COVID-19 SPECIAL ISSUE | ISSUE 09.2020

National Healthcare Group POLYCLINICS

Transforming PRIMARY CARE

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PERSPECTIVES
OUR HEALTHCARE HEROES TALK ABOUT LIFE AT THE FRONTLINES

THE FIGHT GOES ON
THE FIGHT AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS EXTENDS BEYOND POLYCLINIC WALLS AND INTO THE COMMUNITY



COMBATTING COVID-19:

THE UNITED FIGHT

Staff of the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics rise to the challenge to wage war on a pandemic, and share their insights

2020 APEX® AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE



Swift and Sure

"Difficulties mastered are opportunities won." – Winston Churchill

What will we remember when we look back at 2020? Will it be a blur of anxiety and uncertainty, or will we remember this as a momentous time, when we showed our grit and mettle when faced with an unprecedented challenge?

Since the beginning of 2020, global and local healthcare systems have been threatened by a deadly disease caused by a coronavirus, more commonly known as COVID-19. This outbreak, which has killed almost 700,000 people worldwide as of 4 August 2020, has compelled many countries to enter the race for a COVID-19 vaccine. As the COVID-19 pandemic seems poised to stay for longer than expected, it has significantly affected our lives in more ways than one. That said, we are not alone in this global fight. At the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), we have navigated obstacles and overcome hurdles, guided by our collective mission. This special issue of *Transforming Primary Care* is thus dedicated to our staff, who have stood shoulder to shoulder and united in this fight against the pandemic.

As soon as the outbreak started, our staff across all six polyclinics and headquarters swiftly rose to the challenge, thinking on their feet and rapidly rolling out a 360-degree plan based on our 'COVID' framework. This included **C**ontaining cross-contamination; **O**bserving safe distancing; **V**erifying infections quickly; **I**solating at-risk staff; and **D**eveloping new ways to care for patients, such as via Tele-consultations and medication delivery. Such measures are detailed in our Cover Story, 'The Battle Begins'.

NHGP's efforts go beyond the walls of our polyclinics. Our staff, working together with volunteers from all walks of life, have answered the call to provide clinical care for migrant workers. In the feature story, 'The Fight Goes On', read about our efforts at the various medical posts at migrant worker dormitories and Swab Isolation Facilities, as well as our involvement in mass swabbing missions conducted across the island.

At this juncture, I would like to take the opportunity to record my heartfelt thanks to all members of the NHGP team for their hard work and dedication in these trying times. Such commitment has not gone unnoticed. Words of gratitude and encouragement from the community, including patients, partners, and members of the public, have been captured in the 'Tributes' section of the newsletter as a testament to NHGP's courage and resilience during these difficult times. I also wish to express our sincere thanks to all our partners, who have supported us in NHGP's journey. We are all in this fight together, with every individual and organisation playing an important part.

As a parting note, I would like to urge everyone to remain vigilant, continue to observe good personal hygiene habits, limit social activities and prepare for the unexpected. Together, we shall win this battle. And when we look back at 2020, may we recall a year where we faced adversity with readiness and resilience — a year when we turned difficulties into an opportunity to grow stronger.



Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah
Chief Executive Officer
National Healthcare Group Polyclinics & Primary Care

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A tent, designated as the Red Zone, set up at Toa Payoh Polyclinic.

THE BATTLE BEGINS



NHGP takes its place in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic

Make no mistake — this is war. Declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 12 March 2020, the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus (now established as COVID-19) outbreak is a global challenge. Since the first identified case in Wuhan, China in December 2019, the virus has spread around the globe, with hardly any countries spared. In Singapore, the first COVID-19 imported case was reported on 23 January. Just six months later, in late July, the number of cases in Singapore crossed the 50,000 mark, with most of the cases comprising migrant workers in dormitories.

Scientists around the world are busy developing safe and effective vaccines, with some of these already in the trial stage. In the meantime, containment and prevention are the keys to winning this worldwide race against the spread. And in this campaign against the COVID-19 virus, every individual counts.



The screening and triaging area at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic.

REINFORCING THE RING

As the frontliners of this battle, healthcare workers, including General Practitioners (GPs) of Public Health Preparedness Clinics and polyclinic staff, guard the outer ring of defence against this infectious disease.

This outer ring plays a critical role in the prevention and containment of the disease spread, and the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) has stepped up its efforts in every aspect: from segregation and early identification, to increased frequency of environmental cleaning for high-touch areas. Given healthcare workers' higher exposure to potential risks compared to workers in other sectors, it is important for them to be equipped with the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). However, to minimise the exposure to the virus and to reduce the risk of transmission, NHGP has implemented even stricter standards which require all clinic staff including cleaning, security and maintenance personnel to follow the PPE guidelines closely whenever they are in the clinic premises.

These additional requirements, when combined, require a Herculean effort to accomplish, yet at NHGP, every staff member has stepped up, and stood shoulder-to-shoulder to face this unprecedented crisis together.

