150 undergrads a year at Imperial College-NTU’s medical school

By Janice Heng

SINGAPORE’S third medical school will be a tie-up between Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Imperial College London.

The Imperial College-NTU Medical School will take in 150 undergraduates a year, helping to meet Singapore’s increasing demand for doctors.

The tie-up, which has been in the works since last year, was announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong last night.

“Our population is ageing, we have a bigger population – we need more doctors,” he said in his National Day Rally speech.

Singapore’s existing medical schools have already been expanding.

The National University of Singapore’s (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine has been steadily increasing its intake from 200 students in 2008 and will reach 300 next year – its maximum intake.

The Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School took in 50 students last year, double its 2007 intake.

The Government has also stepped up overseas recruitment efforts, with 200 foreign doctors hired this year.

But there is still a need to get more Singaporeans to become doctors, Mr Lee said. The new school will create more places for those who wish to study medicine.

It will also attract good international students who may live and work here as doctors, he added.

Students contacted by The Straits Times welcomed the increased opportunities for aspiring medical students here.

Mr Chng Zi He, 21, wanted to go to medical school but felt that his A-level grades would not have secured him a place in the competitive NUS course.

“If the NTU school had been around then, I might have tried for it,” said Mr Chng, who is considering an undergraduate medical programme in Australia, or a postgraduate medical degree either here or overseas.

Another student who welcomed the news is Mr Ajit Nair, 22, who was unsuccessful in his application to NUS’ medical school in 2007 and is now studying medicine at Monash University in Australia.

“I think the new NTU medical school will definitely stem the talent drain somewhat, because NUS has far too few places for the number of people in Singapore who want to do medicine. Now they won’t have to change course or try their luck overseas,” he said.

In Parliament last year, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen said the Government was considering a third medical school to improve the doctor-to-patient ratio and quality of health care by 2015, when two new public hospitals will be up and running at full capacity.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) asked NTU to submit a proposal for such a school in May last year. A month later, NTU said it intended to ally with Imperial College London in setting up the school.

That intention has now been made real, with MOE set to announce further details of the tie-up this week.