Healthy eating for all generations
A healthy diet and good nutrition is crucial in determining the growth and development of young children, and enables older adults to age healthily. Here is a look at some of NHGP’s dietitians’ recent efforts to promote healthy eating.
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Breaking ground for new Pioneer Family Healthcare Centre

On 29 May 2015, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) held the groundbreaking ceremony of its 10th polyclinic, with Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower as the Guest of Honour. The event marked a significant milestone in the organisation’s 15 years of transforming primary care and advancing Family Medicine.

The polyclinic, known as Pioneer Family Healthcare Centre, will be completed in 2017. This is part of the Ministry of Health’s Healthcare 2020 Masterplan to expand the national healthcare capacity to meet the needs of Singapore’s growing and rapidly ageing population by delivering more accessible, affordable, integrated and quality care to all. It is also hoped that the healthcare centre will ease the volume of patients at Jurong Polyclinic – where about 50 percent of patients are residents in Jurong West. The primary care facility is projected to see about 272,300 attendances when it begins operations and will serve 385,000 attendances annually by 2030.
A care model that focuses on relationships and population health

"Polyclinics have been trusted by generations of Singaporeans to provide care that is accessible, affordable, comprehensive and of good quality, and we need to continuously reinvent ourselves to do more to deliver greater value in health to patients and their families," said Adjunct Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah, Chief Executive Officer, NHGP.

Breaking away from conventional modes of treatment, the care delivery model in Pioneer Family Healthcare Centre will focus on patient empowerment to a care team led by Family Physicians. In other words, a patient and his or her family will be cared for by a specific healthcare team comprising Family Physicians, a care coordinator and allied healthcare professionals who will support their care when needed.

"With the benefit of stronger relationships between patients and their care teams, there can be more effective disease prevention, health promotion and patient empowerment," explained Dr David Tan, Deputy Head of Jurong Polyclinic and Designate Head of the Pioneer Family Healthcare Centre, NHGP.

The enhanced care team model will help the healthcare team better understand the patients' medical history and even family environment to manage the chronic disease of the patients holistically and better engage them around their care plans.

"Having a team of well-trained healthcare professionals that work closely together will also ensure better coordinated care for patients as they deliver patient care that is personal, person-centred, comprehensive, coordinated and with continuity," said Madam Kay Kuok, Chairman, NHG during her speech at the ceremony.

A healthcare provider that engages and empowers the community

To keep the community healthy, a more proactive approach will be taken in identifying patients who may be at risk for chronic diseases during their visits to the centre for acute illnesses. This will be facilitated by the patients' respective care teams. The healthcare centre is also designed to be a health-promoting classroom where health educational and promotional activities for the community can take place. It will feature health-themed artworks to facilitate learning about health.

“The transformation of primary care will be vital as we move from illness to wellness care. Primary care will form the bedrock of healthcare in Singapore by helping patients with illness live well. The addition of the Pioneer Family Healthcare Centre will help us further our goal,” said Professor Philip Choo, Group Chief Executive Officer, NHG.

NHGP will continue working closely with its partners in the community and building strong relationships with GPs to promote health and improve health literacy.

A physical environment designed with the community in mind

Located a stone's throw from Pioneer MRT station and nestled among housing estates, Pioneer Family Healthcare Centre will offer residents in Jurong West convenient access to polyclinic services. "With this polyclinic, we can just easily walk here in less than five minutes. Before that, we would have to drive 10 to 15 minutes to Jurong East,” said Mr Tony Chua, a resident of Jurong West.

With a floor plan of 7,750 square metres, the new seven-storey healthcare centre will feature universal barrier-free designs to meet the needs of the elderly, people with disabilities and young families. Services are also grouped together for coordinated patient care.

With community engagement as a key theme in the new polyclinic's design, features of the healthcare facility include communal spaces, a café and green and open rooftop spaces that offer a healing environment for patients and caregivers to rest and interact.

A series of activities to engage Jurong West residents on the upcoming healthcare centre

As part of efforts to reach out to its community stakeholders in the Pioneer region in light of the upcoming Pioneer Family Healthcare Centre, NHGP conducted a series of engagement activities for the students of Jurong West Primary School (JWPS) and their parents.

