

IMH to run new study on dementia, depression among elderly

Syarafana Shafeeq

A new study will be done to track dementia and depression among those aged 60 and above, with the results used to guide future policies and resource planning to better prepare for an ageing population.

It will be the second such study done by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). The first, conducted

in 2013, found that one in 10 adults aged 60 and above had dementia, while one in 27 had depression.

The latest research will also look at caregiver burden, healthcare utilisation, the cost of the disorders and the proportion of people who do not receive treatment.

The collection of data for the Well-being of the Singapore Elderly study, which is funded by the Ministry of Health (MOH), will begin this month and continue until

July next year, said IMH in a press statement yesterday.

A total of 6,000 participants are expected to be involved. Of these, 3,000 will be elderly folk, while the other half will comprise family members and caregivers nominated by elderly participants.

One-third of the elderly participants will be from the first study in 2013. The earlier study involved about 2,500 seniors and 2,400 caregivers.

The multidisciplinary research team involved in the latest study is led by Professor Chong Siow Ann, senior consultant at IMH, and Associate Professor Mythily Subramaniam, assistant chairman of IMH's medical board (research).

The team includes clinicians and experts from IMH, MOH, Changi General Hospital, National University of Singapore, King's College London, and Greenwich University in London.

Prof Chong said: "As our population ages, the number of elderly with both these conditions would also increase, with inevitable consequences on healthcare costs and quality of life.

"This would mean a greater burden of care, loss of economic productivity, and distress and suffering among those affected and their family members as well."

Dr Ng Li Ling, senior consultant at the department of psychological

medicine in Changi General Hospital, said that the issues identified in the first study, such as the treatment gap and care burden of dementia, are a deep concern for Singapore's ageing population.

"Caring for people with dementia during the pandemic has increased the complexity of the situation, and added stress on caregivers. I believe that the second study is a step towards strengthening the network of services to improve the health and quality of life of both older adults and their caregivers," she added.

syarafanams@sph.com.sg