

TTSH is taking delirium care to the community

TTSH@Home provides caregiver education and brings inpatient-level care to homes

Judith Tan
Correspondent

When the 95-year-old patient who has moderate dementia was discharged from hospital, she became increasingly confused and agitated.

Her daughters initially thought the change in her behaviour was related to her dementia – that it had worsened.

“It was only during home monitoring by the Community Health Team that it was flagged that she had delirium due to a urinary tract infection (UTI). Before that, we had never heard of delirium. We just thought my mother’s dementia was getting worse,” said her daughter

Wong, 68, who declined to give her full name.

Delirium, a state of sudden confusion and a severe change in mental function that reduces the ability to focus, sustain or shift attention, often gets missed and is frequently mistaken for normal ageing or a worsening of dementia.

“It is usually caused by underlying medical conditions, such as drugs, infections, electrolyte imbalances, constipation and UTI,” said geriatrician Lim Jun Pei from Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

“It leads to adverse outcomes. Some of the patients would even describe it as a post-traumatic stress experience when they remember the episode they went through. There was a loss of digni-

ty, well-being, independence, as well as pain and suffering,” she added.

To lessen the burden and strengthen delirium care in the community, Lim and her team developed a new pathway within TTSH@Home, TTSH’s alternative hospital service that delivers inpatient-level medical care directly to a patient’s home, enabling suitable patients to receive hospital-level care safely at home.

It is supported by specialist oversight and home-based clinical support from a team of nurses, who also provide caregiver education that includes different phrases to help caregivers remember information.

This pathway was implemented after the team visited the National Health Service of Greater Manchester in Britain, where they observed its community delirium programme demonstrating how



Retired teacher Wong (right), who declined to give her full name, getting advice from TTSH senior staff nurse Annie Ling on how to hydrate her mother to prevent delirium, a condition often mistaken for worsening dementia. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

suitable patients could be managed safely outside the hospital, between February and March 2025.

Lim said a study by the team at TTSH found that more than one in 10 patients (11 per cent) aged 65 and above experienced delirium while admitted to hospital for surgery, and this risk was three times higher in people with dementia.

A separate study in Britain found that about three in 10 patients (31 per cent) who experienced delirium developed dementia within five years of the onset of delirium.

Both studies, she said, demonstrated the need for timely intervention to address the underlying causes.

Lim added that the early results

of the new pathway to recognise and manage delirium early within TTSH@Home “have been encouraging”.

The data from June to December 2025 found that three in 10 elderly patients (28.4 per cent) aged 85 and above who were cared for under the programme had a diagnosis of delirium.

Lim said that while they generally needed 1.25 more days of care on average, the rate of returning to hospital remained similarly low.

While there is no specific national figure for the total annual healthcare cost attributed only to delirium in Singapore, in the United States, it is higher than the costs of many other conditions common in

the elderly.

The estimated annual national healthcare cost burden of delirium in the US is US\$152 billion (S\$194 billion), second only to cardiovascular disease, at US\$258 billion, and higher than that of diabetes, at US\$92 billion.

Beyond supporting patients at home, TTSH has also trained more than 130 people across 23 community partner organisations, including nursing homes, in delirium and dementia awareness.

Lim said apart from medical factors, environmental factors can also contribute to delirium.

“For some patients, familiar home surroundings, supported by trained caregivers and structured clinical oversight, may help (them) remain calmer and more engaged in recovery,” she said.

For Wong, the home-based care for her elderly mother “made a world of difference”.

The coaching from the TTSH@Home nurses taught Wong to distinguish between delirium and dementia, and she now has the confidence to work with her domestic helpers to care for her mother.

“Learning to recognise the signs gave me the confidence to support her recovery at home. The helper now takes the initiative to record her blood pressure, temperature and oxygen levels regularly,” she said, adding that she is glad her mother has almost returned to her normal activities such as playing games like Swat The Fly.

juditht@sph.com.sg



Lynn Leng, whose husband George has young-onset dementia, says the Post Diagnostic Support Plus scheme is a godsend. It offers early palliative care and home support for people with dementia and their caregivers. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

\$3 million initiative to boost dementia care, home support

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

Lynn Leng, 55, has spent the past decade caring for her 56-year-old husband, George, who was diagnosed with young-onset dementia. However, his care needs have intensified as his condition has advanced to the late stage.

In mid-2025, George started attending daycare at a New Horizon Centre, which provided him with routine and gave Leng much-needed respite. That support ended in October when he was discharged following a seizure. The health episode left him unable to stand independently, requiring more care.

At home, the physical toll mounted. Leng developed knee and lower back issues from constantly transferring her 1.83m-tall husband between the bed, sofa and bathroom, even with aid from her domestic helper.

Relief finally arrived when she met Esther Vanessa Chua, the senior manager of palliative care at Dementia Singapore.

Through Chua, Leng discovered that George was eligible for a new initiative, called Post Diagnostic Support Plus (PDS+), that offers early palliative care and home support for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Announced on Sept 15, PDS+ is developed by Dementia Singapore and Lien Foundation, with a \$3.3 million four-year grant from the latter.

The service is being piloted at the four New Horizon Centres that provide daycare services for people with dementia. These centres, in Bukit Batok, Jurong Point, Tampines and Toa Payoh, are managed by Dementia Singapore.

“I was very anxious about every blister that he had,” said Leng, recalling how helpful it was when Chua arranged for a physiotherapist to visit her home.

Leng also hired a second domestic helper to share the load of caregiving.

PDS+ builds on an earlier Post Diagnostic Support (PDS) programme that Dementia Singapore and the Lien Foundation launched in 2020 to address the immediate post-diagnosis adjustment period. The PDS initiative has since been scaled nationally across other care providers, said the programme director at the foundation, Gabriel Lim.

