Tougher entry to S’pore’s 3rd med school

Students must also clear special test and 8 interviews

BY LIM ZHAIWEI

GETTING into medical school is seen by many students as a difficult challenge, but the process is about to get tougher.

That is because those vying for one of 50 places in Singapore’s third medical school — a partnership between Nanyang Technological University and Imperial College London — will need to surmount two new hurdles.

The first is a two-hour BioMedical Admissions Test (Bmat) administered by the Cambridge Assessment group in Britain.

The test, which includes multiple choice and writing sections, assesses areas such as problem-solving, organising ideas and applying scientific knowledge.

The second hurdle is eight mini-interviews with healthcare professionals such as nurses and therapists, as well as laymen who may assess candidates from the perspective of a patient.

Candidates will go through all the eight interviews, lasting five minutes each, within a day.

The aim is to assess candidates outside the realms of grades and test scores.

This rigorous admissions criteria was announced by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Medicine yesterday.

In comparison, the National University of Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, currently the only school for undergraduate medical study here, relies on academic results, panel interviews, an essay and a portfolio review.

The Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School uses the Medical College Admission Test used for entry to US medical schools.

The Lee Kuan Yew School, whose first term starts in August next year, will be the first outside Britain to use the Bmat as part of its admission criteria, said a senior manager at Cambridge Assessment.

Explaining the move, Professor Martyn Partridge, senior vice-dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School, said the test would help sift out the best applicants, many of whom are expected to have straight As.

“The Bmat tests aptitude as much as knowledge so it gives a much better ‘scatter’ of results,” he said.

He added that the Bmat scores could also be used in exceptional circumstances. For example, a sportsman who did not get perfect A-level results could still stand a chance. “If the candidate has a brilliant Bmat score, then of course that’s just the sort of person we would look at,” said Prof Partridge.

Around 1000 people, looking to apply to the top British medical schools, take the Bmat test in Singapore every year. But with the new medical school using the Bmat, many more are expected to sit the test.

This year’s exam on Nov 7 is on the same day as the A-level mathematics test, but Prof Partridge said arrangements have been made to hold the Bmat in the afternoon.

Some doctors are not convinced, however, of the usefulness of Bmat as a selection tool. Medical officer Tan Shermin, 27, said medical schools should instead place more emphasis on “soft skills” during selection.

She suggested that role-play, used commonly in medical school classes, could be used instead.

The Lee Kuan Yew School of Medicine is holding a series of talks at 10 schools and polytechnics over the next few weeks. Yesterday, sessions were held at National Junior College, Hwa Chong Institution (HCI) and Raffles Institution.

HCI student Lee Shi Yan, 18, said the talk has piqued her interest in applying for the school because of its emphasis on technology and hands-on learning.

She admits that the clash of the Bmat and A-level exams would be a challenge but points out that those interested in applying would make the effort to prepare for both.

“I think I will check out the test website later, and maybe start preparing if I decide to apply for the school.”