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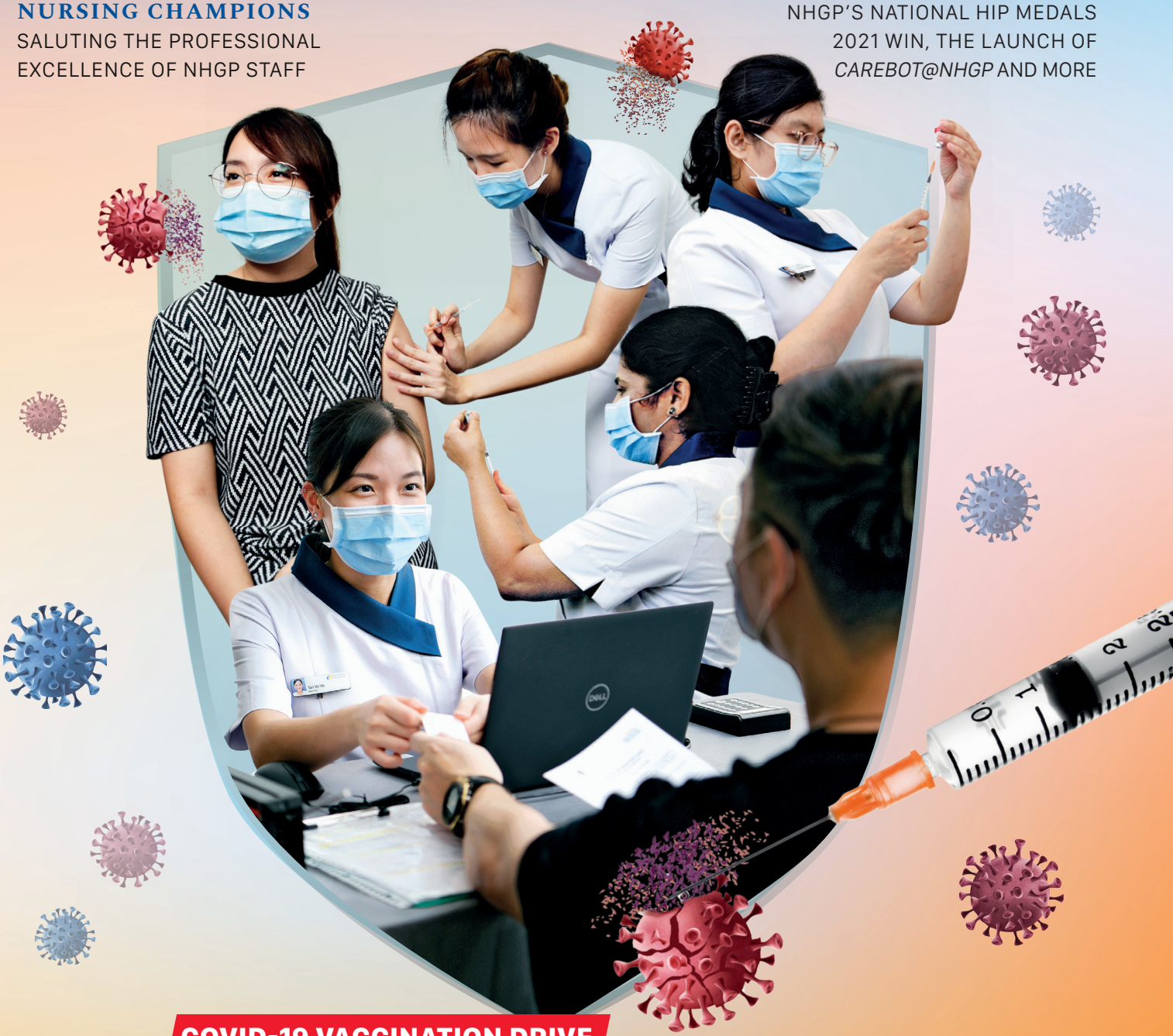
National Healthcare Group POLYCLINICS

Transforming PRIMARY CARE

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HONOURING OUR NURSING CHAMPIONS
SALUTING THE PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE OF NHGP STAFF

IN AND AROUND
NHGP'S NATIONAL HIP MEDALS 2021 WIN, THE LAUNCH OF *CAREBOT@NHGP* AND MORE



COVID-19 VACCINATION DRIVE

MISSION: VACCINATION

The National Healthcare Group Polyclinics is part of the nation-wide mission to protect everyone from the pandemic by supporting Singapore's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

2021 APEX® AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE



Together, Towards A New Normal

As we continue the fight against COVID-19, Singapore has been swift to adapt and redefine strategies to contain the spread of transmission within the community, while taking steps to ensure that the economy reopens safely. You may have heard about the government's 'Let's Test, Trace and Vaccinate' campaign announced in early July 2021, which details the various phases that will ease Singapore into the new normal.

