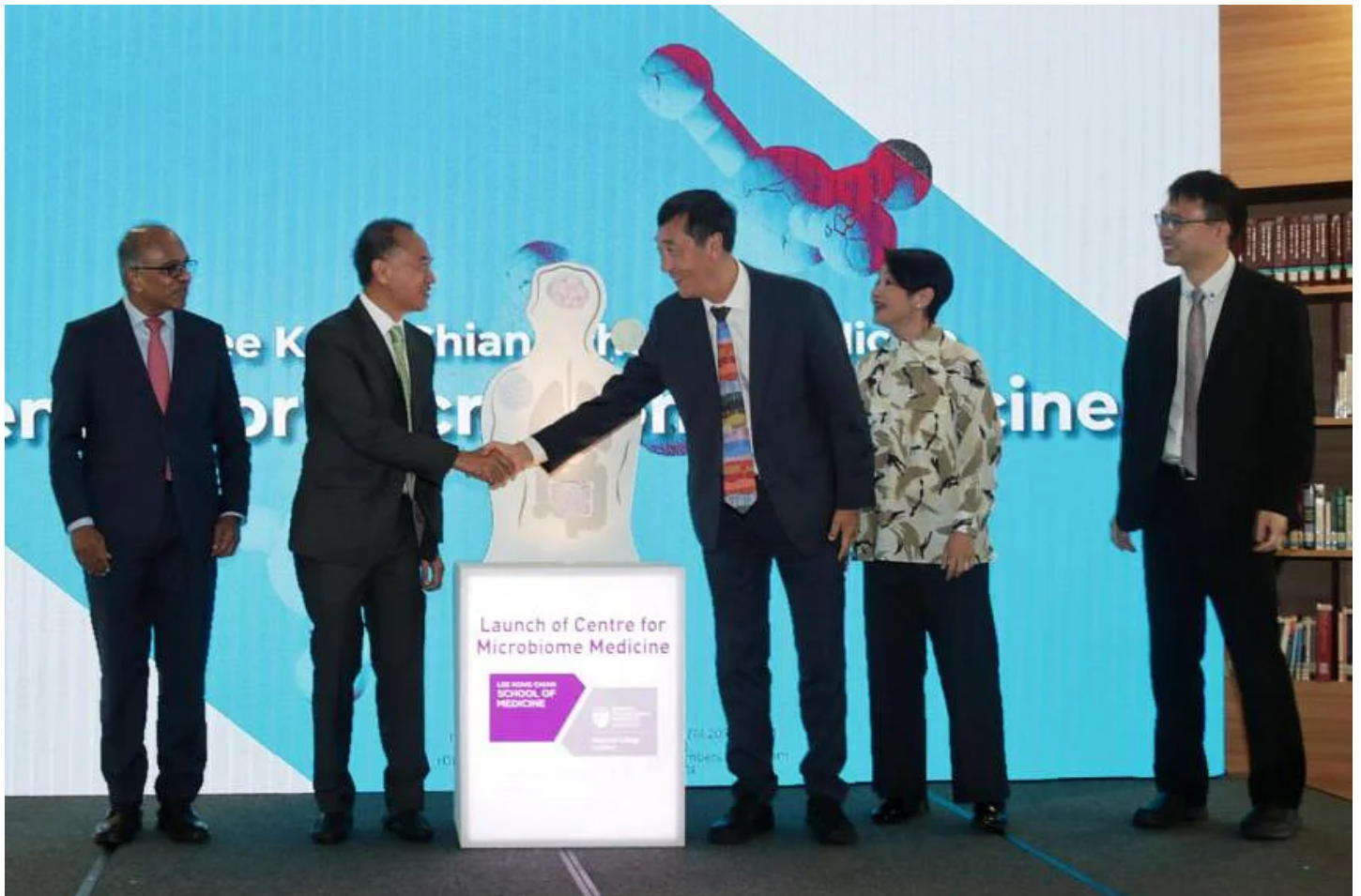


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New microbiome research centre to find new ways to treat obesity, chronic diseases



(From left) Professor Subra Suresh, president of NTU; Mr George Yeo, former foreign minister and guest of honour; Professor Joseph Sung, dean of LKCMedicine; Ms Petrina Leong and LKCMedicine's Associate Professor Sunny Wong. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY



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SINGAPORE - Microbiome - micro organisms that naturally live on, and inside, human bodies - could be the new foot soldiers to fight obesity and chronic diseases such as cancer, with a research centre set up to help win the war.

The Centre for Microbiome Medicine at Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) was launched on Wednesday by guest of honour George Yeo, Singapore's former foreign minister, and NTU president, Professor Subra Suresh.

With a deepened understanding of how microbiome is related to these diseases, researchers at the centre in the school's Novena campus hope to translate their discoveries into improved diagnostics and new treatments for patients.

Said Prof Suresh in his speech: "We know that trillions of microbes live on each and every one of us. Our interaction with them is important in health, but it can go wrong in some cases. In healthy individuals, the microbes exist peacefully.

"However, in unhealthy individuals, the imbalance of the microbes causes the body to be more susceptible to disorders such as obesity, cardio-metabolic diseases, cancers, lung and skin diseases."

Mr Yeo urged the new institute to work with other research facilities, and even Chinese medicine experts.

Professor Joseph Sung, dean of LKCMedicine, said the set-up of the centre is exciting as "microbiome represents an emerging field of research that has the potential to change medicine". He added that the centre will serve as a hub where scientists, clinicians and industry partners can collaborate and exchange knowledge and know-how.

Prof Sung said: "More importantly, it will allow Singapore as a whole to advance microbiome research beyond the capacities of individual groups or investigators. We are united by the same goal, which is to maximise the contribution that microbial science can make to improving patient health."

NTU declined to reveal the cost of setting up the research facility, which has received \$2.5 million from Ms Petrina Leong, Ms Sandy Leong and Mr Jimmy Leong through the Madam Wang Lee Wah Memorial Fund.

They are the children of Madam Wang who died in 2020 after a long illness.

Mr Leong said: "We would like to commemorate the second anniversary of our mother's passing with a meaningful gesture. We feel that microbiome research is an area that has the potential to bring wide-reaching and positive improvement for overall health, and we are excited to be part of this meaningful journey with LKCMedicine."

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