

MEDIA RELEASE

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HEALTHY HEARING, HEALTHY AGEING – NEW COMMUNITY-BASED HEARING CLINICS FOR ELDERLY SINGAPOREANS

Singapore — Unaddressed hearing loss, especially among the elderly, is associated with cognitive decline, dementia, social isolation and depression. It also presents workplace safety challenges and may lead to increased dependence on family, friends and community support services, as well as a fear to go out alone. Some elderly are reluctant to visit a hospital for assessment of hearing loss that they do not deem as a major health problem.

To assist them, a multi-disciplinary team from the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine), National University Hospital (NUH) and Singapore General Hospital (SGH) has established three community-based hearing clinics that leverage on a new boothless method developed by the hearing research team at NUS Medicine. It uses a portable hearing test system that has a built-in sound isolation technology for constant noise monitoring, allowing hearing tests to be conducted without the need for sound insulated testing rooms typically found in hospitals. The method allows greater flexibility for audiologists to provide hearing care to the elderly in community settings and reduces cost in its setup.

Dr Jenny Loo, Senior Principal Audiologist and Head, Department of Otolaryngology, NUH, noted, “We never imagined that hearing testing can be done at your doorstep. This new model of community hearing care makes it possible for us to look towards providing hearing care to even home-bound individuals.”

“Having these hearing clinics in the community not only offer greater convenience for the elderly but also free up resources for hospitals like SGH so that we can focus on patients with more complex hearing issues,” said Mr Gopal Krishna Sarepaka, Senior Manager and Senior Principal Audiologist at SGH’s ENT Centre.

Besides providing early and convenient access for elderly with hearing loss symptoms, these clinics are helping to reduce patient load at the restructured hospitals, allowing them to focus their attention on patients with severe and complex hearing and balance disorders. The three clinics are located at Pioneer Polyclinic managed by NUH, as well as Tiong Bahru Community Health Centre managed by SGH and SGH’s Sleep Centre in SingHealth Tower. These clinics are open on weekdays, and are open to referrals from selected polyclinics and general practitioner for adult Singaporeans with hearing issues. The consultation fee varies based on the subsidy status of patients. They can get also their hearing aids at the same subsidy level as others seen at a restructured hospital, if they are eligible.

Professor William Hal Martin, NUS Professor of Otolaryngology and Public Health, NUS Medicine, who led the development of the new method said, “We are excited to be able to help our wonderful seniors connect with their families and friends by hearing well again. We also hope that the results of this collaborative research study will provide valuable insights that can shape the future of hearing care in Singapore and globally.”

Although still in its pilot phase, both SGH and NUH have found that the hearing test results using this new boothless method is comparable to those conducted in hospitals. Concurrently, the NUS Medicine hearing research team is also comparing the wait times and experiences of patients at restructured hospitals and a community-based hearing clinic. More of such community based clinics may be set up depending on the outcome.

Chinese Glossary

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About the National University Hospital

The National University Hospital is a tertiary hospital and major referral centre with over 50 medical, surgical and dental specialties, offering a comprehensive suite of specialist care for adults, women and children. It is the only public hospital in Singapore to offer a paediatric

kidney and liver transplant programme, in addition to kidney, liver and pancreas transplantation for adults.

The hospital was opened on 24 June 1985 as Singapore's first restructured hospital. Each year, the Hospital attends to more than one million patients.

As an academic health institution, patient safety and good clinical outcomes are the focus of the Hospital. It plays a key role in the training of doctors, nurses, allied health and other healthcare professionals. Translational research is pivotal in the Hospital's three-pronged focus, and paves the way for new cures and treatment.

A member of the National University Health System, it is the principal teaching hospital of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and the NUS Faculty of Dentistry.

About the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine)

The NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine is Singapore's first and largest medical school. Our enduring mission centres on nurturing highly competent, values-driven and inspired healthcare professionals to transform the practice of medicine and improve health around the world.

Through a dynamic and future-oriented five-year curriculum that is inter-disciplinary and interprofessional in nature, our students undergo a holistic learning experience that exposes them to multiple facets of healthcare and prepares them to become visionary leaders and compassionate doctors and nurses of tomorrow. Since the School's founding in 1905, more than 12,000 graduates have passed through our doors.

In our pursuit of health for all, our strategic research programmes focus on innovative, cutting-edge biomedical research with collaborators around the world to deliver high impact solutions to benefit human lives.

The School is the oldest institution of higher learning in the National University of Singapore and a founding institutional member of the National University Health System. It is Asia's leading medical school and ranks among the best in the world (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2021 by subject and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by Subject 2021).

For more information about NUS Medicine, please visit <https://medicine.nus.edu.sg/>

About Singapore General Hospital

Singapore General Hospital, a member of Singapore Health Services, is the public sector's flagship hospital. Established in 1821, SGH is Singapore's largest acute tertiary hospital with 1,700 beds and national referral centre offering a comprehensive range of more than 40 clinical specialties on its campus. Every year, about 1 million Singaporeans benefit from medical care delivered by its 800 specialists. As an academic healthcare institution and the bedrock of medical education, SGH plays a key role in nurturing doctors, nurses and allied health professionals, and is committed to innovative translational and clinical research in her continual strive to provide the best care and outcomes to her patients. www.sgh.com.sg