In line with this national strategy, the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) has mobilised additional teams on the ground to plan and implement new workflows and processes since December 2020. From supporting swabbing efforts since February 2020, NHGP continued to play a key role in kick-starting Singapore's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. In January 2021, the inoculation of healthcare workers under Phase 1 of Singapore's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme began and NHGP moved on to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to external healthcare and frontline workers in the same month. By the end of January 2021, NHGP moved on progressively to inoculations for the vulnerable groups — people aged 70 and above as part of the national COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Since then, all of NHG polyclinics have been running the vaccination programme for members of the public. In our cover story, 'Ready, Set, Vaccinate', you will read about how NHGP's teams have supported this nation-wide vaccination exercise, much of which has been fronted by our hardworking nurses.

Despite the pandemic, we took time to commemorate the outstanding contributions of nurses across the care spectrum in conjunction with Nurses' Day in August 2021. Nurses have long been the backbone of healthcare — and the pandemic has only underscored their invaluable role in our healthcare system and the community. From day one, they have been at the forefront of our COVID-19 response and are still working hard to protect our community daily. This year's celebrations, which you can read about on Page 6, acknowledge the sacrifices and dedication of our nursing colleagues over the past year. In particular, we honour our NHGP nurses who have received the 2021 President's Award for Nurses and Nurses' Merit Award in our *Special Feature*.

On that note, we would like to thank every one of our nurses for their resilience and dedication!

The Editorial Team

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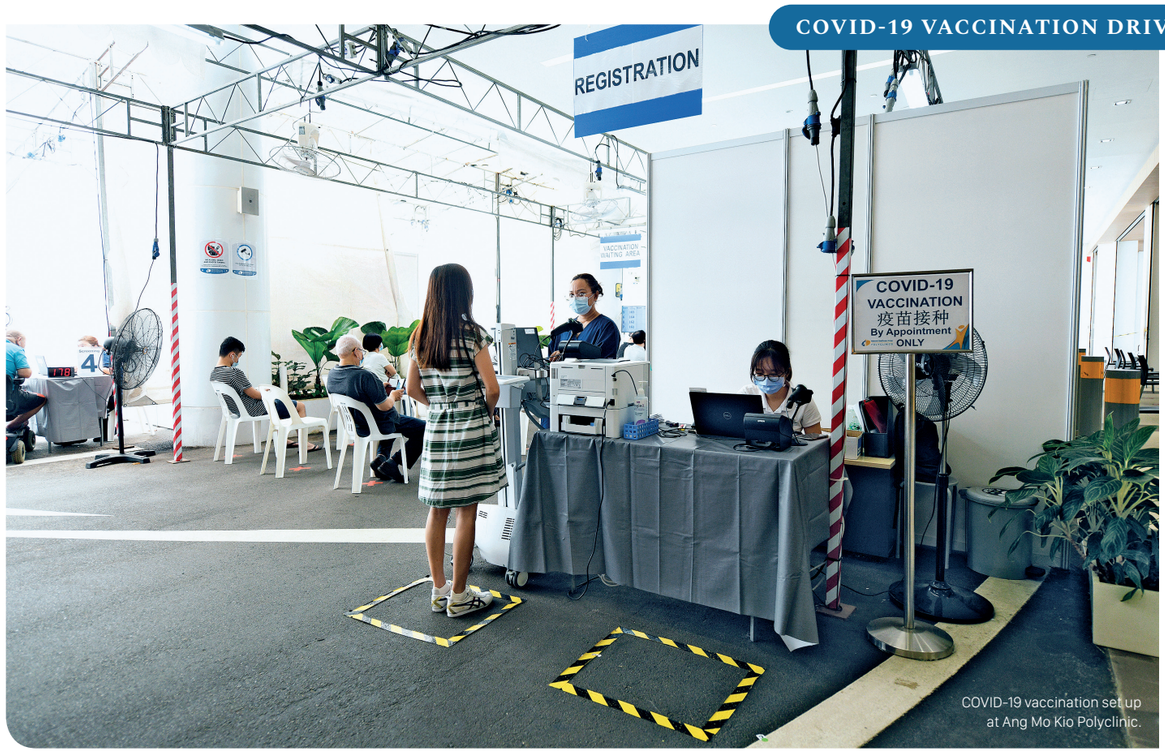
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COVID-19 vaccination set up at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic.

