More doctors to be trained in sports medicine

Graduate diploma course to focus on age-related injuries amid greying society

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As the population ages and more people turn to exercise, Singapore finds itself lacking in expertise in the area of sports medicine services. To meet the growing demand, more physicians, including general practitioners, will be trained in sports and age-related injuries under a new Graduate Diploma in Sports Medicine.

The initiative is being introduced jointly by Changi General Hospital (CGH) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

There will be no shortage of patients, given that more Singaporeans are exercising frequently. About 20 per cent of Singaporians engaged in sport activities at least three times a week in 2016, compared with just 16 per cent in 2008, according to a survey by Sport Singapore.

With the number of people over 60 set to double from 440,000 in 2010 to 900,000 in 2030, age-related injuries and ailments are also likely to rise. Elderly patients are at high risk of musculoskeletal injuries such as chronic back pain, sprains, arthritis and tendinitis. Common sports-related ailments include knee injuries and ankle sprains.

Despite growing demand, there is limited medical expertise in the prevention and non-surgical treatment of musculoskeletal conditions and injuries, even for physicians with fewer than 30 certified sports medicine physician licences.

Physiotherapists provide rehabilitative exercises for patients, but sports medicine doctors are required for proper diagnosis of injuries.

Associate professor of exercise physiology Fabian Lim of NTU’s Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine said, “Empowering general practitioners and family medicine physicians with this additional knowledge and skill set brings care to the heartland, so that injuries can be prevented and managed at the primary-care level, and more complicated cases can be promptly referred to the specialist clinics.”

The four-long postgraduate diploma programme — the first of its kind in Asia — will be conducted on a part-time basis and cover sports-relevant musculoskeletal injuries, cardiovascular diseases for the elderly and patients with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and hypertension.

NTU can capitalise on the expertise of CGH sports medicine doctors for students consultation opportunities with specialists with at least 10 years’ experience.

One member of the programme’s faculty is Professor Peter Hickner, a world-renowned expert in sports medicine at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

The course’s projected first intake of 20 students will start in July. Adjunct Associate Professor Roger Tan, a senior consultant in sports medicine at CGH, added, “There is increasing evidence regarding the role of physical activity in the prevention of chronic diseases. The skills imparted will enable doctors to use exercise as a tool in the battle against these diseases with confidence.”

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