

# Knowledge gaps flagged to better support health system

## NUS medicine dean highlights 4 main gaps in clinicians' knowledge that must be addressed

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There are four main gaps in knowledge that must be addressed so that clinicians can better support the public health system in the future, Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, said yesterday.

These gaps lie in the areas of practising medicine well in a community setting rather than just a specialised one, improving human potential, health economics and health systems, he added.

On April 24, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said there is a need to further develop emphasis on public health here, following lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Professor Thomas Coffman, dean of Duke-NUS Medical School, had previously told *The Straits Times* he believed the push to strengthen Singapore's emphasis on public health will see the role of clinicians shift in the coming years.

He said: "While providing therapeutic care to patients will remain the major responsibility of clinicians, understanding and incorporating the contemporary principles of public health and preventive care will take on increasing importance."

Agreeing, Professor Joseph Sung, dean of Nanyang Technological University's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, said: "Conveying accurate information about vaccines and promoting cancer screening... are just a few examples of what doctors should do."

Yesterday, Prof Chong told ST in a follow-up interview: "If you want to really start to promote population health, then you have to think beyond patients who are sick, to those who are relatively well, and how you make them more healthy."

There is a need for a "new breed of doctors" who understand human potential in medicine, ensuring that early life factors align so that a child is born with the very best start that he can have.

This may involve ensuring a mother-to-be gets the right nutrition when she conceives – a subject doctors may not have much knowledge of, said Prof Chong.

He said that too many doctors are currently trained to function in a specialised setting, such as a hos-

pital, rather than in a community setting, such as in a general practitioner clinic.

In the community setting, it is crucial to understand that the social determinants of health are probably more critical than other

factors, said Prof Chong.

Many doctors also lack knowledge about health economics, he said.

This may result in overprescribing tests to patients covered by insurance, raising healthcare costs.

He also said doctors need to improve their knowledge of the health system and how it works, so they can properly hand over their patients to the next stage of their treatment.

Prof Chong said his school has taken several steps to address these gaps, including recruiting experts in family medicine, conducting research into human potential, and offering courses in health economics and health systems.

He added that he believes clinicians who first work as doctors and then go on to specialise in public health can contribute to the public health system with their knowl-

edge of disease and experience on the ground.

Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of NUS' Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, had previously told ST that public health involves experts drawing on various disciplines – both medical and non-medical – to improve the population's health.

"I must accept that as a statistician, I can contribute to only one part of the solution. I need to work with a behavioural scientist, a clinician, an economist, to jointly put together the solution," he said.

Yesterday, Prof Chong said: "I think there'll be a need for physicians who actually go out and practise, and then go into public health... This gives an extra dimension to the care they provide, in order to promote health as well as to treat patients."

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A NEW BREED OF DOCTORS

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**PROFESSOR CHONG YAP SENG**, dean of NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.