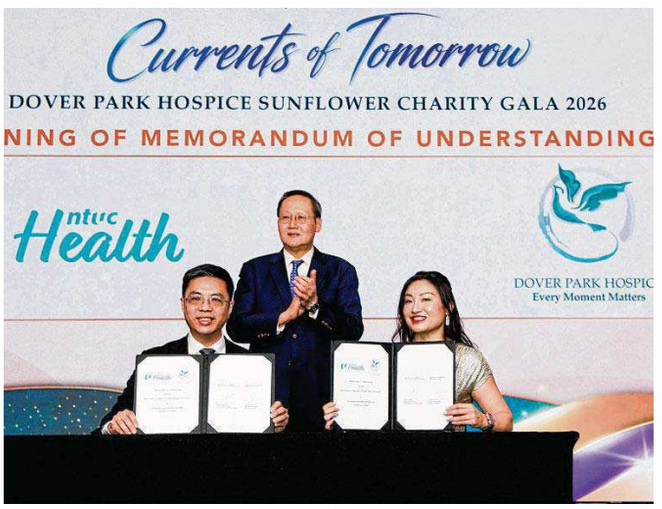
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The Straits Times (Mon - Wed), Singapore

Nursing home staff to be trained in end-of-life care for seniors



Minister for Energy, Trade and Industry (Energy and Industry) Tan See Leng witnessing the signing of a memorandum of understanding by NTUC Health chief executive Choo Kin Poo and Dover Park Hospice chief executive Liew Li Lian on Oct 25. The new initiative aims to benefit more than 1,600 residents. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

Two-year pilot initiative part of efforts to address critical need in fast-ageing society

Wong Pei Ting
Correspondent

Nursing home staff will get training in palliative and end-of-life care for elderly residents under a new tie-up between Dover Park Hospice and NTUC Health that aims to benefit more than 1,600 residents.

The two-year initiative is part of efforts to address a critical need in Singapore's fast-ageing society, the two organisations said in a joint statement on Oct 25.

The pilot programme – involving about 60 nursing and care staff – is expected to start early in 2027 at the NTUC Health Nursing Home in Geylang East, with the likelihood of expanding to the five other nursing homes the co-operative operates.

Training will focus on equipping front-line healthcare workers with skills to provide palliative care in the nursing homes, aimed at helping residents receive end-of-life care in a more familiar setting.

Singapore is grappling with the challenges of an ageing society in which more than one in five citizens is 65 or older.

Speaking at a Dover Park Hospice fund-raising gala at Shangri-La Singapore hotel on Oct 25, Minister for Energy, Trade and Industry (Energy and Industry) Tan See Leng, the guest of honour, said that while two-thirds of Singaporeans would prefer to die at home, nearly two-thirds of Singapore residents died in hospitals in 2023.

"There is more we can do to better support the end-of-life wishes and care preferences of our patients," he added.

Tan said demand for palliative care would continue to grow as more Singaporeans live longer, often with serious illnesses and increasingly complex care needs.

Dover Park Hospice chairman Ong Hung Guan in his address said longer lifespans have brought growing pressures on healthcare resources and families, particularly caregivers who juggle work, raising children and looking after ageing parents. Caregivers also face burnout, financial strain and emotional exhaustion, he added.

Ong said Dover Park Hospice must look beyond delivering care within its own facilities and patients' homes.

"If we focus solely within our own walls, we will only ever be a shelter from the storm. We need to move from being a shelter in the storm to truly changing the climate," he added.

Dover Park Hospice and NTUC Health, under the pact inked at the charity gala, will focus on taking stock of their existing palliative care capabilities, and develop training and mentorship programmes for community care staff.

Sharing best practices and research into end-of-life care will also form part of the initiative.

At the pilot stage, there will be an evaluation of care outcomes and areas like staff competency, symptom management, avoidable hospital transfers and the ability to support residents in receiving appropriate end-of-life care within the nursing home in line with their wishes.

The tie-up will bring together Dover Park Hospice's specialist clinical expertise and NTUC Health's network of nursing homes, the organisations said.

NTUC Health chief executive Choo Kin Poo said equipping staff with palliative care capabilities can help them continue caring for residents they know well. It will also help staff provide residents with compassionate and comprehensive care that respects their comfort and wishes, and reassurance and personalised support towards the end of their lives, he added.

Dover Park Hospice chief executive Liew Li Lian said the tie-up can help make quality end-of-life support accessible to more seniors within their communities.

The two organisations, in response to queries, said the initiative is not designed to incur extra costs for residents and their families. Instead, the focus will be on staff training and capability-building activities.

Care-related fees and subsidies will continue to be governed by existing nursing-home funding and subsidy frameworks.

Any changes to care arrangements that will affect fees will be made known to residents and their families, they added.

The fund-raising gala raised more than $900,000 to support subsidised patients receiving inpatient, home and day care services from Dover Park Hospice.

More than $50,000 was raised through a performance by Tan, who sang two songs at the gala.

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SUMMARIES

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