COVID-19 HARD FACTS





Transmission Routes

Respiratory droplets carrying the COVID-19 virus travel through a cough or sneeze into another person's eyes, nose or mouth. Transmission also occurs when a person's hands come into contact with contaminated surfaces and are then used to touch the eyes, nose or mouth.



Incubation Period

COVID-19 is believed to have an incubation period ranging from a day to two weeks. It has been suggested that person-to-person transmission is possible during the asymptomatic phase of the infection, even if these risks appear to be low.



Risk Level

Current data suggests that older people and individuals with pre-existing medical conditions (such as hypertension, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and heart disease) appear to be more impacted by COVID-19.

THE UNITED FIGHT

As the first line of defence in the primary healthcare landscape, NHGP's key priority is to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19. NHGP was thus quick to take steps to minimise the risk of infection in Singapore, even when the Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (DORSCON) level was at Yellow (see DORSCON chart below, which provides a colour-coded framework of the current disease situation and determines the scale of the response). NHGP also aligned its efforts to that of nation-wide efforts by putting in place precautionary measures such as safe distancing, as well as regularly reviewing patient process flows to sieve out possible suspect cases when the DORSCON level was raised to Orange.

SINGAPORE'S DORSCON FRAMEWORK

DORSCON Level	Description
GREEN	Disease is mild
YELLOW	Disease is spreading in Singapore but is mild or being contained
ORANGE	Disease is severe and spreads easily but has not spread widely and is being contained
RED	Disease is severe and is spreading widely

Source: Ministry of Health

Having been through other disease outbreaks like SARS, H1N1 and Zika puts NHGP in good stead to manage this COVID-19 disease outbreak. However, NHGP remains vigilant to ensure the well-being of its patients, staff and the community. To this end, the NHGP COVID-19 Taskforce put together a robust framework to tackle the ever-changing challenges of the pandemic.

Containing cross-contamination

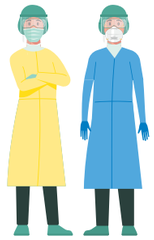
Observing safe distancing

Verifying infections quickly

Isolating at-risk staff

Developing new ways to care for patients

READYING THE TROOPS



'People power' lies at the core of NHGP's strategy for fighting the pandemic.

A SHOW OF STRENGTH

Navigating these extraordinary times means having all hands on deck — and NHGP staff have been supporting this effort by adjusting their leave and travel plans, ensuring that NHGP has adequate manpower at the frontline to join the country's fight. As Ms Anita Tan, Senior Nurse Manager from Geylang Polyclinic, who has more than 30 years of nursing experience in Singapore, pointed out, "With good and prudent management of our manpower right from the start, half of our battle fighting this global pandemic is won. While this sudden outbreak hitting our shores may have disrupted their plans, they rose to the occasion as healthcare personnel, and responded to the call of duty."

JOINING THE RANKS

The NHGP team spirit has seen its headquarters (HQ) staff coming forward and deployed to all its polyclinics to supplement the manpower on the ground. This deployment allowed HQ staff to work alongside polyclinic staff at screening areas, and play key roles in implementing additional preventive measures. This in turn allowed clinicians to focus on taking care of the patients. These HQ staff were given training in infection control through video demonstrations and materials to prepare them for their new roles. They were also trained to do visitor-screening and temperature-taking. Adapting to the ever-changing situation, other NHGP HQ staff also work from home to help minimise movement and interactions.


Clinic staff donning Personal Protective Equipment.



NHG's Staff Health Surveillance System for temperature recording.

> "My family trip to the United States in February 2020 was cancelled, which was a huge disappointment initially. However, on hindsight, I am glad that my reporting officer had advised me to cancel the trip, in view of the worsening COVID-19 situation in the States, and the (semi) lockdown situation the world was facing then. It is not just about work — the organisation is truly concerned about my well-being."
>
> **Klara Lim,** Patient Service Associate, Hougang Polyclinic

CONDUCTING RECONNAISSANCE

To get the team fighting fit, NHGP needed to first take care of its staff's health and well-being. All staff were required to record their temperature twice daily, including weekends and when they were off duty, in the Staff Health Surveillance System (S3). Staff in close contact with those on Stay-Home Notice and Leave of Absence (LOA) were also closely monitored for their health. While temperature monitoring may seem trivial, it is an important step to detect the virus early and reduce the risk of transmission of diseases. Staff who were unwell were immediately asked to consult a doctor.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

NHGP implemented workplace segregation and split team arrangements to ensure the business continuity of essential functions throughout the duration of DORSCON Orange. Face-to-face interactions between staff were kept strictly within the designated split teams, even outside of working hours. Social interactions, even among those stationed on the same floor, were also minimised. Additionally, all Public Healthcare Institutions (PHIs) staff had to restrict their movements across PHIs and clinics to reduce the risk of cross-infection. Staff who moved between PHIs were asked to work from home or go on LOA as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 — a move which was above and beyond the guidelines set by the government. Bearing in mind that a safe and effective vaccine is still underway, what each and every one can do now to contain the further spread of the virus is to maintain safe distancing at all times. Staff at the clinics continue to observe the safe distance requirement such as by sitting apart during lunch breaks, while HQ staff continue to work from home.

