

Healthcare professionals 'should embrace innovation and serve with heart'

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SINGAPORE— The healthcare community needs to embrace innovations in research and practice, on top of serving its patients with "heart", said Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean yesterday.

Speaking at the official opening of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine's Clinical Sciences Building in Novena, Mr Teo said while there are already "advanced methods and sophisticated equipment" to combat complex illnesses, the Republic is not immune to sudden changes.

"Pathogens are evolving at ever-faster rates, and can also be transmitted globally within a short period as countries are more interconnected," said Mr Teo, who is also Coordinating Minister for National Security.

Last year's Zika outbreak and the discovery of several drug-resistant tuberculosis cases in Ang Mo Kio "show that we are susceptible as well".

Technology may help in ways such as remote patient monitoring via home-care robots in the near future, and tele-consulting services, he said.

The Republic has also built up its biomedical research capabilities through the development of faster diagnostic kits for infectious diseases to contain their spread, as well as medical robots to assist in surgical procedures, for instance.

The medical school, Singapore's third, is a partnership between the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Imperial College London. It admitted its first batch of 54 students in 2013 and now has about a total of 440 students. It took in 120 students this year and the pioneer batch will graduate from the five-year course next July.

Students have their lessons both at NTU's main campus in Jurong West and at Novena, near Tan Tock Seng Hospital and other specialist centres and community care services. National Healthcare Group (NHG), the school's primary clinical training partner, operates Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Having the medical school located right next to one of the largest health centres in Singapore would allow for better interactions among the researchers, clinicians and patients,

said its dean, Professor James Best.

One area of the school's work is lung disease, in which researchers are working with clinicians to understand the reasons for the high asthma rate here, as well as the nature of chronic lung infections.

Imperial College London president Alice Gast said both universities also collaborate on student exchange programmes. So far, around 50 NTU students have gone to Imperial Col-

lege London — either in their second year for a week-long immersion programme that began last year, or in their final year for six-week-long elective placements that began this month. Imperial students visited NTU last year.

The visits expose students to the similarities and differences in medical education and healthcare in Singapore and the UK, said Prof Gast.

Even with technological advances,

Mr Teo said healthcare is "ultimately a human endeavour".

"This total-health approach requires good social skills and the ability to work in teams with other healthcare professionals, within and across the hospitals, clinics and community, to serve our patients with a 'big heart'," he said.

"This is especially important as our healthcare structures evolve to suit the needs of an ageing population."



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DPM Teo
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