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National Healthcare Group
POLYCLINICS

Transforming PRIMARY CARE

UP CLOSE WITH
DR ANGELIA CHUA ON RAISING THE STANDARDS OF PAEDIATRIC MEDICINE IN PRIMARY CARE

IN AND AROUND
PAYING TRIBUTE TO NATIONAL DAY AWARD WINNERS FROM NHGP, ENGAGING CN-PCN GP PARTNERS, AND MORE



RAISING THE FUTURE:

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

At NHGP, coordinated care programmes are in place to support a mother's health from pregnancy to delivery, and children's health from the moment of birth.

2022 APEX® AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE



Building sound health foundations from the start

A healthy population starts with healthy children — and the foundations are set even before birth, with the health of the parents. In fact, studies show that a mother's health plays a critical role in the cycle of intergenerational health.

To give every child a good start in life, Singapore is building an integrated ecosystem to support children and their families across all domains, from the health and social spheres to education and more. As a primary care provider, the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) plays an important role in delivering comprehensive and holistic healthcare delivery to give all children a good head start.

In our cover story 'Raising the Future: Embracing a Good Head Start on Children's Health', we discuss how NHGP's EMBRACE programme lays the groundwork for a lifetime of good health and well-being by providing integrated maternal and child health services to strengthen the mother-child dyad. Under the EMBRACE programme, we look after a mother's health from pregnancy to post-pregnancy and focus on the 'first 1,000 days' from the child's birth. Additionally, the EMBRACE^{PLUS} , a component of EMBRACE, assists at-risk children aged 0 to 3 years old from low-income families who face health and social issues.

To build on the topic of holistic healthcare, turn to *Up Close With*, where we feature Dr Angelia Chua, Family Physician and Consultant. Dr Chua talks about how NHGP's Paediatrics Specialty Advisory Group is playing its part in increasing the capacity to broaden the care of patients from cradle to grave. She also highlights how such efforts will buoy the national Healthier SG strategy, and ensure continuity of care and good health from birth, all through a child's growing-up years, into adulthood and beyond.

It takes a village to raise a child. NHGP, as part of this village, will continue to drive population health and connect with our community partners to care for our future generations.

The Editorial Team

ISSUE 17.2022

CONTENTS

3 **RAISING THE FUTURE: EMBRACING A GOOD HEAD START ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH**
The right start in life lays the groundwork for decades of well-being. At NHGP, coordinated care programmes are in place to support a mother's health from pregnancy to delivery, and children's health from the moment of birth.

8 **IN AND AROUND**
Paying tribute to National Day Award winners from NHGP, engaging CN-PCN GP partners, the launch of the NHG Diabetes Reversal Programme, and more.

10 **UP CLOSE WITH**
Dr Angelia Chua, Family Physician, Consultant, Yishun Polyclinic, on raising the standards of paediatric medicine in primary care.

Note:
Some photos featured in this issue were taken before the pandemic, while others were taken at different phases of COVID-19 in Singapore.

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Healthy eating habits go a long way in preventing childhood obesity.

RAISING THE FUTURE: EMBRACING A GOOD HEAD START ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH



The right start in life lays the groundwork for decades of well-being. At NHGP, coordinated care programmes are in place to support a mother's health from pregnancy to delivery, and children's health from the moment of birth.

Strong and resilient families are the bedrock of society. From family-friendly policies to infrastructural support, the government continues to enhance wide-ranging initiatives to build a Singapore Made for Families.



Healthcare is a critical component in its plans. In 2021, an inter-agency Taskforce was set up to bring various organisations together to develop a five-year Maternal and Child Health and Well-being Strategy. The goal is to enhance upstream preventive health efforts for mothers and children, to integrate social and health services to provide more support and person-centric care, and to enhance convenience to the family. This will provide holistic and comprehensive support to women and their children in order to attain good health and well-being.

COMPREHENSIVE CARE FOR MOTHER AND CHILD

One such maternal and child health initiative offered at the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) takes the form of the **E**nhanced **M**aternal **B**aby Toddle**R** **A**nd **C**hild Surv**E**illance (**EMBRACE**) programme, which provides integrated services to strengthen the mother-child dyad. EMBRACE recognises that a mother's health impacts that of her child as well as family well-being, and that the early years of a person's life play an important role in preventing the onset of disease, and affecting their quality of health as adults and seniors.



A nurse preparing a vaccine to be administered to an infant.



Promoting an active lifestyle from a young age is key in achieving good health outcomes in later years.



