

App for Singapore parents may be available soon

SINGAPORE – Parenting tips for those with newborns, delivered through a mobile application designed for Singapore, may be made available to a wider audience soon.

The Home But Not Alone app is developed by a team of researchers from the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in the National University of Sin-

gapore (NUS), and it aims to feed new parents with information they need and address common questions asked.

For instance, users can get professionals to advise on whether certain

foods help with a new mother's milk production, or post questions on a forum that a professional midwife will answer daily.

NUS said that the app would be tested in several leading public hospitals in the near future before it is released to the public for free.

Assistant Professor Shefaly Shorey, 38, who is the research team leader for the app, said: "One of the main questions asked by those who have given birth in Singapore is how they can (produce better quality) breast milk."

She noted that common practices vary among different races when it comes to making sure a new mother gets better nourishment: The Chinese drink red-date soup, the Indians drink rice gruel, and the Malays consume jamu, a traditional herb-and-spice concoction.

Though "they're not scientific", she said, discussing such matters through the app may help new parents feel more confident when they are told by others about what to do, "especially mothers-in-law".

Asst Prof Shorey, who is a mother of one, and a former nurse and midwife, said that through her clinical and personal experience, she noticed a gap in existing post-natal supportive care that she felt needed to be filled.

Another topic discussed in the forum is the use of a beanbag to "keep a baby's head round". "For these kinds of questions, you can't find (a professional) answer anywhere," she said. "But (I tell parents that) there is no harm as long as it is soft enough and you are not putting the baby's head in one position for (too) long."

Piloted and run from December 2015 to May last year with 250 parents (125 couples) from National University Hospital, the study found that participants who had used the app showed a boost in confidence and higher parenting satisfaction, along with a greater sense of perceived social support. Participants in the control group showed a drop in all three measures.

Mr Zhang Han, 34, an assistant manager, and his wife Hu Dan, 32, an electronic engineer, have two girls aged four and 16 months. The couple said that the app was a good source of on-the-go information.

Madam Hu said, for example, when their toddler kept crying and they did not know why, a midwife gave them "very detailed responses" through the app's forum.

"We learnt to observe the different sounds and lengths of crying, which all point to different things — the baby could be hungry, tired or have different needs."

She added: "It saves us time spent on travelling to the hospital, where we may need to wait for quite a while."

JOEY CHUA XUE TING

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