THE BATTLE FORMATION

These unprecedented times were also very challenging to GPs, especially the solo GPs. As such, NHGP spared no effort in supporting the larger primary care ecosystem. NHGP's nursing team helped conduct mask-fitting sessions for GPs in its Central-North Primary Care Network (CN-PCN) as well as non-CN-PCN GPs and their clinic staff. Fearing that these GPs might not be equipped with PPE to protect themselves, the CN-PCN administrative team acted swiftly to purchase consumables such as masks, hand sanitisers, alcohol wipes and protective goggles and visors on behalf of the GPs and delivered these to them. To ensure these GPs kept up with the evolving situation, the CN-PCN administrative team also helped set up virtual meeting accounts and provided regular and timely updates.



An NHGP nurse conducting mask-fitting for a General Practitioner.



An NHGP nurse checking a patient's oxygen level at the Orange Zone at Yishun Polyclinic.

RALLYING THE DEFENCE

In line with the 'COVID' framework, NHGP also implemented defensive measures to keep its clinic services going.

'FORTRESS NHGP'

Screening areas at all NHG polyclinics were expanded, with tents set up to ensure proper infection control measures were observed at all times. These tents increased the premises' capacity to better segregate and manage patients by zones. They also created more sheltered and safe-distancing space for patients and visitors.

Temperature checks and a declaration of travel history were made mandatory for all patients and visitors prior to entering the clinics. Depending on their temperatures, symptoms experienced or displayed, and travel history, patients were assigned to the Green, Orange or Red Zones to mitigate the risk of cross-infection between patients of different risk levels. All patients suspected of having COVID-19 were managed in tents at the Red Zone outside the main building. Meanwhile, within the premises, the Orange Zone mainly catered to patients with acute respiratory symptoms who did not display any COVID-19 symptoms. The Green Zone saw patients with chronic conditions, who passed the screening criteria and did not have acute respiratory symptoms.

Satellite Pharmacies were also specially set up at the Orange and Red Zones to help minimise cross-contact between patients and visitors from different segregation zones. Such pharmacies also allowed pharmacists to better manage and focus on the prescription needs of these patients.



Safe distancing markers at a waiting area at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic.

Safe distancing markers in public and staff areas were placed to demarcate spacing of at least a metre apart. Posters and notices were also put up to remind everyone about the importance of safe distancing. To help reduce crowding and maintain safe distancing in the clinics, reminder SMS messages were sent to remind patients that they could only be accompanied by one person during this period.

PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKES

Non-essential services were deferred during the Circuit Breaker period, the two-month-long nation-wide partial lockdown which ended on 1 June. These included non-urgent medical procedures and certain types of screening. Elective dental procedures were also deferred, and only urgent or emergency dental treatment was provided to relieve pain and/or infection.

Online and mobile appointment booking logic were reviewed and enhanced to ensure patients booked appointments in the appropriate segregation zones based on their declared travel history and respiratory infection symptoms.

Medication extension and home delivery were offered to patients with well-controlled chronic conditions from February. NHGP's team actively reviewed patients with chronic conditions on their suitability for medication extension, and offered this service to those whose conditions were well-controlled. Patients could also opt for medication refills and have their medications delivered to their homes at no additional charge during this period. Medication home delivery services increased from less than 50 per day in pre-COVID-19 times to an average of more than 700 daily in July. To manage this increase, the National Healthcare Group Pharmacy (NHGPh) set up a centralised dispensing service, Pharmacy Services Centre.

Medication home delivery services have increased, from less than 50 per day in pre-COVID-19 times to an average of more than **700** daily in July



An NHGPh pharmacist handing over a medication parcel to a courier for delivery.

Tele-consultations are a key component of NHGP's shift towards the new norm of care. In line with the government's call to use technology to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, NHGP introduced Tele-consultations in February to virtually meet patients with well-controlled chronic conditions. This gave eligible patients the option to consult their doctor from the comfort of their homes via either a telephone or video call and have their medications delivered to their homes. In the first three weeks after the introduction of this service, NHGP's Tele-consultations increased by 11 times, resulting in a reduction of 30% for clinic visits. Apart from its own patients with well-controlled chronic conditions, Hougang Polyclinic also offered Tele-consultations to the elderly patients of Sunlove Home who currently have regular follow-ups with the care team.

NHGP's Tele-consultations increased by 11 times, resulting in a **30%** reduction in clinic visits

> "Patients who have poorly-controlled chronic conditions or experienced any new acute symptoms, for example, are advised to have face-to-face consultations at the polyclinic. Those eligible for Tele-consultations are strongly encouraged to take up this service for convenience and to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the community."