EMBRACE looks after a mother's health from pregnancy to post-pregnancy and focuses on the 'first 1,000 days' from the child's birth.

With this in mind, EMBRACE looks after a mother's health from pregnancy to post-pregnancy and focuses on the 'first 1,000 days' from the child's birth. Aligned with national health initiatives, the programme offers integrated services for both mother and child, such as vaccination, childhood developmental and postnatal depression screenings and breastfeeding support services. The multi-disciplinary team of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals also collaborates with hospitals to improve the care of postnatal patients with a history of Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM), a type of diabetes that can occur during pregnancy in women with no known previous history of Type 1 or Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus.

According to Dr Lim Wei Khoon, a Family Physician at Yishun Polyclinic and NHGP's second-in-charge of Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders Specialty Advisory Group, women who are diagnosed with GDM require regular follow-up because they are at higher risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes. Most women with well-controlled GDM will have normal pregnancies and babies. However, if GDM is not well-controlled during pregnancy, it will pose potential risks to both mother and baby. Mothers may experience high blood pressure during pregnancy or run the risk of giving birth prematurely and having babies with birth defects. Hence, mothers with a history of GDM are recommended to take an oral glucose tolerance test for six to 12 weeks after delivery. If the test result is normal, regular screening should be done every one to three years. "So under the EMBRACE programme, these mothers are seen by our Advanced Practice Nurses, who will counsel the women on GDM and the importance of regular follow-up. They will also provide them with relevant lifestyle advice, and ensure appropriate glucose tests and follow-up appointments are arranged," said Dr Lim. This is becoming more relevant as cases of GDM are on the rise. Singapore also experiences a higher prevalence of GDM, with about one in four to five pregnant women developing it, compared to around 10% or less in most other Eastern and Southeast Asian countries[1].

Beyond these issues, Dr Siew Wei Fong, Family Physician, Consultant and the Lead for EMBRACE, stressed that the programme offers holistic care.



EMBRACE^{PLUS}, a component of EMBRACE, was launched at Yishun Polyclinic in 2020 and has since been expanded to Kallang Polyclinic and Woodlands Polyclinic. It seeks to actively identify at-risk children aged 0 to 3 years old from low-income families, and address health and social issues through systematic screening at the clinic, when the child receives his or her immunisations and regular childhood developmental screening appointments. Where needed, the children and their family are referred to appropriate services for assistance such as child care, financial support and more.

Mothers will also be screened for postpartum depression under EMBRACE^{PLUS}. Dr Winnie Soon, Family Physician and Consultant, explained that while it may be normal to feel emotional highs and lows after giving birth, postpartum depression is more intense and long-lasting. In severe and untreated cases, it may lead to a risk of suicide and harm to the baby. "Early diagnosis, treatment and counselling is important. And if needed, medications can be prescribed," she said.

BENEFITTING FROM HOLISTIC SUPPORT

One such child is 11-month-old Matthew[2] who, together with his mother Mrs Ong[3], enrolled in EMBRACE^{PLUS} in April 2021. It was assessed that Mrs Ong was experiencing postnatal depression after giving birth to her fourth child, which was compounded by the need to care for her three other children and worries about another unplanned pregnancy. The family of six also faced financial pressures as the father was the sole breadwinner. Her third child, a boy, was exhibiting some behavioural issues and her two older children were not performing well in school. With so much going on, Mrs Ong neglected her own health, and missed her follow-up medical appointments for her GDM and pregnancy-induced hypertension.

As Mrs Ong was seen under the EMBRACE^{PLUS} programme, effective interventions kicked in to tackle these challenges. These included counselling and family planning discussions, as well as a referral for her third child to the Child Development Unit at KK Women's and Children's Hospital. To address her medical conditions, Mrs Ong was referred for postnatal care, GDM follow-up and hypertension management at Yishun Polyclinic. Additionally, a Medical Social Worker assisted Mrs Ong with an application for financial assistance at the Social Service Office and arranged tuition service for her children



at the Chinese Development Assistance Council. Matthew was also introduced to kidSTART, a programme to support families with children aged 0 to 6 years old for a good start in life.

With continued support, Mrs Ong and her family were able to make progress on resolving their issues. The team periodically calls to check in on her as well. This has helped alleviate her stress, thus improving her mood and ability to cope. During her postnatal visit, Mrs Ong's blood pressure and blood glucose levels were normal. She was given an appointment to follow-up on her history of GDM.

