
Centre to focus on end-of-life research, education

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The National Healthcare Group (NHG), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Dover Park Hospice are working together on a new centre to better understand patients with end-stage organ diseases, 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 time for more interest to be shifted towards non-cancer illnesses, 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 painful end-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 Oct 12 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 in Research and Education (PalC), in the third quarter of next year.

The centre will develop training and education programmes to equip healthcare professionals and volunteers with skills to provide patients with a more comfortable, productive and independent 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 biomedical indicators 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 their families to 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 years, end-stage organ diseases and failure are increasing drastically.

In 2015 alone, such illnesses accounted for 33 per cent of deaths across National Healthcare Group's patient pool.

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