Dr Jonathan Chong, Family Physician, Associate Consultant and Deputy Head, Hougang Polyclinic

Virtual classes were conducted by NHGP staff for 90 fifth-year students from Nanyang Technological University's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine. When postings to polyclinics were suspended in February due to the COVID-19 outbreak, NHGP tutors helped them continue their learning through video lessons. The sessions took place in the School and were observed by NHGP Family Physicians stationed at the polyclinic, who would 'sit in' on a simulated patient-doctor interaction to observe how the student derived his diagnosis. The doctor then lent insights on areas for improvement and looked at the finer details of each case, just as he would for the student at a clinical posting.



Cleaning personnel don full Personal Protective Equipment when carrying out environmental cleaning.

'MOPPING UP' OPERATIONS

Thorough cleaning and disinfection was done to areas visited by a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patient. All instruments and environmental surfaces, from stethoscopes and thermometers to telephones and computer mouses, were also disinfected for safety.

Routine environmental cleaning procedures were rigorous and included disinfecting floors twice a day, and cleaning clinic common areas, including lifts and toilets, and consult rooms within Red Zone areas. The frequency of wipe-downs and cleaning for the high-touch areas was also increased.

KEEPING TRACK

Contact tracing was done to track patients who were in close contact with a COVID-19 patient while they were on clinic premises. Those identified as having casual contact with confirmed cases were put on phone surveillance. This means NHGP's Contact Centre team would contact these people on the day the case was confirmed and on Day 14 to check on their health. In the event such patients became unwell, they were asked to return to the clinic for medical assessment or to go to the Accident & Emergency Department of a hospital.

SafeEntry was instituted in all clinics and HQ premises. All staff and visitors to the clinic and HQ were required to check in and check out at entry and exit points, respectively.

A WAR ON ALL FRONTS

WAGING THE WIDER OFFENSIVE AGAINST COVID-19

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Beyond implementing precautionary measures at the clinic premises, notices on requirements when visiting the clinics were also put up on the NHGP Facebook page and corporate website. Educational materials were also posted on the Facebook page to provide tips to followers on how to stay healthy during this pandemic.

POLYCLINIC SWABBING

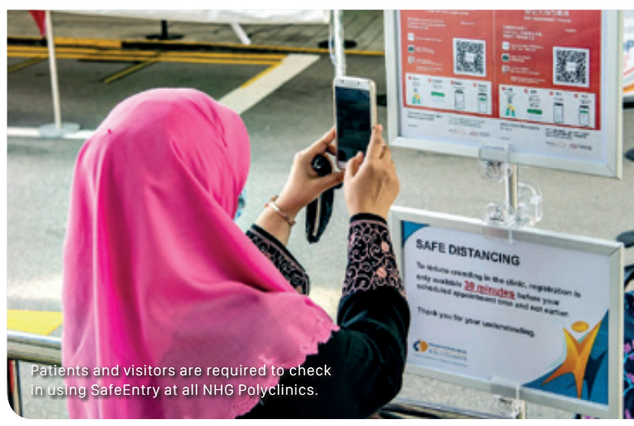
NHGP actively supports systematic swab testing efforts in the community under the Swab and Send Home (SASH) Programme to detect the virus early and reduce the risk of further transmission. Patients then receive notification of their test results. As of 31 July 2020, its six polyclinics have conducted almost 26,000 swabs in total.

STAFFING THE NATIONAL CARE HOTLINE

NHGP Medical Social Workers and Psychologists serve as Duty CARE officers manning the National CARE Hotline set up by the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

> "During this time, I was also deployed to serve as a Duty CARE Officer to provide psychological first aid, supportive counselling and crisis management via the National CARE Hotline. The pandemic and changes in lifestyle resulting from the new norm of living have no doubt contributed to a sense of uncertainty and even anxiety for many. We need to learn to rearrange our routines and schedules to create this new norm which can then give us a sense of stability and structure for self-care."

Mr Mah Siew Chung, Senior Psychologist, Clinical Services, NHGP



Patients and visitors are required to check in using SafeEntry at all NHG Polyclinics.



A mass swabbing team collecting swab samples from migrant workers during one of the mass swabbing missions.

THE FIGHT GOES ON



As part of the nation-wide effort against the spread of COVID-19, NHGP's contributions go beyond the walls of its polyclinics

Apart from fortifying its polyclinics and readying its staff, NHGP also stepped up to care for migrant workers at dormitories and Swab Isolation Facilities (SIFs) in the northern, eastern and central regions of Singapore, respectively. With the sharp increase in positive cases of COVID-19 in Singapore among migrant workers in April, more than 130 NHGP staff, both clinical and non-clinical, were mobilised to set up and manage 14 medical posts at migrant worker dormitories and four SIFs.

Dr Mok Ying Jang, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Dr Darren Seah, Family Physician, Senior Consultant and Director of Family Medicine Development, Dr Lim Chee Kong, Family Physician, Senior Consultant and Deputy Director of Clinical Services, and Ms Chen Yee Chui, Chief Nurse, each led their respective teams to support this massive effort since early April. The teams' overall efforts included various tasks such as setting up and running the medical posts, developing clinical protocols, workflows and Standard Operating Procedures from scratch, as well as planning, deploying and rostering personnel to ensure adequate manpower on the ground. A separate referral pathway to hospital Specialist Outpatient Clinics and primary care partners was also developed for migrant workers who needed follow-up care beyond the capability of the medical posts.