BUILDING OUR NURSES´ CAPABILITIES

In support of EMBRACE and to enhance knowledge and skills of NHGP nurses in maternal and child health services, NHGP has begun to upskill nurses with an NUS Graduate Certificate in Child & Family Health in the Community. This one-year course curriculum — which was co-developed with the three healthcare clusters and NUS — comprises four modules and addresses the interactions across the social, cultural, educational and healthcare services that influence the health of women, children and families. "The course equips nurses with advanced knowledge and skills in nursing, enabling them to analyse and apply the concepts they have learnt in order to promote optimal health outcomes," said Ms Alicia Gan, Assistant Director, Nursing Services, NHGP. This involves understanding the determinants of health and life course theory in influencing population health, as well as the purpose, rationale, activities and performance measures for promoting care to women, children and their families.



Healthy lifestyle habits are most effective when adopted from childhood.

These integrated care delivery programmes will anchor care and provide support for children and their families in the community. In the pipeline, NHGP hopes to address adolescent mental health needs. Such integrations of care, said Dr Siew, will ensure there is a network of support anchored in the community that effectively addresses the health needs, risk factors and the wider health determinants from pre-conception to adolescence and beyond, regardless of life stage.

> "The [NUS Graduate Certificate in Child & Family Health in the Community] course equips nurses with advanced knowledge and skills in nursing, enabling them to analyse and apply the concepts they have learnt in order to promote optimal health outcomes.
>
> **Ms Alicia Gan**
> Assistant Director, Nursing Services, NHGP



Healthy eating habits go a long way in preventing childhood obesity.

1 Agency for Care Effectiveness (ACE). Gestational diabetes mellitus – an update on screening, diagnosis, and follow-up. Appropriate Care Guide (ACG), Ministry of Health, Singapore. 2022. Available from: https://go.gov.sg/acg-gestational-diabetes-mellitus-an-update-on-screening-diagnosis-and-follow-up.

2 & 3 Pseudonyms used to protect the privacy of the patient and caregiver.

4 Ministry of Health, Notice Paper No. 960, Notice of Question for Written Answer for the Sitting of Parliament on 14 February 2022. Available from: MOH | News Highlights

TACKLING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Obesity is a major risk factor for chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obstructive sleep apnoea and osteoarthritis. According to the Ministry of Health[4], the proportion of students who were overweight in schools increased from 13% in 2017 to 16% in 2021. Childhood obesity is thus a serious medical condition, as chronic diseases due to obesity can occur in childhood and often persist into adulthood as well.

Besides chronic diseases, obese children may also develop psychosocial problems, such as poor body image, low self-esteem and confidence. There is also an impact on their learning and education. This is because obesity-related obstructive sleep apnoea may cause behavioural disorders, poor school performance and poor quality of life. One way to tackle childhood obesity is through comprehensively detailing the diet, feeding habits and the activity history of the child. When preparing food for the child, parents and caregivers should opt for a healthy and well-balanced diet.

> "Because of these implications, the multi-disciplinary team from NHGP identifies weight issues and intervenes early so that complications are prevented and obesity will not persist into adulthood. We want to prevent childhood obesity by raising awareness and educating parents, even when the child's weight is normal."
>
> **Dr Chen Shiyun**
> Family Physician, Consultant, Yishun Polyclinic



To improve the care of obese children, NHGP's Paediatric Specialty Advisory Group works closely with KK Women's and Children's Hospital specialists by developing the Clinical Practice Guidelines for the management of childhood obesity. This collaboration includes early referrals to Specialist Outpatient Clinics if necessary, and provides flexibility and convenience to parents as the necessary services are readily available at the polyclinics and in the community. Nurses provide feeding information to the parent and caregiver; dietitians support the parent and caregiver by building knowledge, confidence and skills for healthy eating; while doctors continue to monitor the child's growth at every Child Development Screening visit.

> "We provide education and counselling to parents and caregivers regarding age-appropriate food serving sizes and portion control. Apart from diet recommendations and advice, we educate parents and caregivers on how to purchase affordable healthier food alternatives and teach alternative methods of preparation for foods that are culturally suitable and acceptable."
>
> **Ms Wong Yuefen**
> Principal Dietitian, Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NHGP STAFF

18 staff from NHGP were conferred medals in this year's National Day Awards.

THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MEDAL (BRONZE)	
Dr Simon Lee Biing Ming	Family Physician, Consultant Chief Clinical Informatics Officer Chief Data Officer, Operations
Dr Kenneth Low Meng Tze	Director, Dental Services

THE LONG SERVICE MEDAL	
Dr Lim Chee Kong	Family Physician, Senior Consultant Director, Clinical Services
Dr Lim Pui San	Family Physician, Principal Staff, Toa Payoh Polyclinic
Ms Norherawati Binte Mohd Yasin	Staff Nurse, Yishun Polyclinic
Dr Tang Wern Ee	Family Physician, Senior Consultant Director, Clinical Research Unit and Information Management & Analytics
Dr Tung Yew Cheong	Family Physician, Senior Consultant Deputy Group Chief Quality Officer, NHG Director, Quality & Patient Safety

THE COMMENDATION MEDAL	
Ms Elane Zhang Yunxia	Senior Nurse Manager, Hougang Polyclinic

THE EFFICIENCY MEDAL	
Ms Denise Loh Peisi	Assistant Manager, Human Resource
Ms Hasnah Bte Bulat	Supervisor, Woodlands Polyclinic
Mr James Tay Chee Por	Assistant Manager, Operations
Ms Julia Zhu Xiaoli	Senior Nurse Clinician, Nursing Services
Mr Patrick Ong Tse Hian	Senior Executive, Finance
Ms Pauline Xie Xinying	Principal Dietitian, Geylang Polyclinic
Ms Pearline Lim Su Ching	Assistant Manager, Dental Services
Ms Suyriati Binte Mohd Isa	Senior Dental Assistant, Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic
Ms Wendy Lee Pui Kuan	Secretary, Operations
Ms Wu Yangmei	Senior Oral Health Therapist, Woodlands Polyclinic

ENGAGING THE SEMBAWANG COMMUNITY

On 12 June 2022, NHGP and the Primary Care Academy (PCA) participated in the Bukit Canberra Fiesta organised by SportSG. Attended by over 1,500 residents, it featured booths and activities by co-locating agencies in Bukit Canberra, including NHGP's upcoming Sembawang Polyclinic.

Attendees received information from NHGP and PCA staff on the need for early evidence-based screenings and on upcoming talks, as well as tips on preventing sports injuries.



Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health and MP for Sembawang GRC, also stopped by NHGP's booth to convey his gratitude to healthcare workers for their efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ADDRESSING EMOTIONAL DISTRESS



From April to May 2022, three psychologists from NHGP took part in a three-part series of skills-based workshops for Home Care staff from NHGP's community partner, TOUCH Community Services. During the workshop sessions, Mr Tan Ee Xuen, Ms Goh Hui Ting and Ms Jeanette Yeo, along with psychologists from other organisations, shared how one can identify possible signs of emotional distress among individuals in the community, as well as practical skills to communicate more effectively with such individuals.

LAUNCH OF NHG DIABETES REVERSAL PROGRAMME

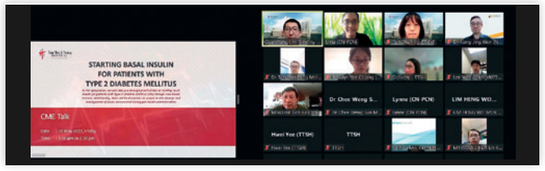


Photo: National Healthcare Group

In line with nationwide efforts to combat diabetes, the National Healthcare Group (NHG) and Tanoto Foundation launched the Diabetes Reversal Programme on 5 August 2022. The launch event, held at Kallang Polyclinic, was graced by Dr Janil Puthucheary, Senior Minister of State for Health.

Anchored in a primary care setting in NHGP, this three-year programme aims to help individuals living with obesity and early diabetes reverse diabetes through behavioural changes and without medication or surgery. At the event, the programme's lead investigator Associate Professor Tang Wern Ee, Family Physician, Senior Consultant and Director, Clinical Research Unit, NHGP, shared how participants in the programme could be engaged, educated and empowered to prevent and delay the onset of diabetes, as well as learn about the interventions that would be implemented during the key phases of this programme.

ENGAGING CN-PCN GP PARTNERS



Facilitated by Dr Kong Jing Wen, Head of Woodlands Polyclinic, the Central-North Primary Care Network (CN-PCN) kicked off its inaugural small group Continuing Medical Education (CME) virtual talk titled, 'Starting Basal Insulin for Patients with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus' with CN-PCN General Practitioners (GPs) on 20 May 2022.

This small group concept presented the CN-PCN GPs with ample opportunities to interact with the invited speakers from Tan Tock Seng Hospital – Dr Timothy Quek, Consultant Endocrinologist; and Miss Tan Shu Ying, Senior Pharmacist – who shared medical case studies on insulin initiation, storage and administration.

