

Bringing GPs into the palliative care network

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SINGAPORE — When Madam Yeo Guat Ngoo lost her husband to lung cancer three years ago, she relied mainly on her family doctor for support, even though a hospice team was on hand during his final days.

“He’s familiar with us. If there are any problems, he can explain them to us better. We communicated with the hospice doctor, but there are some things which we find difficult to say, said Mdm Yeo, a sales assistant.

It is this bond that HCA Hospice Care, Singapore’s largest home hospice provider, wants to tap on.

As the need for better palliative care increases with Singapore’s ageing population, the hospice is reaching out to general practitioners (GPs) to improve the quality of care at a community level.

Said Dr Chong Poh Heng, deputy medical director at HCA Hospice Care: “When we institute any treatment, some of them will not take the medicines because it came from us, despite us being the experts. However, if it does come from the GP, they will faithfully take them.”

By being involved, the GP can also

provide better emotional and psychological support for the family, said HCA.

Under the programme, the GP will be brought on board only with the patient’s consent.

The initiative was announced on Saturday at a HCA symposium and a few GPs have expressed their willingness to be on board.

The hospice team — comprising a doctor, nurse and counsellor — will keep GPs in the loop on the patient and provide the necessary help and training, and develop a clinical management plan for each patient.

In turn, the team gains access to the patients’ medical records more easily.

Dr Tan Poh Kiang, a GP, said such an arrangement would allow him to seek advice beyond his expertise should a patient go to him instead of the hospice. “I can place a phone call to my counterpart, check whether the dose of medicine is appropriate, check whether it’s time to tail off something or to increase, or to add on.”

But communication channels between the GP and hospice team must be open and uncomplicated. “I want to know I can just pick up a phone or send an email to them,” he said.

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