

Goh Foundation pledges \$6.35m to transform care for the terminally ill

Patients with cancer at NCCS will be the first to benefit from a palliative care programme

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The Goh Foundation pledged \$6.35 million to the SingHealth Duke-NUS Supportive and Palliative Care Centre (SDSPCC) on Monday to boost services for seriously and terminally ill patients in Singapore.

Only about four in 10 people who die here each year receive specialist palliative care services, which help improve the quality of life of patients facing life-threatening illnesses by relieving suffering, SDSPCC said in a statement on Monday.

The medical centre said funds from the foundation will go towards setting up the Goh Foundation Innovation in Supportive and Palliative Care Programme, which will study the effectiveness and implementation of a novel health coaching programme for patients with cancer, among other things.

Dr Tan Eng Liang, board member of the Goh Foundation, said the programme will improve access to supportive and palliative care in the community, so patients are better supported as they deal with the challenges of living with cancer.

The Goh Foundation was started by paint tycoon Goh Cheng Liang in 1994 to help conduct philanthropic work. Apart from funding scholarships and bursaries, the foundation supports medical research.

Of the 9,000 patients in Singapore

who received supportive and palliative care between April 2020 and March 2021, the median duration of acute palliative care for hospitalised patients was 11 days before they died, said SDSPCC.

Meanwhile, the duration of palliative care for those in home hospices was 38 days before death, it added.

Said Assistant Professor Grace Yang, director of research at SDSPCC: "What this shows is that palliative care is accessed very late in a patient's journey."

Patients with cancer at the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) will be the first to benefit from the programme.

NCCS chief executive William Hwang said: "Facing the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness is distressing. We want to empower patients with cancer so that they can make healthcare decisions according to their personal preferences."

"The Goh Foundation's generous gift will allow more patients to get the support they need so that they are better equipped to cope with the physical, psychological and emotional burden of the disease."

Under the programme, patients will receive support from dedicated health coaches, who will be integrated into primary care teams to ensure that coaching activities are aligned to the patients' medical care.

The health coaching programme will be offered to both NCCS pa-

tients and their caregivers so that they can develop coping skills such as problem-solving, navigating treatment decisions, communicating with loved ones and healthcare professionals, and symptom management.

This proactive approach that enables patients to be effective managers of their own health and wellness is in line with the national Healthier SG initiative, SDSPCC said.

Said Clinical Associate Professor Patricia Neo, head of SDSPCC: "By educating and empowering patients, they can move from being passive recipients of health services, to being activated and informed partners in managing their healthcare needs."

"This will augment current provision of supportive and palliative care services to meet the rising needs of our population."

The programme will also tackle mental and social wellness for those with serious illnesses by working towards a more systematic and comprehensive model of bereavement care.

This includes offering individual bereavement counselling, group therapy sessions and practical assistance such as return-to-work support for bereaved spouses and interim childcare support for young children.

Other initiatives under the programme include a database to track patient-centred outcomes and drive research, a professorship in supportive and palliative care, and an academic fund, said SDSPCC.

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