VISIT BY MMOH DELEGATES

NHGP hosted delegates from the Ministry of Health of Malaysia (MMOH) on 3 June 2022 at Kallang Polyclinic. The delegation included YBhg. Datuk Dr Chong Chee Keong, MMOH Deputy Director General (Public Health); and YBhg. Dato' Dr Asmayani binti Khalib, MMOH Deputy Director General (Medical).

The delegates were provided with an overview of NHGP and Singapore's primary healthcare system by Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah, Chief Executive Officer, NHGP and Primary Care; and Dr Valerie Teo, Head of Kallang Polyclinic. The delegation also toured the clinic and was introduced to NHGP's Teamlet Care Model, as well as various innovation initiatives by NHGP, such as the SMARTVacc System and the Self-Help Blood Pressure and Body Mass Index machines.



MY HEALTHHUB BUDDY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

The NHGP Operations team collaborated with the Youth Corps Singapore Eldercare Cluster to engage a group of young volunteers to help raise awareness of HealthHub and the benefits of its use, among senior patients at Geylang Polyclinic and Woodlands Polyclinic. Over a period of eight weeks, from March to May 2022, patients were introduced to the HealthHub mobile app and taught to use its key features. Caregivers were also encouraged to use the app to better monitor and manage the health of their loved ones.



KEEPING THE YOUNG ONES HEALTHY

Dr Angelia Chua, Family Physician, Consultant, Yishun Polyclinic, on raising the standards of paediatric medicine in primary care.

As a child, Dr Angelia Chua saw the toll that chronic conditions and ill health could take on people, both the young and the elderly. It inspired her to embark on a career in the healing profession, where – apart from her Family Physician duties – she now leads the Paediatrics Specialty Advisory Group (SAG) in NHGP to provide comprehensive healthcare to children. She tells us more about her interest in serving the youngest members of our community.

When I was young, I saw how my grandmother's obesity and asthma limited her daily activities. She subsequently died young from poorly controlled asthma. My younger brother was underweight as a baby and was often sick. From these personal experiences, I believe that health is wealth, and this led me to become a doctor.

When I became a doctor 27 years ago, I realised there was a strong focus on adult medicine in primary care. But good adult health starts from childhood, and I felt that I could do more to optimise health from the beginning, starting with children's health and screening. As Family Physicians, we play a critical role in childhood developmental surveillance, which is of utmost importance in the early detection of delayed milestones, poor growth or illnesses.

We are seeing a prevalence of childhood obesity and rising cases of mental health conditions. Our role within primary care is to address these issues, not just from a clinical perspective, but also to equip more doctors through continuing medical education and case discussions. Another concern is that while Singapore has a structured childhood developmental screening programme, we have experienced how some parents default to the subsequent touchpoint checks at ages three and four after the completion of the childhood immunisation programme. This affects the early detection of developmental delays.



Dr Angelia Chua
Family Physician, Consultant, Yishun Polyclinic

Part of our alignment with the national Healthier SG strategy is ensuring continuity of care all through the growing up years. We hope to work towards having children receive continuing care with the same Family Physician from birth. This Family Physician will manage the range of childhood ailments, track growth parameters and developmental milestones, as well as monitor speech development and identify early behavioural issues as the child grows.

NHGP's Paediatrics SAG — which comprises clinicians, nurses, dietitians, medical social workers, psychologists and pharmacists — establishes standards for the delivery of coordinated care in children's health, via clinical practice guidelines. We also work with specialist institutions to streamline referral and discharge criteria to right-site paediatric patients appropriately, and improve continuity and coordination of patient care. The Paediatrics SAG also works with relevant departments in NHGP to develop training materials, do research analysis, as well as identify and close gaps in clinical management and patient safety. This includes rolling out continuing education for Family Physicians so they are familiar with children's growth and development milestones and can detect any delays.

Apart from being the lead of NHGP's Paediatrics SAG, I am also part of various workgroups, committees and taskforces. This involvement ensures that NHGP can align itself with and contribute to the national conversation on the evolution of the mother-child health journey, childhood developmental screening schedule and clinical guidelines for autism.

As a Family Physician, it is gratifying to be part of the transformation of primary care. While we have been looking after the adult and elderly population, we wish to do the same for our paediatric patients. We aim to optimally manage medical conditions, upskill and create closer collaborations with our hospital partners and deliver comprehensive care in the community.