Healthcare (www.omnimedhealthcare.com), a healthcare service and clinic that offers house calls around the clock.

Dr Lai's newly acquired knowledge was put to the test when he was caring for a patient with end-stage chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The patient had developed stage-four laryngeal cancer. "It was challenging managing the palliative aspect of end-stage organ disease and end-stage cancer. In addition, my patient had multiple comorbidities, most significantly of which was diabetes," says Dr Lai.

The patient chose to live out his life being cared for at home. "Unfortunately, the family felt they would not be able to care for the patient at home sufficiently and sent the patient to the hospital where he passed away," recounts Dr Lai.

With this experience in mind, Dr Lai is a strong supporter of the scheme. With more GPs stepping forward to offer their services in the community, seniors and their caregivers will have more home care options and services to choose from.

"Home care will be a key service required in the future as the population ages," he stresses. "Previously, home care was for the rich who could afford to pay for house calls. We need more GPs in to grow the availability of subsidised home care as well as nursing home medical support. Only then can we bring care to the doorstep of the poor, or to patients with mobility issues," he says.

WHAT DO YOU GET FROM THE COMMUNITY CARE-GP PARTNERSHIP TRAINING AWARD?

70% of your course fees will be funded if you are enrolled in any of these courses and are sponsored by an eligible Community Care institution:

Graduate Diploma in
Palliative Medicine (GDPM)

Graduate Diploma in
Geriatric Medicine (GDGM)

Graduate Diploma in
Family Medicine (GDFM)

The list of institutions which have sponsored GPs for the CCGPTA are:

Methodist Welfare Services
Singapore Christian Home
Singapore Cancer Society
Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities Limited
Orange Valley Nursing Homes Pte Ltd
TOUCH Community Services Ltd
Dover Park Hospice

Metta Welfare Association
All Saints Home
Home Nursing Foundation
Ren Ci Hospital
St. Andrew's Community Hospital

Applications for the FY16 Community Care-GP Partnership Training Award are open till 31 December 2016. AIC will be able to assist you in linking up with potential sponsoring institutions. To register or find out more, visit www.primarycarepages.sg or email AIC at gp@aic.sg.