READY, SET, VACCINATE



When it was go-time for Singapore's COVID-19 vaccination programme, NHGP stepped up to the occasion.

In mid-December 2020, the government announced its plan to vaccinate the population as one of the key COVID-19 strategies to keep Singapore safe while re-opening progressively. Setting up Singapore's COVID-19 vaccination programme for success took swift action and unwavering dedication from many parties. With the Ministry of Health (MOH) leading vaccination efforts and polyclinics playing a key role within the primary care setting, the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) had to quickly transition from containing the risk of infection within its polyclinics, to inoculating the population.

When Ms Maybeline Chin checked into a local hotel with her family last December, she was looking forward to unwind and enjoy a well-deserved break. But the Operations Senior Executive at NHGP, who had an intense 2020, ended up working round-the-clock into 2021 to set up and implement both internal and external workflows to support NHGP's vaccination efforts against COVID-19.

SCORING AN "A" FOR ACCELERATION

Not only was the task at hand monumental, it called for phenomenal speed. The first batch of vaccines arrived in Singapore in mid-December 2020, and by 8 January 2021, the nation-wide drive to vaccinate healthcare workers was in full swing. By 1 February, all 20 polyclinics in Singapore, including the six under NHG, were offering COVID-19 vaccinations to the public.

Making this happen involved a lot of work. "Even with drawer plans ready for mass vaccination, we had to constantly update and adapt our plans according to the information that trickled down to us from different parties," recalled Ms Chin of the intense period between mid-December and January. The team had to work within a short timeline, and for a good reason too. "We would be having discussions past midnight to refine procedures to match operational needs, so that our clinics would have a standardised vaccination workflow to run with the next day," she added.

Apart from working speedily to get clinical operations down pat, the NHGP team also had to adopt a whole new medical record system for the vaccination programme. "GPConnect is an integrated IT system with National Immunisation Registry that



An NHGP nurse verifying the individual's medical history at the screening area.

> “Our working hours might be off the charts, but I feel that we as a team are united in our efforts in helping to advance the national COVID-19 Vaccination Programme — and it feels good when we see the number of vaccinated people steadily increase! I still love what I do, and get a great sense of satisfaction knowing that I am working for a noble cause.
>
> **Maybeline Chin**
> Senior Executive, Operations, NHGP




An NHGP nurse preparing the COVID-19 vaccine.

is used both for vaccination operations in the clinic and other vaccination centres,” explained Ms Wendy Ong, Senior Nurse Manager, Nursing Services, at NHGP. “Apart from the hardcopy vaccination card provided, members of the public could also access their vaccination records over HealthHub.” While this new system is very user-friendly, its adoption and application happened over a highly-compressed timeline. In contrast, Ms Ong cited NHGP’s recent transition to the Next Generation Electronic Medical Records (NGEMR) System, which was an exercise that took two to three years for overall training and implementation. “But with GPConnect, our staff were using it on the ground while simultaneously guiding others through it the very same week of training. Despite the extraordinarily tight timelines, our teams pulled through.”

NO DETAIL IS TOO SMALL

Given Singapore’s target to vaccinate 80 per cent of the population by September 2021 in order to achieve herd immunity, the vaccination drive is one of unprecedented scale and urgency. This translates to a massive mobilisation of resources, not just at the frontlines, but also behind the scenes, to ensure every detail is perfected for the smooth roll-out of the programme.

As a start, taking on the additional role of a vaccination site while maintaining essential business-as-usual operations means that polyclinics are now performing double-duty. To make this possible, infrastructural capacities had to be expanded through the setting up of tentages, room partitions, and even portable toilets. Equipment such as coolers and fans were brought in, additional cleaners and security guards were hired to maintain the regular disinfection of these expanded areas and guard the facilities respectively. There was also a need to procure digital queue display systems and other electronics to replicate a service area outside the polyclinics. “It was almost like setting a pop-up clinic within a month or less!” said Ms Chin.