PDS+ helps people at the late stage of dementia transition from centre-based to home-based care for up to one year. It plugs a gap as traditional palliative care is typically reserved for patients with a prognosis of under one year and is usually introduced near the end of life.

PDS+ has serviced 64 families since late November 2024.

At least 80 front-line Dementia Singapore staff are expected to be trained and more than 280 people living with dementia and their families are expected to benefit directly over the next two years.

“Ultimately, we want to mainstream this programme,” said Dementia Singapore chairman Philip Yap.

Based on the second Well-being of the Singapore Elderly study by the Institute of Mental Health, there were about 74,000 people living with dementia in 2023. This number is estimated to grow to 152,000 by 2030.

“When a person has dementia, it often comes with many other chronic, long-term illnesses. So care cannot be focused only on the mental health issues of dementia,”

Yap said.

Furthermore, over time, the condition will also affect the person’s physical function and their ability to upkeep daily activities, such as walking, dressing and toileting, he said.

Through an interactive AI tool called ACP GO!, PDS+ hopes to help people living with dementia indicate their care preferences earlier in the dementia journey, before decision-making capacities decline.

These advance care planning conversations, which start when they are still at the centres, help to avoid the distressing guesswork and conflict that often arise in families when making difficult decisions as dementia progresses.

Dementia Singapore chief executive Bryan Tan said PDS+ provides critical support for families struggling to initiate these conversations.

He experienced this first-hand when he tried to speak to his father, who was diagnosed with dementia in 2025.

“Every day, he fights to regain his identity, his dignity and even his independence,” he said. “Every conversation I had with him just ended up really bad because he didn’t want to talk about it.”

Dementia Singapore said it will be scaling its ACP Toolkit training and sharing the ACP GO! tool with other healthcare providers.

While PDS+ officially offers up to one year of support following the transition to home care, Yap said the programme will continue to offer help even after that. With PDS+, one care worker will be the main point of contact.

For Leng, PDS+ has been a godsend. “I feel very supported,” she said.

joyceteo@sph.com.sg

Students recognised for achievements in sports, arts



On Sept 9, 12 secondary and post-secondary students received the Capital Group Talent Award for their achievements in their respective sports or arts.

Each student will get \$6,200, to be disbursed over two years in four instalments. The amount is sponsored by Capital Group, an investment management company. The students, aged between 13 and 19, are involved in various fields such as Chinese calligraphy, rugby, football and ballet.

All award recipients are past and current beneficiaries of The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund (STSPMF), an initiative by ST that provides pocket money for children from low-income families. Pictured

with Lai Pei Si (far left), treasurer of STSPMF and group CEO of GX Bank, are (standing from left) Chen Xin Hao, 16, from Woodlands Secondary School; Jaylen Lai, 19, who graduated from Eden School; Law Yee Teng, 14, from Nan Hua High School; Tok Ming Xuan, 17, from Hwa Chong Institution (College); Madinah Wong, 17, from ITE College Central; and Katherine Wee, partner of Capital Group; as well as (first row, from left) Muhammad Zayd Zuhayr Zaidi, 13, from St Andrew’s Secondary School; Muhammad Adiel Mohd Andishahril, 13, from Naval Base Secondary School; Oscar Teo, 13, from Edgefield Secondary School, and Cadence Ang, 16, from North Vista Secondary School. PHOTO: CAPITAL GROUP

Experience Japan

Autumn Beauty in East South Hokkaido & Enchanting Tohoku
10D7N/11D8N
29 Oct
price fr. **\$6,588***

Scenic Wonders of Shikoku & Hiroshima with Seto Inland Sea
10D7N/10D6N/11D8N
05, 06 & 07 Dec
price fr. **\$6,288***

Autumn Highlights of West Shikoku & Northern Kyushu 10D7N
18 & 30 Nov
price fr. **\$5,888**

Fabulous Autumn Classic Japan 9D6N
19 Nov
price fr. **\$5,388***

The Best of Nagoya, Wakayama, Mie & Osaka 9D6N
18 Nov
price fr. **\$5,088***

Hokkaido Autumn Melody + 2N Tokyo 11D8N
05, 07 & 11 Oct
price fr. **\$5,688**

Autumn Colours in North Central Japan 10D7N
17 & 19 Oct
price fr. **\$5,188***

Autumn Elegance of the Hokuriku Region 10D7N
25 & 27 Oct
price fr. **\$5,488***

Winter Fun Classic Japan 9D7N
02 & 16 Dec
price fr. **\$5,088***

Winter Gourmet in Central Japan with Snow Monkey 10D7N
07 & 13 Dec
price fr. **\$5,388***

Hokkaido Winter Wonderland 9D7N
*SQ Direct Flight to Hokkaido
01, 07 & 23 Dec
price fr. **\$5,788***

Winter Wonders in North Central Japan & Izu Peninsula 8D7N/9D7N
08 & 24 Dec
price fr. **\$5,388***

Hokkaido Winter Festival & Icebreaker + 2N Tokyo 11D8N
27 Jan, 04 & 08 Feb
price fr. **\$6,388***

Winter Light Up & Gourmet Indulgence in Central Japan 9D6N
28 Jan
price fr. **\$5,888***

***Prices not inclusive of airport taxes & fuel surcharge from \$130 to \$590**

FREE LUGGAGE REDEMPTION
Get a ***FREE** luggage with minimum spend^ on a group package with Citi Cards.
^while stocks last. *terms & conditions apply

FREE GIFTS!
UP FOR GRABS PER BOOKING

JTB PTE LTD (TA563) KEPPEL SOUTH CENTRAL 10 HOE CHIANG RD #11-06/07/04 (089315)
6595 0600 sg.jtbtrip.com jtbttravelsaloon.sg@jtbp.com