

Premium

# New diploma will increase expertise in sports medicine to meet surging demand



Associate professor Fabian Lim of exercise physiology at Nanyang Technological University's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine tests for carotid-femoral pulse wave velocity, which is a non-invasive measure of arterial stiffness. PHOTO: NTU

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SINGAPORE - As the population ages and more people turn to exercise, Singapore finds itself sadly lacking in expertise in the area of sports medicine services.

To meet the growing demand, more medical practitioners, including GPs, will be trained in sports and age-related injuries under the new Graduate Diploma in Sports Medicine.

The initiative is being jointly introduced by Changi General Hospital (CGH) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. There will be no shortage of people seeking treatment given more of us are exercising frequently. About 38 per cent of Singaporeans engaged in sport activities at least three times a week in 2014 compared with just 16 per cent in 2001, according to survey by Sport Singapore.

With the population ageing – the number over 65 is set to double from 440,000 in 2015 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 tendonitis. Common sports-related ailments include knee injuries like an injured anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), and ankle sprains.

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

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

Associate professor Fabian Lim of exercise physiology at NTU's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine said: "Equipping general practitioners and family medicine physicians with this additional knowledge and skillset brings care to the heartlands, 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 year-long postgraduate diploma programme - the first of its kind in Asia - will be conducted on a part-time basis, and will cover sports-related injuries, exercise prescription for the elderly and patients with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and hypertension.

NTU can capitalise on the expertise of CGH in sports medicine to offer students consultation opportunities with specialists with at least 10 years of experience.

One member of the programme's faculty is Professor Peter Brukner, a world-renowned expert in sports medicine at La Trobe University in Melbourne. He was also the official physician for Australia's teams at the 1996 Olympic Games and the 2010 World Cup.

The programme's projected first intake of 20 students will start in July.

Adjunct associate professor Roger Tian, a senior consultant of sports medicine at CGH, added: "There is increasing evidence regarding the role of physical activity in the prevention and management of chronic diseases such as obesity, hypertension, coronary heart disease and diabetes.

"The skills imparted will enable doctors to use exercise as a tool in the battle against these diseases with confidence."