Ms Ong further highlighted the challenges beyond infrastructural needs. These ranged from additional manpower needed at the registration and observation stations, and developing Standard Operating Procedures for emergency response, to doctors lending their clinical guidance during the vaccination process — especially in the initial stages when the eligibility criteria was stringent. The heat and light-sensitive, multi-dose mRNA vaccine vials with short shelf-life after thawing from the freezers require meticulous cold-chain management and planning like no other vaccines the clinics usually administer. As such, this made the processes even more complicated and challenging to handle.


An NHGP nurse preparing to administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

“The pharmacy and nurses worked hand-in-hand with MOH to stock up on the vaccines as frequently as once every two to three days. We also had to closely monitor the appointments to minimise wastage of the multi-dose vials, which can each be used for five individuals,” highlighted Ms Ong. “However, despite monitoring the vaccine supply and appointments, while keeping in mind dropout rates, there were times when we had to reach out to the other NHG polyclinics or healthcare institutions, and send someone running for urgent vaccine supply in order to honour appointments!”


An NHGP nurse administering the COVID-19 vaccine.

Apart from being able to adapt and think on their feet, nurses also found themselves taking on new duties. “NHGP nurses were trained on the cold-chain management procedures for handling and administering the vaccine — but it would be more challenging to keep this up in the long run on top of their day-to-day duties. So, we engaged external locum nurses and had our NHGP nurses conduct these trainings and oversee the operations instead,” shared Ms Ong. “It was a different experience for many nurses, and this gave them an opportunity to take on a leadership role.”

UPDATED AND UPGRADED

While it has been half a year since the vaccination exercise started, NHGP has remained on high alert to keep both staff and public accurately informed of the evolving situation. The novel nature of both the virus and the vaccines means that new discoveries are constantly being made, and NHGP works closely with MOH to gather the latest information. This information is then rapidly disseminated to the staff at all polyclinics through emails or calls. Twice-weekly updates with the vaccination teams further ensure that every member is informed and equipped with the latest data. “Once, the updated information came in around midnight, and we had to ensure that all our staff were notified and adhered to the new clinic workflows by 8am the next day, when the polyclinics start operation,” added Ms Chin.



176,000

The number of people who have received the **Pfizer-BioNTech / Comirnaty** vaccine from NHG Polyclinics, as of **31 July 2021**

Keeping all team members abreast of the latest information and instructions is no mean feat. “We often had to react and revise processes quickly, such as when the changes to the contraindications list provided by MOH came in and we had to implement them within 3 days,” said Ms Chin. Such changes usually have a domino-effect on clinic workflows and preparations to revise the vaccination screening questions, and disseminate them to clinics, with support from Integrated Health Information Systems (IHiS) to then modify the IT system after clinic hours.

Apart from sharing and adapting to the latest information from MOH, NHGP also actively collates feedback from the public to improve the existing systems. “Working on our clinic users’ feedback, IHiS (GPConnect Team) and NHGP co-designed and co-developed numerous enhancements to support vaccination operations,” shared Ms Chin. “These were tested and operationalised rapidly within extremely tight timelines to match the workflow on the ground.” For example, the enhancements to the COVID-19 Vaccination Card, started out from print-out sticker labels and manually completing the cards to having electronic versions with personal and vaccination details, were implemented within only nine days.

Such episodes demonstrated the dynamic nature of the nation-wide effort, which required vigour and commitment to fine-tune various systems and processes. While it took a lot from the staff, the process of planning, implementing and sustaining the vaccination operations also gave them a lot. “Prior to the pandemic, we had conducted mass vaccination exercises within the polyclinics through mock exercises. Never did I imagine that I would have the opportunity to go through a real-life operation, and it is something that is truly enriching for me,” reflected Ms Ong. “The process, while exhausting, was also heart-warming. Different stakeholders worked seamlessly within tight timelines, often sacrificing personal time and public holidays, to make things happen.”


COVID-19 vaccination waiting area at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic.












HONOURING OUR NURSING CHAMPIONS

Three National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) nurses have been recognised for their professional excellence and for going the extra mile at the frontlines.

Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing once said, "Nursing is one of the Fine Arts — I had almost said 'the finest of Fine Arts.'" Indeed, nursing is a special profession underpinned by the highest and most important form of art — care. Beyond fulfilling their pledge to care, comfort and respect every patient, NHGP's nurses also went above and beyond in Singapore's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation for all the hard work and dedication shown by all our outstanding nursing colleagues, who are the pillars of our healthcare system," said Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah, Chief Executive Officer of NHGP and Primary Care. "Since the start of the pandemic, they have administered swab tests within our polyclinics, and conducted mass swabbing missions around Singapore and set up medical posts at migrant worker dormitories last year." She added that this year, some NHGP nurses have been right at the forefront, vaccinating hundreds daily against COVID-19 at all NHG Polyclinics.

Such exemplary nurses include NHGP's Chief Nurse, Ms Lim Voon Hooi, who was conferred the President's Award for Nurses 2021; as well as Nurse Clinician, Ms Evonne Oh and Assistant Nurse Clinician, Ms Nisha Menon, our two Nurses' Merit Award 2021 winners. Beyond their wins, every member of NHGP's nursing team is a true hero.

> "Our nurses have been a resilient and reliable workforce who can be counted on to support our healthcare system and the community.
>
> **Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah**
> Chief Executive Officer of NHGP and Primary Care

PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR NURSES 2021



TRANSFORMING NURSING, ONE STEP AT A TIME

Having joined NHGP 14 years ago as a Senior Staff Nurse, Ms Lim Voon Hooi has dedicated her life to the profession. After rising steadily through the ranks over the years, she was appointed Chief Nurse on 1 June 2021, having actively taken on leadership roles prior to that. For instance, she played a key role in the planning and development of nursing services for new polyclinics, and acted as a key team member during the re-development of Ang Mo Kio and Yishun Polyclinics. She is also actively involved in the setting up of the upcoming Kallang and Sembawang Polyclinics.

In her work, Ms Lim is guided by a simple maxim — when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. The COVID-19 pandemic saw Ms Lim flexing her abilities not just as a nursing professional, but also a strong communicator and effective leader. During the setting up of medical posts at the migrant worker dormitories, she managed the nursing support team while undertaking the massive task of designing clinical processes and planning logistics deployment. In addition, given her extensive clinical knowledge and rich operational experience, Ms Lim was a natural candidate to lead the team that helmed the recent rollout and implementation of the Next Generation Electronic Medical Records (NGEMR) System. In this capacity, she helped to ensure a smooth transition to the new system by developing mitigation plans to deal with inherent risks during the switch.An advocate for healthcare technology, Ms Lim also led the development of the Tele-Directly Observed Therapy (DOT) service, into a first in public primary care. Through close collaboration with the Tuberculosis Control Unit (TBCU), she established the clinic workflows and guidelines for the daily observed treatment of patients with tuberculosis, which is currently observed and used in all NHG Polyclinics. NHGP's suite of Tele-Health services, which includes Tele-DOT, was awarded the *Best Practice Medal* under the Care Redesign category, for the National Healthcare Innovation and Productivity (HIP) Medals 2021.

> "With technology bringing rapid changes to healthcare practices, I strongly believe that the development and upskilling in the specialty area of nursing informatics will greatly contribute to enhancing the nursing profession.
>
> **Ms Lim Voon Hooi**
> Chief Nurse,
> National Healthcare Group Polyclinics

As a firm believer in innovation and quality improvement, Ms Lim is also a member of the Singapore Healthcare Improvement Network (SHINe), a major initiative by the Ministry of Health (MOH) involving various healthcare institutions that bring about large-scale improvement and transformative changes in healthcare.



Chief Nurse, Ms Lim Voon Hooi explaining how the Nurse Learning Home Dashboard on the Next Generation Electronic Medical Record (NGEMR) works.

NURSES' MERIT AWARD 2021

Two NHGP winners reflect on the joys of their chosen profession.

TAKING THE LEAP

My godmother's stories of her nursing experiences deeply inspired me when I was young.

It was serendipity, however, that led me to nursing. My own journey into the field began in my mid-twenties while hunting for a full-time job. My mother came across an advertisement for a nursing professional conversion programme and urged me to take the leap.

