

# Teen actors role play for medical students at KKH

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For doctors, learning how to communicate well with patients can be tricky – especially when the patients are teenagers.

To help prepare medical students to treat teenage patients, a programme at the KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) lets undergraduates practise by having conversations with young theatre actors.

In each three-hour session, students from Duke-NUS Medical School and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine at Nanyang Technological University talk to the actors about difficult-to-broach topics such as sexual health or puberty, drug use, underage smoking and alcohol use.

They are also given communication tips and receive feedback from both the actors and KKH doctors as they go through the group exercises.

The aim of the adolescent simulated patient programme – which started in August 2016 – is to help students refine their communication skills with teenage patients, said Dr Kumudhini Rajasegaran, head of KKH's Adolescent Medicine Service.

She said: "As physicians, we have the responsibility to open discussions around these issues with our adolescent patients as they may not feel so comfortable."

To make the conversations realistic, participating actors are aged between 16 and 18, and trained by KKH doctors to act as patients, and give constructive feedback.

The actors are from Buds Theatre, a non-profit group with platforms for young theatre graduates to practise their craft. Each session has about 15 medical students and seven actors, and the students attend the session only once.

So far, about 200 medical students have participated in the programme, which is compulsory for those who do a paediatric clinical rotation at KKH.

The outcomes are encouraging.

Surveys by KKH found that students improved their skills in things like conducting interviews with teenage patients, discussing doctor-patient confidentiality, establishing rapport with patients and their parents, and negotiating for time alone with patients.

Students were also more confident in discussing tricky topics such as alcohol and tobacco use, as well as sexual health.

Ms Cheryl Woo, 28, a second-year medical student, said: "It's impossible to have a conversation about sensitive issues without fumbling the first time."

"So, it was great we were able to do so in a safe environment where we could get feedback and polish our skills."

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