

NUS will continue to increase intake in dentistry faculty

More S'pore-trained dentists wanted

✓ **SALMA KHALIK, THE STRAITS TIMES**

Singapore is not training enough dentists to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population, resulting in many foreign and foreign-trained dentists being recruited.

In recent years, locally trained dentists made up less than half the new dentists registered each year.

In 2014, for example, 141 — or 75 per cent — of newly registered dentists were trained overseas.

Only 46 — or 25 per cent — were local graduates.

A Ministry of Health (MOH) spokesman said the demand for dental care is projected to grow in the coming years.

Singapore's chief dental officer Associate Professor Patrick Tseng told *The Straits Times*: "With an ageing population,

demand for dental services is not only increasing but also changing due to the more complex dental needs of geriatric patients."

To cater to a growing need for dentists, the National University of Singapore's dentistry faculty increased its intake from 48 in 2010 to 54 last year, she said.

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The number will continue to grow to an annual intake of 80 undergraduates with the opening of the National University Centre for Oral Health in about three years.

She added that half the overseas-trained dentists are Singaporeans or permanent residents.

Foreigners account for only one in five dentists practising here.

Of the foreign-trained locals, 12 were recipients of a pre-employment grant where the ministry pays up to 60 per cent of tuition fees for the last two years of study at a recognised foreign dental school.

The grant is capped at \$50,000 a year.

These students are bonded, on graduation, to two years' service for a one-year grant, and three years if they received the full two-year grant.

Another four grant recipients will be returning to work here this year.

The number of dentists here has grown by 40 per cent between 2010 and last year.

Singapore now has about 2,200 dentists, giving a dentist to population ratio of 1:2,550.

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