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**Title : New home palliative programme launched**

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SINGAPORE: A new home palliative programme has been launched for children and teenagers with life-threatening or terminal conditions.

Called Star PALS (Paediatric Advanced Life Support), the programme aims to improve the patients' quality of life with support from a team of doctors, nurses and counsellors.

The three-year pilot costs some S\$3.1 million with 80 per cent covered by the Tote Board Community Healthcare Fund.

And the HCA Hospice estimates that more than 160 children can benefit from home palliative care every year.

Patients under the Star PALS programme may benefit from physiotherapy, occupational and speech therapy. It also aims to relieve the burden of caregiving by providing respites at home using a group of specially trained care staff called medi-minders.

17-year-old Wong Choon How has been suffering from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy - a disorder that involves muscle weakness.

Since April, Choon How has been receiving care from Star PALS and this has reduced the hassle of him having to go out of his house for check-ups.

"They will come to our house to help him do a check-up and measure his blood pressure. Sometimes, for minor ailments, they will prescribe medicine for him," said Choon How's mother, Madam Siok Bee Pan.

More patients like Choon How will benefit from quality end-of-life care by the Star PALS team.

Dr Chong Poh Heng, programme director for Star PALS, said: "For those who are suffering from advanced cancers which are not curable, we are able to help them accept what's ahead of them and plan some of these end-of-life care, which is so critical for them because we hope that at the end of the day when the stars stop shining, the parents can look back with fondness and not regret that they have not done their best for these unfortunate children."

Minister of State for Health Dr Amy Khor said: "These families can now look forward to spending more time with their loved ones at home rather than in the hospital. Advance care plans could be made more consistently to honour the wishes of patients and their parents in relation to medical management at the end of life."

The Health Ministry says it will continue to explore ways to extend the scope of home palliative care services to more patients.

- CNA/ir/ck