NTU, Imperial ink agreement for Singapore's 3rd medical school

By LEE U-WEN

SINGAPORE'S third medical school - on track to open its doors in 2013 - will help stem the 'brain drain' that the country is facing and ensure there is a constant stream of high-quality doctors ready to tackle the needs of a rapidly ageing population here.

Many of the Republic's brightest young minds have little option but to head overseas because of the limited number of university places here, so the new school - a tie-up between the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Imperial College in London - will give them fresh opportunities to pursue their medical degrees locally, said NTU president Su Guaning.

Called the Imperial College-Nanyang Medical School (ICNMS), the school - to be located near Tan Tock Seng Hospital in the Novena area - will award a joint degree from both institutions. This is the first degree that the 103-year-old Imperial College is developing, delivering and awarding outside of the UK.

The school is expected to admit its first batch of 50 students in three years' time. The plan is to eventually reach a steady state of 150 new students a year. According to senior vice-dean Martyn Partridge, they must have not only the brains but also the 'humanity' to administer the proper patient-centred care. He was speaking at a press conference ahead of a signing ceremony between NTU and Imperial to formalise their partnership.

'While the 150 students is quite a substantial size, we won't be sacrificing on quality. There is no shortage of top students who want to do medicine in Singapore,' said Dr Su.

Education Minister Ng Eng Hen, who was among a group of VIPs invited to witness the event, described the new school as an 'important project' for Singapore, having noticed the parallels in Imperial's development and NTU's potential and strategic direction.

Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan said that he was confident that the school would be a 'great success' and would complement the other two schools. 'All three will cooperate but also compete to gear up a new generation of doctors who will transform health care and help Singaporeans stay healthy.'

It was just two months ago when Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced in his National Day Rally speech that Singapore would have a third medical school to meet the country's increasing demand for doctors.

The two other medical schools are also growing their intakes. The Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore (NUS) is growing from 260 students in 2008 to its maximum of 300 by next year. The Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, meanwhile, admitted 56 students last year, twice its 2007 intake.

Meanwhile, it was announced that A*Star chairman Lim Chuan Poh will be the temporary governing board chairman to help guide the establishment of ICNMS. A former permanent secretary at the Education Ministry, Mr Lim is both a member of the NTU's board of trustees and a fellow at Imperial.