Medical school with a difference

Students at 3rd facility can learn about healthcare economics, how to run a clinic

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SINGAPORE — Come 2013, an inaugural batch of 50 students will start their five-year undergraduate course at Singapore's third medical school.

Studying under professors from the Imperial College London and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), these students can tap on their medical, engineering and business expertise.

Enrolment at the school, which has not been named yet, will be ramped up gradually. It targets an eventual steady enrolment of 150 students. At his National Day Rally address last Sunday, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that the NTU will partner Imperial, which is among the top five universities worldwide, for the new medical school.

Providing more details on Tuesday, the Ministry of Education (MOE) said Imperial will lead the curriculum development and run the school together with the NTU — making it a first for Imperial, which has not ventured beyond the United Kingdom.

NTU president Su Guan Ping said the partnership, which covers an initial term of 18 years, gives the medical school a "highly-recognised and high-level" degree.

Situated next to Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the school will also partner the National Healthcare Group for clinical training.

NTU provost Bertil Andersson pointed out that, other than learning "what is bacteria and a kidney", students could learn how to run a clinic efficiently, understand healthcare economics and learn how to cure patients using engineering.

Dr Su noted that the NTU has more than 10 years of experience developing medical devices and technology and is the No 1 business school in Singapore.

Said Dr Su: "We'll have a major role to play in training doctors as medical leaders ... who can lead medical teams and spread medical care into the home, into the community, to reach out to elderly patients in our ageing society."

For a start, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen has set out the mission for the school: Producing good doctors Singaporeans can trust.

Mr S L Goh, 20, who will be studying medicine in Australia, said having a third medical school here provides more places for students keen on pursuing medical studies, especially for those who cannot afford to study overseas.

But he pointed out that prospective students may feel uncertain about applying to the new school, given that it has not established itself.

The MOE has also announced that it will fund up to 300 to 400 places annually for new degree programmes to be offered by the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) and Lasalle College of the Arts, in partnership with reputable overseas universities.

In studying proposals by both institutions, it will consider areas such as the quality of the programme and the needs of the economy. A Nafa spokeswoman told MediaCorp it was in talks with overseas universities.

Lasalle student Nadia Abdul Rahman, 21, who is pursuing a degree programme that is validated by an overseas university, finds her fees of about $21,000 a year "challenging". The MOE funding for future students will help them focus on their studies, instead of having to do part-time work, she said.

THE INITIATIVES

New medical school
- NTU partners Imperial College London and National Healthcare Group to offer five-year undergraduate medical degree
- First intake of 50 in 2013; enrolment to hit 150 students per year
- Own governing board, including representatives from Imperial and NTU

Funding for Nafa and Lasalle
- 300 to 400 places for new degree programmes offered in partnership with overseas universities

Funding tertiary institutions
- $4 billion over the next 20 years to match funds raised by universities; half will be set aside in a trust
- Starting yesterday, the Government will match donations for new projects by 3:1 and donations to existing universities by 1.5:1