

Stats expert to head NUS School of Public Health

39-year-old biostatistician selected as next dean after a rigorous global search

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Numbers play a big role in the generation of sound public-health policies and programmes that are backed by evidence.

With this in mind, an international expert in health statistics has been named the next dean of the National University of Singapore (NUS) Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

Professor Teo Yik Ying, the current vice-dean for research at the school, will take over as dean from Jan 1.

Prof Teo, 39, does research in biostatistics, population genomics and genetic epidemiology.

He will succeed Professor Chia Kee Seng, 60, who is the founding dean of the school, which was established in October 2011.

Prof Teo will continue to hold a joint appointment at the Department of Statistics and Applied Probability under the NUS Faculty of Science.

When Prof Chia steps down, he will return to teaching and his research in molecular epidemiology – which is a scientific field that studies how genetic and environmental factors cause or prevent disease – where he will focus on chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan said yesterday that under Prof Chia's leadership, the school has transitioned successfully from an academic department to a

full-fledged faculty. "He has established solid foundations, spearheaded several strategic initiatives, and placed the school on the international public-health map," Professor Tan said.

These include the integrated Total Workplace Safety and Health approach, which is now driven by a tripartite committee involving the ministries of health and manpower, to enhance the safety, health and well-being of employees.

The school also leads the Singapore Population Health Studies – a population-based health research initiative that aims to find out how lifestyle, physiology, genes and their interactions impact the development of common health conditions. Some 50,000 participants have been recruited.

Prof Tan said Prof Teo was selected as the next dean after a rigorous global search. He is confident Prof Teo will drive good research, including in areas that will impact national policies and programmes.

Prof Teo said addressing important, complex public-health issues will remain an integral part of the school's mission as Singapore faces big national and global health challenges such as obesity and diabetes.

"There will be the increasing need for evidence-based approaches to guide public policies in health and healthcare that are both sustainable and cost-effective," he said.

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Professor Teo Yik Ying says addressing complex public-health issues will remain an integral part of the school's mission as Singapore faces big national and global health challenges such as obesity and diabetes. PHOTO: NUS