Cheow Sue-Ann

The National Healthcare Group (NHG), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Dover Park Hospice have joined forces to set up a new centre to better understand patients with end-stage organ failure, including developing more effective tools for predicting lifespans.

Dr Allyn Hum, senior consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, said at an event unveiling the new initiative that while the focus in the past years has been on cancer patients, it is now more important to be shifted towards non-cancer diseases, as these patients have a different set of needs.

Such patients include those suffering from end-stage organ failure, diseases and even dementia.

Dr Hum said non-cancer patients often have a longer but more variable period of life experience, with many becoming unable to function normally due to pain and conditions such as breathlessness.

NHG, NTU and Dover Park Hospice will sign a Memorandum of Understanding on 12 October to commit to developing research and education in areas of non-cancer-related chronic diseases with the intention of launching the new centre, called the Palliative Care Centre for Excellence (PaCE), in its first and second education (PaCE), in the third quarter of next year.

The centre will develop training and education programmes to equip nurses and vocational education professionals and volunteers with skills to provide patients with a more comprehensive, supportive and non-invasive end of life.

The data collected from the research will also allow the doctors and researchers to fine-tune their definition of a set of biomarkers to identify vulnerable patients.

Dr Hum, who will be the director of the new centre, said: "It will allow for us to be there providing medical, emotional and psychological support from the moment they are diagnosed, throughout their period of deterioration, and also to be able to train them for those who cope with the bereavement process.

"We do not want to just come in when the patient is already on the last breath."

Over the past year, end-stage organ failure and death are increasing drastically.

In 2015 alone, such illnesses accounted for 33 per cent of deaths across National Health Care Group’s patients pool.

That same year, end-stage organ failure accounted for 43 per cent of deaths among Tan Tock Seng Hospital’s patients over 60.

suexann@spg.com.sg