

More patients can be treated at dental centre opening in 2019

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A dental centre that can treat 500 patients a day, up from the 350 at its current premises at National University Hospital, will open in 2019 at Kent Ridge.

The centre will then expand its scope from just private patients now, to include subsidised patients.

It will focus on complicated cases, such as treatment for transplant patients, or those suffering from heart diseases or cancers.

Such patients might need to be warded or require blood transfusion, said dental dean, Associate Professor Grace Ong.

Another area of focus will be dental care for the elderly, given that one in four people in Singapore will be aged 65 years or older by 2030.

Prof Ong said the Dental Faculty, which will occupy three-quarters of the new building, will be ramping up the teaching of gerodontology to prepare its students to care for Singapore's ageing population.

She said that with proper care, people can keep their full set of teeth until they die, no matter how long they live.

She added that dental care is particularly important for the frail elderly and those with weak immune systems, as bacteria build-up in the mouth could migrate to their lungs, causing pneumonia.



A model of the National University Centre for Oral Health, which will open in 2019 at Kent Ridge. It will focus on complicated cases, such as treatment for transplant patients, as well as dental care for the elderly. PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong said at the ground-breaking ceremony of the National University Centre for Oral Health yesterday: "For the elderly, poor oral health can significantly affect their eating, possibly leading to malnutrition and other complications."

"Patients with uncontrolled diabetes tend to have more severe and rapid progression of gum disease."

He said that conversely, controlling gum disease contributes to better diabetic control, generally improving their health.

The new centre will also house the clinical training facilities for Nanyang Polytechnic students taking the Diploma in Oral Health.

Prof Ong said: "This will provide excellent opportunities for dental undergraduates and trainee oral health therapists to engage in collaborative learning and prepare them to work effectively as an oral healthcare team when they graduate."

She added that the faculty will exploit technology to better support interactive, independent

and on-demand learning for its undergraduates.

Mr Gan said that with the expanded facilities, the school will be able to take in more students, from 54 a year now to 80 a year by 2021.

The faculty has trained more than 2,000 dentists to date.

Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, chairman of the National University Health System and president of the National University of Singapore, said the centre is designed to "cater to as yet unmet needs", such as for elderly patients, those with

mobility problems or those who have special needs.

He added: "It will clearly cater to the growing demand in specialty areas such as the oral healthcare of patients with complex medical conditions, or the elderly who may have multiple chronic illnesses."

He also revealed that the new centre will facilitate research in a number of key areas, such as finding new ways to repair and regenerate soft tissue and bone.

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