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## Relax, she'll be in touch with you

Meet Emma, your new massage therapist.

That's short for Expert Manipulative Massage Automation, Singapore's first robotic massager. Its silicone tips can mimic the human palm and thumb, and it has entered service at NovaHealth TCM clinic, offering a good rubdown at a cheaper price. **FOR MORE, SEE PAGE 6**

# Are you ready for a robot rubdown?

by MELANIS TAI

Emma started work as a massage therapist at NovaHealth TCM Clinic yesterday.

Emma — short for Expert Manipulative Massage Automation — is a robotic massager, developed by a team of researchers, engineers and programmers at AiTreat, a start-up incubated by Nanyang Technological University (NTU). It is particularly good for neck and knee massages.

Emma has soft silicone tips that mimic the human palm and thumb, and can be warmed up for a traditional acupoint massage, also known as “tui na”.

AiTreat said more than 20 companies globally have expressed interest in Emma.

The idea for Emma came from AiTreat CEO Albert Zhang in 2014.

“Over the past seven years, I barely saw any local youngster signing up to be a TCM therapist. Emma addresses this manpower shortage,” he said.



Emma can massage a patient's back and knees. PHOTO: THE STRAITS TIMES

“Massage therapists will get tired as tui na requires strength and can be labour-intensive.”

Ms Calista Lim, a physician at NovaHealth, said the robot is able to help with longer massages while she attends to another patient.

Emma is also able to gather data such as muscle stiffness or blood pressure and circulation to track the progress of patients.

NovaHealth predicts lower costs for customers. For example, a treatment package

for lower-back pain, including consultation, acupuncture and a 20-minute massage, can cost up to \$150, but costs \$68 with a 40-minute massage by Emma and a human therapist.

Property agent Ken Tay, 31, who was treated by Emma yesterday, said: “It felt like a real person. Despite having 20 cameras pointing at me, I still fell asleep because it was so consistent and comfortable.”

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