> "Many of our staff on the frontline work tirelessly to contain the outbreak, be it at the polyclinics, or as part of teams deployed to provide medical support at the dormitories, SIFs, or mass swabbing missions. In knowingly putting themselves at risk to save lives and reduce the number of patients affected, they are our heroes. This strong team spirit and dedication that has been demonstrated so far will definitely bring us a long way during this tough period."
>
> **Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah**,
> Chief Executive Officer,
> National Healthcare Group Polyclinics and Primary Care



The preparatory work was further bolstered by other NHGP and NHG units. For instance, NHGP's Information Technology Office worked around the clock to set up the IT infrastructure needed for the smooth operation of the medical posts. On-site dispensaries were set up by NHG Pharmacy (NHGPh) at each dormitory and were manned by both pharmacy technicians and nurses. Yishun Polyclinic's pharmacy team also managed the medication supply to these dispensaries. NHG Diagnostics assisted with diagnostic supplies and sample collections, while nursing and operations staff from Woodlands, Toa Payoh and Yishun Polyclinics worked hard to pack and provide the medical posts with the necessary supplies.

Many NHGP staff from various departments were deployed to the medical posts, together with staff from other NHG institutions, Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Medical Corps, private practitioners and locums as well as the Singapore Police Force.

"NHGP has spared no effort in supporting this critical undertaking. With everyone pitching in, the first medical post was operational within three days, and all sites were able to see patients within a week," said Dr Mok.

DORMITORIES



The medical posts set up at the migrant worker dormitories, which replicated an actual clinic set-up, were each split up into four sections — Registration and Triaging, Consultation, Medication Dispensing and Swabbing. Every morning, the team would first conduct a general wipe-down to disinfect the medical posts and equipment. "As soon as the medical post was ready, the dormitory operator would make an announcement to ask the residents to head to the posts to see a doctor should they be unwell. This was how we started our day," recalled Dr Steven Chao, Family Physician and Associate Consultant at Toa Payoh Polyclinic, who was one of the NHGP doctors deployed to the dormitories. On a typical day, the team saw patients with acute symptoms as well as chronic conditions. Those who showed symptoms of Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) at the medical post would be asked to do a swab test on-site. For those who had tested positive for COVID-19, a separate 14-day daily review of their temperature and blood oxygen level was conducted to monitor their health status.



Swab samples taken at the dormitory medical posts are packed and dispatched to the laboratory.

Beyond offering medical assistance to workers who experienced ARI symptoms and/or had chronic conditions, the team also conducted minor procedures such as wound dressing and removal of ear wax. These medical teams even carried out simple surgical procedures such as toilet and suture (T&S) for lacerations, and incision and drainage for abscess. "Our purpose here was not just seeing patients with ARI symptoms but to ensure that their overall health was taken care of," said Dr Chao. This inclusive approach also shaped the way the medical teams communicated with the workers whom they were looking after. While most of the workers at the dormitories understood simple English, the team adopted the use of language aids and infographics to better facilitate communication.



Language aids being used at a dormitory medical post to better facilitate communication with migrant workers.



SWAB ISOLATION FACILITIES

NHGP led the operations at four Swab Isolation Facilities (SIFs), which offered patients who were waiting for the results of their swab tests a safe space to self-isolate. The teams manning the SIFs comprised medical, nursing, allied health professionals (AHPs) and operations staff from NHGP, NHG and NHGPh, as well as volunteers from all walks of life.

The task of running the four SIFs — which were each equipped with a medical post, segregated waiting areas and bedding — was akin to running a step-down care hospital. This definitely presented a steep learning curve for NHGP. “I remember when NHGP was first tasked to take over the operations of the first two SIFs from the SAF,” said Dr Tung Yew Cheong, Family Physician, Senior Consultant and Director of Quality and Patient Safety at NHGP, and lead for SIFs. “One of the first things that came to mind was how to put in place and sustain adequate infection control measures to ensure the safety of migrant workers, as well as all the staff working at the SIFs, many of whom had no healthcare background or training. We quickly pulled together an administrative team to run the SIFs to ensure everyone’s safety and the smooth operation of our services.” As for Mr Matthew Wong, Assistant Director, Facility Development & Planning Office, NHGP, who had been involved in the setting up of medical posts during H1N1, this was nothing new: “Because of my past experience, I was able to quickly put different moving parts together and delve into the fine details required to ensure the SIFs were operating smoothly and safely.”

PPE trainings and Infection Control and Safety briefings were conducted for more than 300 resort and hotel staff and community volunteers working at the SIFs. Regular stringent infection control audits were also conducted by the NHGP Infection Control nurses.



A doctor reviewing a migrant worker at a Swab Isolation Facility.