Throughout my 14 years as a nurse, I have been blessed with amazing teammates who were motivated and provided me a supportive environment for growth.

A moment I will never forget was my first experience performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on a patient, who had suddenly collapsed. While initially nervous, I trusted my training and gained strength from my fellow nurses who immediately rushed over to support me. They also stepped up to cover my medication rounds to ensure other patients would not be affected. It was then that I truly recognised and appreciated the importance of teamwork in this profession.

Ms Evonne Oh Siew Gek
Nurse Clinician,
Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic

PROVIDING CARE FOR EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

I have been a nurse for 15 years, starting out as a neonatal nurse. In my current role as an infection control nurse at NHGP, I work alongside colleagues from various departments to ensure our polyclinic patients receive quality care.

Some of my most memorable experiences were having to care for families whose infant babies had passed on. Those encounters allowed me to better appreciate the sanctity of life, and also helped me to learn how I can better improve the patient experience. Subsequently, I worked as a nurse in the paediatric ward, oncology ward and nursing home. Each posting further shaped my outlook as a nurse.

My greatest motivation is seeing my patients smile and knowing the impact I have made on their care journey. It has been a rewarding journey thus far, and I hope to put more smiles on the faces of patients.



Ms Nisha Menon
Assistant Nurse Clinician,
Nursing Services

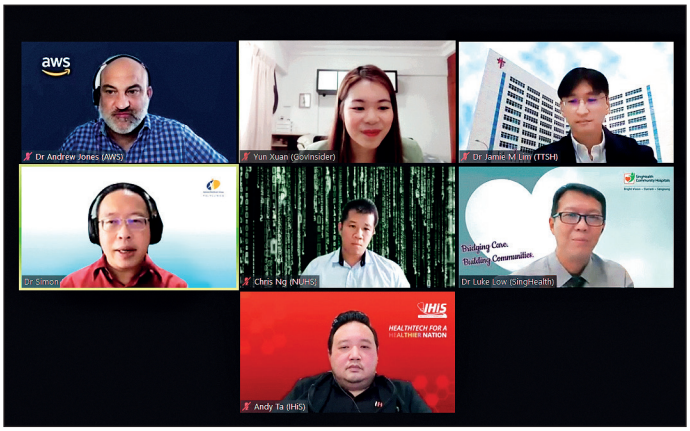
NHGP WINS AT NATIONAL HEALTHCARE INNOVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY MEDALS 2021

Adding to the organisation's list of accolades, an NHGP project titled 'Implementing Tele-Consultation Services for the Care of Chronic Conditions' was awarded the *Best Practice Medal* (Care Redesign Category) at the National Healthcare Innovation and Productivity (HIP) Medals this year on 1 July 2021. Organised annually by the Centre for Health Innovation, the National HIP Medals recognise and celebrate excellence in healthcare innovation and productivity.

Given the current COVID-19 situation, NHGP's team, led by Dr Sabrina Wong, Family Physician, Senior Consultant and Assistant Director of Clinical Services, received the medal from Associate Professor Chong Phui-Nah, CEO of NHGP and Primary Care, at an internal ceremony held at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic.



CHARTING SINGAPORE'S INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE JOURNEY



At a webinar titled 'Connecting the Dots for Integrated Healthcare' organised by GovInsider on 3 June 2021, Dr Simon Lee, Chief Data Officer and Chief Clinical Informatics Officer, NHGP, shared how NHGP brought care closer to the community during the pandemic by offering a suite of Tele-Health services to patients. These include Tele-Psychology, Tele-Dietetics and Tele-Physiotherapy among others, with eligible patients identified via predictive data analytics.

Joining Dr Lee were speakers from Tan Tock Seng Hospital and National University Health System, who shared how healthcare institutions in Singapore are moving towards personalised and integrated care for all patients.

INTRODUCING *CAREBOT@NHGP*

On 8 April 2021, a virtual assistant chatbot with a unified design was made available on the websites of all ten National Healthcare Group (NHG) institutions. Initiated by NHGP and Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, the animated call centre's virtual customer associate assistant offers patients seamless round-the-clock access to information on healthcare services across the various care settings in NHG. As of 30 July 2021, NHGP's chatbot named *CareBot@NHGP* has provided close to 5,000 chat sessions, with about 70% of users rating their experience as positive.

