



They are certified collaborative prescribing practitioners (clockwise from left, back row): Principal clinical pharmacist at National University Hospital Associate Professor Priscilla How; registered advanced practice nurse and senior lecturer at NUS Nursing Zhou Wentao; assistant director of nursing and APN at National Healthcare Group Polyclinics Carolyn Chan; APN at NUH Karen Koh and principal pharmacist (clinical) at Institute of Mental Health Ng Boon Tat. PHOTO: LEE JIA WEN

Group of pharmacists, nurses certified to prescribe medicine

Participants also qualified to order tests but have to wait until their hospitals attain licence

Isabelle Liew

An initial group of highly qualified pharmacists and nurses can now prescribe medicine and order tests for patients without needing a doctor to sign off on them.

They are from different health-care clusters, and are the first to fin-

ish a national programme certifying them as collaborative prescribing practitioners (CPP).

But the 19 experienced pharmacists and 19 advanced practice nurses (APNs) from the National Healthcare Group, National University Health System and SingHealth will have to wait until their hospitals attain a licence, for which they can now apply, for them to start.

Having such qualified personnel who are able to prescribe medicine or order tests would save patients time, said healthcare professionals. Said Associate Professor Tham Kum Ying, education director and senior consultant for emergency medicine at Tan Tock Seng Hospital: "For the APNs in the emergency department whom I work with, my estimation is that they save each patient about eight minutes."

Prof Tham also chairs the committee overseeing the curriculum for the National Collaborative Prescribing Programme.

A graduate of the programme, Dr Karen Koh, 42, an APN at National University Hospital who set up four APN-led clinics in collaboration with cardiologists at NUH, said collaborative prescribing practitioners would become even more important with an ageing population. She said: "It gives us satisfaction to know we can go that extra mile for our patients, to give them that continuity of care. Otherwise, they would have to face prolonged waiting times while we consult the doctors and sort out prescriptions for them."

Mr Ng Boon Tat, 40, principal clinical pharmacist at the Institute of Mental Health, said the most valuable part of the programme was learning to conduct physical assessments and patient evaluations.

With those skills, he may be able to spot health issues faced by patients with schizophrenia, for instance, and bring them to the attention of a doctor. He said: "I can help the psychiatrist to co-manage patients within the collaborative practice agreement, and hopefully that can increase the availability and access of healthcare to them."

For it all to work, said NUS Department of Pharmacy Associate Professor Priscilla How, 42, inter-professional education is key. She said: "Through the course, I saw a lot of camaraderie because the nurses, doctors and pharmacists all came together to help and teach one another. It was really heartwarming to see all the different medical professions come together."

The National Collaborative Prescribing Programme is a three-month programme organised by National University of Singapore's Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies and Department of Pharmacy. It is conducted twice a year, and its next intake is on Aug 14.

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GIVING BETTER CARE

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DR KAREN KOH on how collaborative prescribing practitioners would become more important with an ageing population.