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# More NUP polyclinics to offer mental health, geriatric services

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Three more NUP polyclinics will offer psychiatric services for mild to moderate forms of common mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and insomnia by 2024 to anchor such care in the community, and will also help relieve the load at hospitals.

By this October, Bukit Panjang Polyclinic – which opened last year – will have a Health and Mind Clinic, said Dr Benjamin Cheah, the lead of the Health and Mind Programme at National University Polyclinics (NUP), at a media briefing on Tuesday.

The plan is to expand these services to the other two polyclinics at the rate of one a year, he said. Choa Chu Kang Polyclinic will be up next, followed by Clementi Polyclinic. The other four polyclinics with a Health and Mind Clinic are Jurong, Pioneer, Bukit Batok and Queenstown.

At the same time, the National University Health System (NUHS), which runs the seven NUP polyclinics, is also expanding its geriatric services programme, where it trains polyclinic doctors as well as its community partners such as Lions Befrienders to identify and manage frailty in seniors.

Dr Michael Yong, NUHS' group chief of psychological medicine, said more patients have sought help at the polyclinics for mental health issues after the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic.

From March 2021 to February this year, NUHS had 799 community mental health patients, a number which was more than double the 380 it saw in the previous 12-month period. The patients' average age was 41 and about 58 per cent of the 799 patients had either anxiety, depression and/or insomnia.

"It's unfortunate because in the pandemic, we had to close a lot of clinics to focus on Covid-19 efforts," he said at a media briefing on Tuesday.

"As a result, we had patients who relapsed."

Dr Yong said they also saw new patients who were affected by the fear of Covid-19, Covid-19 information or the circuit breaker, for instance.

"The aim is to continue to have more polyclinics and more GPs trained to manage our mental health patients," he said.

"This is so we can have more clinic slots, to be able to fast-track patients who are very sick because right now, if you look at most departments or the hospitals, the waiting time can go up by one to three months."

Meanwhile, two more polyclinics under NUHS – Jurong and Pioneer – will offer geriatric services probably from September, as more family physicians and nurse care managers are being trained on how to identify and manage frailty in seniors.

Earlier this year, Alexandra Hospital started a similar programme in Queenstown Polyclinic and Clementi Polyclinic.



Dr Lydia Au, head of geriatric medicine at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, attending to a patient while Dr Kwek Sing Cheer, head of Bukit Batok Polyclinic, looks on. Dr Au initiated the geriatric services programme at two NUP polyclinics in 2019. The National University Health System (NUHS), which runs the seven NUP polyclinics, is expanding its geriatric services programme. Two more polyclinics under NUHS – Jurong and Pioneer – will offer geriatric services. PHOTO: NUHS

From July 2019 till March this year, the programme completed the assessment of 300 patients. A total of 124 were found to have a higher risk of falls.

Apart from NUP polyclinics, the other polyclinics here are under SingHealth or the National Health-

care Group.

At SingHealth Polyclinics (SHP), the Health Wellness Clinic caters to patients with mental wellness conditions. This clinic operates at the Tampines, Outram, Bedok and Punggol polyclinics on certain days.

Dr Guo Xiaoxuan, clinical lead of Health Wellness Clinics and clinic director of SHP-Punggol, said that there are progressive plans to include these services in their new or renovated polyclinics.

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