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Senior Health Correspondent

The Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) has launched a centre to study the changes in the brains of Asians before dementia sets in as well as find new strategies that can one day predict and delay the progression of the syndrome.

It is thus targeting people with suspected cognitive decline as well as mild cognitive impairment (MCI).

新加坡’s director of medical services Kenneth Mak, the guest of honour at the launch of the Demen-
tia Research Centre (Singapore), or DRCS, said that the centre aims to develop and validate novel biomarkers and new interventions for dementia in Asians. In Singapore, one in 10 people aged 60 and above lives with the condition.

NTU president Subra Suresh said DRCS will offer new avenues for developing a better understanding of neurodegenerative diseases.

Associate Professor Nagaendran Kandiah, director of DRCS, said: “The challenge with treating dementia is that if it is not picked up early, you miss the boat. Once you lose brain cells, there is nothing we can do to reverse that.”

Crucially, the centre aims to shed light on “Asian dementia” because of the biological factors unique to the Asian brain that increase the prevalence of dementia.

For instance, Asian patients are three times more likely than Caucasians to suffer from cerebral small vessel disease, which is a narrowing of the small blood vessels in the brain that then appear as white matter lesions. They can put one at increased risk of dementia and more rapid cognitive decline. Prof Kandiah also said that the prevalence of the APOE4 gene and the amyloid-beta gene, which are associated with Alzheimer’s disease, is much lower in Asian pa-
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tional trials, the APOE4 gene is an inclusion criterion.

Research done by the DRCS has shown that in Asians, small vessel disease results in more brain shrinkage among those who do not have the APOE4 gene, which shows that novel strategies may be needed to manage Asian patients with dementia, he said.

Furthermore, one in three Asian patients has the tau protein in his brain, known to be a risk factor for dementia, but no evidence of any amyloid-beta protein.

Prof Kandiah, who was previ-
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One of them is his patient, Ms Lena Wong, who is nearing 70 and keen to contribute to the efforts to delay the onset of dementia in people like her, who have mild cogni-

tive impairment.

Her forgetfulness became obvi-
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At the research centre, partici-
pants will go through a cognitive assessment that will include state-of-the-art blood tests to find brain proteins, specifically amyloid and tau, as well as a brain scan to look for brain shrinkage and the pres-
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Clinical research coordinator Ish Chen Ling, 25, extracting blood from homemaker Cecilia Chew Seet Yin, 64, a participant of the dementia study at Dementia Research Centre (Singapore). ST PHOTO: LIN SUY

White meat or fish

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