Photo by Mr Poh Yu Khing, SIF volunteer



The screening station at one of the Swab Isolation Facilities managed by NHGP.

Photo by Mr Poh Yu Khing, SIF volunteer

Together with Dr Tung, Dr Donna Tan, Family Physician, Associate Consultant and Assistant Director of Clinical Services, NHGP, Ms Wendy Ong, Senior Nurse Manager, Nursing Services, NHGP, and Mr Ng Wei Guang, Operations Manager of Yishun Polyclinic, readily took on the uphill task of leading the SIF team. Just as the team had settled the first two SIFs at the resorts, NHGP was tasked to set up another two SIFs — this time, at hotels. According to Ms Ong, this was unlike just taking over the facilities set up by SAF and running them. “Our team had to set up these new SIFs from scratch, survey the premises, and plan and design workflows. We had to see through all processes to ensure that there was no risk of cross-contamination.” In fact, the planning went right down to the details such as determining the best location for the medical posts and pick-up and drop-off locations for buses ferrying migrant workers, and setting up segregated areas and designated facilities for COVID-positive and COVID-negative patients. “As every aspect of the workflow was crucial to our success, we had to constantly think on our feet,” said Mr Ng. “We had to be flexible to improvise and test out new workflows if the need arose.”

Every day, doctors and nurses went from floor to floor to check on the well-being of COVID-19 positive patients while they waited to be transferred to other community isolation facilities. This was part of the infection control processes designed to minimise the mass movement of patients and reduce the risks of spread. The doctors and nurses provided a much-needed assuring human touch to the workers, assessing their clinical condition and addressing their concerns. Educational materials in their native languages were also handed out. Those with chronic conditions and other medical issues were closely monitored during the daily reviews, and care was coordinated across the different healthcare facilities whenever needed. The teams at the SIFs also conducted follow-up swab tests when required.

> “More than mutual respect won among team members, and the deep bonds of camaraderie formed, was that the SIFs became a safe haven with a humane heart to the migrant brothers we served.”
>
> **Dr Donna Tan**,
> Family Physician, Associate Consultant and Assistant Director of Clinical Services, NHGP



The administrative team was the nerve centre of a SIF, with oversight of the movement of patients and the activities occurring in real time. “Our role was to ensure the coordination between all stakeholders on site was smooth,” said Ms Ong Wan Mei, Executive Assistant, Clinical Services, NHGP, deployed as administrative team lead at one of the SIFs. “The team also had to review and assess new admissions and discharge, and plan activities such as arranging different meal timings during Ramadhan for Muslim workers and coordinating donations received from the public.” As of 1 July 2020, the teams at the four SIFs had taken care of close to 3,000 migrant workers.



MASS SWABBING EFFORTS

As part of increasing the nation’s testing capacity, NHG and NHGP joined forces to conduct mass swabbing efforts at various locations around Singapore. For this operation, two teams comprising NHGP’s dentists, care co-ordinators, nurses, AHPs, and administrative staff were co-led by Mr Darion Chong, Group Chief Corporate Development Officer and Group Chief Data Protection Officer, NHG, and Ms Tan Pek Hoon, Senior Nurse Manager from Yishun Polyclinic.

Before each swab mission commenced, Mr Chong would lead the operations team to survey the premises to ensure proper setup for efficient flow while adhering to Infection Control guidelines. Although each site presented its own set of unique challenges — such as narrow corridors and multi-storey buildings with few lifts — the team overcame all these to ensure smooth operations. They also sought to minimise the discomfort of the migrant workers, such as from having to wait under the hot sun, and minimise disruption to the daily operations of the site. For the safety of the swabbers — including those from other agencies such as SAF and the Health Promotion Board — NHGP nurses conducted briefings on appropriate PPE donning, and refresher training on infection control and proper swabbing technique.

On swabbing mission days, the swabbing teams reported to Yishun Polyclinic as early as 7am to pick up the consumable items needed for the day. As soon as the team reached the site, they would don their PPE and be ready for action. “Mass swabbing is like a high-throughput activity — our fastest swabber was able to complete up to 40 swabs in an hour!” shared Ms Tan. “Our teams went around the sites almost daily, including weekends and Public Holidays.” The teams also educated the workers on the importance of basic hygiene post-swab. De-gowning of the PPE was only done after the last migrant worker had been swabbed and the place cleaned up.



A member of the mass swabbing team collecting a swab sample from a migrant worker.

THOUGHTFUL GIFTS AND GESTURES

ANG MO KIO POLYCLINIC







"I would like to compliment Mr Stanley Ho, Senior Executive Assistant, Service Leadership & Patient Relations, for being responsive and reacting promptly to my feedback. Thank you for being so understanding and going the extra mile to make arrangements with Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic, to accommodate an extra accompanying adult for a newborn patient, in light of COVID-19 measures. I would also like to convey my gratitude to the polyclinic's nursing staff member Ms Tan Lizin for proactively sharing her babycare knowledge with us. She was very friendly and made our visits pleasant."

