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Values-centred education important in medicine: Heng

SINGAPORE — Training doctors to be competent and arming them with soft skills, such as leadership, will not be sufficient for Singapore's newest medical school. The Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine should also focus on a "values-centred education" for its undergraduates, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday.

BY SIAU MING EN - 4 HOURS 34 MIN AGO

SINGAPORE — Training doctors to be competent and arming them with soft skills, such as leadership, will not be sufficient for Singapore's newest medical school. The Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine should also focus on a "values-centred education" for its undergraduates, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday.

He made this point at the opening of the Toh Kian Chui Annex at the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine's Novena campus, where the three-storey building was named in recognition of a S\$20-million gift from the Toh Kian Chui Foundation.

"A values-centred education is of particular importance, especially in medical education," Mr Heng said. "All doctors will need to have within them the compassion, empathy and integrity to deal with each and every patient. They will also be faced with many difficult situations where they have to exercise judgment."

The Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine is a joint collaboration between Nanyang Technological University and Imperial College London, and the second to provide undergraduate training here. Earlier in August, the school welcomed its first batch of 54 students, selected from more than 800 applicants.

The S\$20 million from the Toh Kian Chui Foundation will go towards supporting undergraduate student scholarships — up to 25 to be given annually — establishing a Distinguished Professorship, and furthering medical education and research, among other things.

Mr Toh Kian Chui, one of Singapore's pioneering entrepreneurs, started a prosperous road construction company, which built Changi Airport's first runway. He also contributed generously to many charities here.

Mr Heng yesterday called on the school to replicate Mr Toh's pioneering spirit, and provide "an

alternative model of undergraduate medical education in Singapore, spearheading innovation in educating and nurturing doctors with deep values. Medical students can also emulate Mr Toh's spirit of diligence and compassion".

He also pointed out that the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine provides a different model of medical education, and the diversity will allow Singapore to draw on the strengths of various approaches to medical education and benefit from the best of different pedagogies.

With healthcare demands evolving here, Mr Heng said: "Our healthcare system must remain responsive, and our healthcare professionals must be prepared to continually develop new capabilities to meet rising public expectations, and increasing demand for more specialised services."

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the event, Mr Lim Chuan Poh, Chairman of the school's Governing Board, said it will be looking at a "meaningful increase" for the next intake of students.

"From the early indication of students that have signed up for BioMedical Admissions Test, I think we'll have the same level of interest in this particular medical school, so we are very encouraged by that," he said. The test is part of the school's admissions requirements, on top of the A-level results or its equivalent.

While the school aims to increase its intake to 150 students in future, Mr Lim shared that it will "take some time". "We want to stay focused in ensuring that for every cohort that we take in, we have the capacity ready — both the physical capacity and also the clinical opportunities available to the students ... so getting the quality of the medical education right is very, very important."