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SINGAPORE NEWS

MOH aims to increase intake of nursing students
By Yimta Mohandaa | Posted: 25 February 2012 17:19 hrs

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SINGAPORE: The Ministry of Health (MOH) aims to expand the pool of locally trained healthcare workers to address manpower shortage.

One target is to increase the yearly intake of nursing students at tertiary institutions from the current 1,700 to 2,000 by 2015.

The tertiary institutions include the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Institute of Technical Education.

For allied health courses, the aim is to raise the intake from 270 to 290 by 2014.

There are about 32,000 registered nurses in Singapore and two in 10 are foreigners.

As Singapore move towards reducing its reliance on foreign manpower, expanding its pipeline of local nurses is a key focus.

There are now more training places for nurses. A new nursing degree programme offered by the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) in partnership with the University of Manchester launched in September 2011 will offer upgrading opportunities for nursing diploma graduates, adding to the pool of degree-trained nurses.

It also recently announced its partnership with an overseas university, Trinity College Dublin, to offer degree programmes in physiotherapy and occupational therapy which will be launched in September 2012.

However, industry experts said it remains a challenge to get local students to take up nursing.

This could be due to a lack of avenues for skills upgrading.

Tan Chek Ming, deputy president (Operations), at SIT, said: "Before SIT came in, if you want to be a nurse with a degree in Singapore, you only have one choice which is the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies and they take in mainly those with A-levels. If you are a diploma nurse..... there's no option.

"When SIT came in, we said we must create all these opportunities so that our polytechnic students can then have the opportunity. Now, students will say 'oh wow, there's a path available now.' When the first batch of graduates comes out, they can go back to hospitals and get higher pay and the adjustment to commensurate the degree. Now, they are doing a bigger role, a better job and taking more leadership roles. That will then again inspire and attract more students to come in."

Some nursing students said the image of the profession needs to be improved.

Pearlyn Ng, a third year student at Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, said: "In Singapore, when you mention nursing, they will have this impression that nursing is only for poly or ITE graduates. But in overseas, there are a lot of degree holders that are nurses. So I think it will take some time before they realize that nursing is a more 'up there' profession."

Another student Zia Ul Hakim said: "I think students need to learn that nurses don't just do manual labour but play a very critical role in patient care."

As for doctors, MOH hopes to encourage those who are studying medicine overseas to return to Singapore by giving them a pre-employment grant in order to increase the pool of doctors here.

Besides increasing the intake at National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, the opening of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in 2013 will help to build up the local training pipeline for doctors.

Together, the three schools target to take in 500 students annually, up from the 330 students last year.

NUS also offers a master programme in speech and language pathology to train speech therapists. Currently, the programme has a biennial intake of 30 students, up from its initial biennial intake of 20 students in 2007.


Photos 1 of 1

A nurse helps a patient to a bed.


Video

MOH aims to increase intake of nursing students


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