Ms Teo Su Ching Angeline

HOUGANG POLYCLINIC







"During my visit to Hougang Polyclinic on 10 February 2020, I found that the clinic was well-prepared to handle the COVID-19 situation. I wish to thank the staff for their diligence and commitment to helping the community during this difficult period. Well done!"

Mr Wong Chong Wai

"I would like to say thanks to NHG Polyclinics for informing me of the postponement of my medical appointment and arranging for the medication to be delivered to my home at no extra charge during this COVID-19 period."

Mdm Xie You Ying

YISHUN POLYCLINIC

"Please allow me to compliment the staff of Yishun Polyclinic during my visit on 7 March. First off, I was very impressed by the precautionary measures taken to minimise the possibility of a community outbreak of COVID-19. Secondly, the staff were professional in the way they managed patients and the public. My experience was fuss-free and quick. As I was tagged 'red', the staff ensured that I was separated from the rest and made sure that I was well taken care of. Lastly, I would like to commend my attending physician Dr Lim Chee Luan, who was very patient and showed empathy towards me. All in all, I had a wonderful experience and left feeling much better. Thank you to everyone at Yishun Polyclinic for giving your best during this COVID-19 outbreak. You are our heroes and heroines! Keep up the good work."

Mr JW Toh







"I would like to thank Yishun Polyclinic for their tremendous dedication and service. Despite the massive queue and crowd, Dr Viknesh Shanmugam still took the time to teach my 7-year-old son the importance of removing his mask properly and washing his hands. Now, my son even reminds me to do so! NHGP has an amazing team of dedicated doctors and nurses. Wishing you much love and hope everyone stays safe in this traumatic climate!" **Ms Victoria Lye**

GEYLANG POLYCLINIC



"To the frontline healthcare workers: Thank you for your hard work, dedication and sacrifice. Let us remain undivided, our hearts in harmony. I believe that together, we will be able to get through this. Stay strong!"

Ms Aida Yao

"I would like to compliment Dr Sze Kai Ping on his efficient and effective skills in handling patients. He speaks in a calm and gentle tone and I appreciate his good attitude, especially during this tough COVID-19 situation."

Mr Lim Guan Chuan





TOA PAYOH POLYCLINIC









WOODLANDS POLYCLINIC



"I had a pleasant experience when I visited Woodlands Polyclinic for my blood test on 28 February 2020. The screening at the main gate was very organised and brisk. The team was very professional and polite. I would also like to commend the laboratory counter staff and blood-taking staff for their professionalism and good customer service. Please keep up the good work! You are very much appreciated."

Mr Phuan Kheng Chun

"I was very impressed by my experience at Woodlands Polyclinic when I visited on 21 February 2020 for a podiatry appointment. The staff at the reception area were in high spirits despite them having to perform screenings for long hours. The podiatrist also took the time to understand my problem and ensured I was comfortable. Thank you for having such dedicated professionals at NHGP!"

Mr Jairaj Ramanatha



* Most photos were taken before the implementation of safe distancing measures in March 2020.

SPONSORS

Warm thanks to the organisations who have shown their appreciation to NHGP in one way or another.

1. ActiveSG Yishun Sports Centre
2. Al-Futtaim Group
3. Al-Istiqamah Mosque
4. Al-Muttaqin Mosque Kindergarten
5. Ang Mo Kio GRC / Dr Koh Poh Koon
6. Armstrong Industrial Corporation
7. Asia Farm F & B Pte Ltd
8. Bee Cheng Hiang
9. Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC / Mr Saktiandi Supaat
10. BraveheartSG2020
11. Christ Church Secondary School
12. Community Foundation of Singapore (Sayang Sayang Fund)
13. Convenant Evangelical Free Church
14. Dabba Junction
15. Darul Makmur Mosque
16. Decathlon Singapore Pte Ltd
17. Evangelical Free Church
18. Evergreen Secondary School
19. Foreword Coffee Pte Ltd
20. Gardenia Foods (S) Pte Ltd
21. Global Child Development Centre (Woodlands)
22. Grab
23. GSK Consumer Healthcare Singapore Pte. Ltd.
24. Harmoni Preskool @ Yishun
25. Healthcare Services Employees' Union
26. Hisamitsu Pharmaceutical Co., Inc. (Singapore Branch)
27. Hougang CC Youth Executive Committee
28. Hougang Grassroots Organisations / Mr Lee Hong Chuang
29. Hougang Secondary School
30. ITE College Central
31. JJ-Sales & Marketing Pte Ltd
32. Keppel Corporation
33. Koufu
34. Lam Soon Singapore Pte Ltd
35. Lazada Singapore
36. Le Tach Vending Pte. Ltd. (A Subsidiary of Le Tach Pte Ltd & Lingjack Holding Pte Ltd)
37. Living Sanctuary Brethren Church
38. Marine Parade GRC / Mr Tan Chuan-Jin
39. Marsiling Women's Executive Committe
40. Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC / Mr Zaqy Mohamad
41. Masks Sewn With Love
42. Mayflower Primary School
43. Methodist Girls' School
44. Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth
45. Montfort Junior School
46. Montreux Patisserie
47. Mr Bean
48. MTR Restaurant
49. Muhajirin Mosque
50. My First Skool (Yishun Blk 423)
51. National Healthcare Group
52. Nee Soon East Youth Network
53. Nee Soon GRC / Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim
54. Nestle Singapore (Pte) Ltd
55. NHG Resident Council EXCO
56. No Signboard Seafood
57. Northland Primary School
58. NTUC Fairprice
59. OK Chicken Rice
60. Paya Lebar Community & Paya Lebar Grassroots Organisations
61. Paya Lebar Youth Network
62. PCF Sparkletots (Paya Lebar Blk 125)
63. PCF Sparkletots (Whampoa Blk 112)
64. Print Lab Pte. Ltd.
65. Project Dignity
66. Raffles Parents' Association
67. RedMart
68. Red Sparrow SG
69. Roche
70. Seng Hua Hng Foodstuff Pte Ltd
71. Shiseido Singapore Co. Ltd
72. Singapore Corporate Counsel Association
73. Singapore Press Holdings (Chinese Media Group)
74. Singapore Symphony Orchestra
75. Temasek Foundation
76. The POPULUS
77. The Trade Office of Vietnam Embassy
78. Toa Payoh East-Novena Malay Activity Executive Committee
79. Toa Payoh East-Novena People's Association
80. Toa Payoh East-Novena Youth Network & Grassroots Organisations
81. Toa Payoh Methodist Church
82. Toa Payoh South Community Club
83. Tze Chi Singapore
84. Uniqlo
85. U-Say Marketing Ltd
86. Woodlands Ring Primary School
87. Yishun Primary School
88. Yu Yuan Vegetarian Stall
89. Zuellig Pharma