In March 2015, an art competition themed “Healthy Mind, Healthy Body” was held. Over 200 students participated in the competition and the top 20 artworks were displayed at the groundbreaking ceremony. On 30 April 2015, Ms Lynette Goh, Senior Dietitian, NHGP, conducted a childhood nutrition talk for parents of students from the school. She shared about the importance of proper nutrition and how to help children of different age groups achieve a well-balanced diet. The talk also highlighted tips to help parents deal with picky eaters, and introduced simple and interesting ways to prepare healthy, tasty meals. On 19 May 2015, Dr David Tan and Senior Staff Nurse Suzanne Ang from Jurong Polyclinic gave a talk on the role of family doctors and hand hygiene, respectively. Students were also invited on stage to take part in a game where they were asked to guess various healthcare professions based on short descriptions.
Healthy eating for all generations

Recipes for healthy development

Nutrition is crucial for the development of young children. To guide parents and child caregivers on preparing simple, healthy and nutritious meals for young children, dietitians from NHGP and PCF (PAP Community Foundation) Sparkletots@533 Jurong Spring Childcare Centre started a seven-week project to develop healthy recipes.

A survey was conducted on parents and caregivers to identify common barriers faced during food preparation and to identify the types of recipes they found appealing. The project concluded with a nutrition session titled “Giving Your Child a Healthy Head Start” on 7 March 2015. Agnes Wong, Dietitian, NHGP, gave a nutrition talk on “My Healthy Plate” and tips on dealing with fussy eaters. The session ended with a cooking demonstration by student dietitian Clarissa Tang with healthy meals for young children. One hundred copies of the recipe books were presented to parents and staff at the childcare centre.

Eating the healthy plate way

In conjunction with Dietitians’ Day on 13 March 2015, a team of dietitians from NHGP celebrated this day with its patients and staff at each of its nine polyclinics from 9 to 13 March. This year’s theme was focused on how to eat the “Healthy Plate Way”. Senior Dietitian Lynette Goh conceptualised the fun-filled activities with nutrition booths, posters with healthy eating messages and games like “spin the healthy plate wheel”. NHGP also launched recipe cards with affordable healthy recipes capped at $2 per serve. Some patients commended the creative efforts, saying “Love it, I’m bringing the game back to school! I’m an educator.” and “It was excellent.”

Staying fit beyond 50

In line with SG50 and as part of a course on healthy aging and wellness promotion under the CET Academy, Janie Chua, Senior Dietitian, NHGP was invited by Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s School of Health Sciences to give a talk “Healthy Nutrition as We Age” on 9 June 2015. This is aimed to equip older adults with skills to manage their well-being and age healthily.

Ms Chua shared tips on how to reduce cholesterol and high blood pressure, and ways to prevent osteoporosis. To challenge the mindset that healthy food tastes bland, Ms Chua conducted a blind food tasting activity where participants were invited to taste the difference between regular products and their healthier alternatives, such as regular crackers versus low sodium crackers. They were also taught to read food labels. They also walked away with goodie bags filled with healthy food products courtesy of NHGP.

Bringing smiles to residents of Evergreen Nursing Home

On 20 June 2015, as part of a community outreach programme, a team of staff from Choa Chu Kang Polyclinic visited Evergreen Nursing Home to bring good cheer to the elderly residents. The elderly were entertained through song performances and simple games, both of which they participated wholeheartedly in. This was followed by a tea-break, during which the team spoke to the residents individually, fostering closer relationships with the elderly – many of whom were regular chronic patients at the polyclinic. Gifts comprising essential items such as medicated oil, prickly heat powder and oat biscuits were also distributed to each resident. It was a heart-warming and joyful session for everyone.
Healthcare expert from New Zealand visits Toa Payoh Polyclinic

NHGP hosted a visit by Dr Tim Malloy, elected President of The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners at Toa Payoh Polyclinic on 16 May 2015. Dr Malloy was accompanied by Mrs Nancy Malloy, Manager of the Wellsford Medical Centre and Dr Subramaniam Surajkumar, Honorary Assistant Treasurer, College of Family Physicians Singapore. They were warmly welcomed by Toa Payoh Polyclinic’s management team.

The visit began with a guided tour around the clinic led by Clinic Head Dr Tung Yew Cheong, Senior Nurse Manager Anita Tan and Nurse Clinician K. Nanda Kumari. Visitors were provided insights on a typical patient’s journey, starting from the self-registration area, where they were introduced to the Online Appointment System and mobile appointment booking application that have improved the uptake of same-day appointments. They were then brought to various nursing service stations such as the treatment room, the physician consultation rooms, diagnostic laboratories, radiology facilities and pharmacy.

A sharing session was conducted after the tour, where Dr Tung shared about the organisation and gave an overview of public primary healthcare in Singapore. Dr Malloy’s and Mrs Malloy also shared on the healthcare system in New Zealand. The two-hour visit ended off with a short question and answer session.

Dr Malloy shared that he was impressed with the clinic’s laboratory and X-ray facilities. He also noted that the clinic was advanced in its use of innovative technologies, such as the Outpatient Pharmacy Automation System – which was jointly developed by the National Healthcare Group Pharmacy, National University Hospital, Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Integrated Health Information Systems (IHiS).

NHGP nurses receive Nurses’ Merit Award

Two nurses were recognised at the annual Ministry of Health’s Nurses’ Merit Awards Ceremony for demonstrating consistent and outstanding performance, participating in professional development and making contributions to promote the nursing profession. Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) Carolyn Chan and Senior Nurse Manager Yan Chau Chain were among 81 nurses to receive the award from Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower on 24 July 2015 at Orchard Hotel.

Enhancing her practice to meet patients’ needs

APN Carolyn Chan continuously develops the role of an APN in chronic disease management. To benefit patients, she creates and reviews APNs’ clinical guidelines on the management of various conditions and clinical work. An individual with strong professional ethics and the desire to support the people around her, Ms Chan creates opportunities for the professional development of her fellow APNs, and is working on developing a collaborative agreement to enhance all their practice.

Protecting patients against infectious diseases

Senior Nurse Manager Yan Chau Chain has worked with different healthcare professionals and partners to establish and implement policies and procedures to reduce the spread of infection. Passionate in her quest for safety against infectious diseases, Ms Yan contributes to nursing research, using evidence-based guidelines to review and institute changes in infection control. She has introduced stand-alone treatment rooms for patients under Direct Observed Therapy in all polyclinics.
Nurses have a keen eye on what makes a difference to patients and spare no effort when caring for them. As Singapore celebrates 130 years of nursing and NHGP its 15th anniversary, let us take a look at how primary healthcare nurses have evolved.

Primary healthcare nurses take on new levels of patient-centred care

The practice of nursing in primary healthcare has changed radically over the years with primary healthcare nurses tirelessly rising to the challenge to play a critical role in the transformation of patient care journey. “In the last 10 years, primary healthcare nurses have been scaling up on patient education, child development and growth and are taught measures in early intervention in chronic conditions. Through constant upgrading of their skills and outsourcing of non-nursing related duties, nurses are now able to practise at the top of their license. Roles have also evolved to include Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs), Nurse Clinicians and Care Managers. Now, nurses are empowered to take decisive actions not just to provide better care and expedite patients’ access to treatment, but to initiate documentation to improve practices in specialisations such as wound care and reaching beyond the polyclinic to enhance health in their community,” shared NHGP’s Chief Nurse, Ms Chen Yee Chui.

New roles and collaborations for holistic patient care

Among the key milestones has been the creation of the Care Manager (CM), who works with allied healthcare professionals such as psychologists, medical social workers, and Family Physicians in chronic disease management which brings greater benefits to patients.

“With the creation of the CM role, we work very closely and feel comfortable to call other healthcare professionals to discuss or consult on issues. The collaboration extends to having group workshops, such as the workshop I conducted with dietitians on diabetes care. We also set and review goals for patients as a multidisciplinary team,” said Senior Nurse Clinician Ng Soh Mui.

A CM specialising in asthmatic care, Senior Nurse Clinician Lee Ching Lian shared about an elderly patient she had counselled on inhaler administration. “It was incredibly heartening to see him on a return visit with his inhaler tied to his belt. He said that he had committed to memory what I said to him about his inhaler being his life-saver. It makes what I do all worthwhile,” recounted Sister Lee.

Increased autonomy to enhance the quality of care

In the last five years, nurses at triage have been empowered to determine patients who need more urgent care and fast-tracking them to the appropriate channels. Nurses in the Mental Health speciality in the Chronic Disease Management programme are trained to pick out and flag patients with early signs of mental issues, either for referral or for health education as appropriate.

Expansion of roles for nurses to manage more complex conditions

The introduction of APNs has enabled nurses to play a more critical role in the management of more complex conditions. “An APN is an expanded role of nursing; APNs are able to diagnose and manage patients and it gives me satisfaction to see patients improve in their health,” shared APN Carolyn Chan. They are also trained to pick up warning signs and intervene earlier to arrest issues at the pre-disease state.

“We have seen from the recent Nursing Task Force Recommendations that MOH is working towards prescribing authority for non-medical professionals. I am thankful for the strong support by our Family Physicians in NHGP, in tirelessly providing training and developing nursing skills to an even higher level,” shared APN Chan.
Harnessing technology to improve medication safety.

This section is a special feature to celebrate NHGP’s 15th anniversary this year. In this issue, let us take a walk down memory lane and explore how NHG Pharmacy (NHGPh) has been improving medication safety and patient care over the last 15 years.

The evolution of systems and roles to improve patient safety and care

Electronic platform improves efficiency and care

Initially, staff used a legacy dispensing system called “SCOP”, which could only generate labels and calculate drug charges. Prescription orders were keyed in and processed manually.

In 2002, the iPharm system was implemented. Its features include: a record of patients’ medication history; a database for staff to check drug information; an alert system to inform staff if a drug would result in allergic reactions for the patient, or interact or interfere with another drug in the prescription. Besides safer patient care, the system also improves coordination of care by enabling information to flow through its electronic database of medical notes.

Following the launch of electronic prescriptions in 2005, further work was done to introduce interfaces between the prescribing and dispensing systems. With electronic prescriptions sent seamlessly to pharmacy, manual transcription was removed, improving productivity, safety and waiting time.

Medication prescription filling system enables job re-design

In 2014, together with the National University Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital, NHGPh implemented the Outpatient Pharmacy Automation System (OPAS). With 99.9% accuracy, OPAS improves medication safety by reducing potential human packing errors. It also improves efficiency of the medication packing and dispensing processes. The system enables NHGPh to re-designed the job scope of its staff to include tasks such as patient counselling and medication review. The re-designed role increases patient contact time, value-adds to patient care and increases staff’s job satisfaction. OPAS has won awards such as the MOH Health IT Excellence Award for IT Excellence in Providing Quality of Care in 2015, first runner-up in the “Most Innovative Use of Infocomm Technology (Public Sector)” category of the National InfoComm Award in 2014 and the Project of the Year Award 2014 – 2015 in the “Business and Information Systems” category. Around 6,400 patients are expected to benefit from the system daily when it is fully rolled out at all of NHGP’s nine polyclinics by end 2015.

Medication management system improves medication safety

In 2010, NHGPh was the first in Southeast Asia to launch a new automated multi-dose medication packing service, ConviDose. It packs pills 14 times faster than manual means, according to the required quantities and frequency of use. Caregivers and patients could manage multiple medications more conveniently, empowering community-dwelling patients to age-in-place.

In May 2014, to further improve quality control of ConviDose, NHGPh was the first in Southeast Asia to launch another system – the Automated Medication Inspection System (AMIS). It uses 3D-image verification of medications and flags out any error in medication packing so that staff can verify and perform interventions. The system has improved error detection rate significantly and resulted in 34% time saving. ConviDose has clinched several awards like the NHG Excellence in Action Award (Team category) and Merit Award in the Ministry of Health’s EXCEL Best Innovative Project in 2010, and the Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation Bronze Award in 2012. It also won the CIO awards in 2013 – an award for the top five organisations in Asia who break new ground and add value to their customers through information technology (IT) systems.

Pharmacist-led ambulatory clinics transform care

To effectively utilise professional resources, pharmacist-led ambulatory clinics, such as the Anticoagulation and Hypertension, Diabetes and Lipids clinics were piloted in Clementi Polyclinic in 2007 and Bukit Batok Polyclinic in 2008 respectively. In these clinics, pharmacists help check that patients’ medication are suitable for their conditions, monitor patients’ response to their medications, recommend changes in patients’ drug regimen if necessary and educate patients on their medical conditions and medications. Such collaborative care models between pharmacists and physicians transform care for patients whose medication management require closer monitoring. Studies show that such care models improve patient outcomes and satisfaction.
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Kurt C. Stange, MD, PhD is a family physician and epidemiologist with an active clinical practice. At Case Western Reserve University he is the Gertrude Donnelly Hess, MD Professor of Oncology Research, and Professor of Family Medicine, Epidemiology & Biostatistics, Oncology and Sociology.

Dr. Stange is an American Cancer Society Clinical Research Professor. He serves as editor for the peer-reviewed, indexed, primary care research journal, the Annals of Family Medicine, and directs the multi-site Center for Research in Family Practice and Primary Care, one of the three research centers funded by the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Dr. Stange is actively engaged in ongoing basic and applied research that aims to understand the core structures and processes of primary care practice and their effect on preventive service delivery and patient outcomes, and to discover new methods of enhancing the comprehensive, integrative and relationship-centered generalist approach to patient care. He is a Past-President of the North American Primary Care Research Group, and is a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

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