* This list is updated as of 20 July 2020

NHGP STAFF SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT LIVING AND WORKING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

"My fiancée and I had planned for a pre-wedding photoshoot in South Korea in May and our wedding in July, but we had to postpone both due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Since the beginning of the outbreak, I have been busy with work so we have spent very little time together. We were not able to meet as well during the Circuit Breaker period. As doctors, we are able to do what we do because of the sacrifices our loved ones make. They give up time with us so that we can fulfil our responsibilities, go through sleepless nights worrying about our risks of exposure, and experience loneliness when the urgency of our work takes us away from them. They too have sacrificed much for the benefit of patients and the community."



Dr Kung Jian Ming
Family Physician,
Associate Consultant and
Deputy Head, Yishun Polyclinic

"As a Health Promoter, I encourage patients to take up appropriate health screenings, conduct cooking demos, and run lifestyle intervention programmes. A few weeks before DORSCON Orange, I was redeployed to Hougang Polyclinic to help out with frontline duties such as travel screening, caregiver registration, and self-payment kiosk assistance. I assisted with Tele-consultation enrolment too. This outbreak has taught me the importance of resilience! Even though we now face patients who are more demanding than usual, I have learnt how to remain calm and firm in difficult situations."



Tan Sin Ying
Health Promoter, Health Promotion
and Preventive Care Division, NHGP

"I have been working at Hougang Polyclinic for 18 years. While I helped out in the screening of patients during the H1N1 outbreak, I feel that the COVID-19 situation is more intimidating due to the larger number of infected cases. My son worries about me as I am in direct contact with patients on a daily basis, but I reassure my family that many precautionary measures are taken. Furthermore, I am happy coming to work as this allows me to help patients and save lives."



Susan Lim
Patient Care Assistant,
Hougang Polyclinic

"My main duty was to train NHGP staff as well as non-healthcare workers at the community care facilities on infection control matters. The goal was to ensure infection control practices were strictly observed at all times to prevent the spread of infections. Infection control is everyone's responsibility and all of us need to play our part. I am very impressed that the non-healthcare workers, after their training, now practise hand hygiene like professionals. This is truly what we wanted to achieve at the end of the day."



Hamha Bte Mohamed Hamzah
Nurse Manager,
Toa Payoh Polyclinic

"The teamwork and togetherness among our mass swabbing team were truly amazing — the best I have personally experienced. These were what got us through each day battling the COVID-19 outbreak. We also shared laughs and bonded with one another during our breaks. While we faced many challenges on the ground, I felt pity for the migrant workers as there were times they did not understand what was happening due to the language barrier, and felt helpless."



Christie Anna D/O Money Samuel
Nurse Educator,
Nursing Services, NHGP

"I have been a pharmacist for 23 years — and was with NHG during SARS — so having to deal with an outbreak is not entirely new to me. We have to keep ourselves flexible and react quickly to align with new guidelines and meet demands of the changing situation. To streamline our end-to-end processes, we work closely with doctors and nurses and teams from different departments — it takes a lot of cooperation and understanding. I feel that a silver lining of the outbreak is that the relationships between staff from different departments are now strengthened!"



Anna Liew
Principal Pharmacist,
Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic