(From right) NTUC Health's residential care head Leon Luai, Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-Jin and NTUC Health chief executive Chua Song Khim observing former nursing home resident Ang Cheh Eng doing exercises, at the official opening of NTUC Health's nursing home in Chai Chee (below, right) yesterday. ST PHOTOS: SEAH KWANG PENG, SHARON LUM

NTUC Health launches second nursing home

It aims to get the seniors back home early to continue rehabilitation in the community

Lim Min Zhang

The labour movement's second nursing home was launched yesterday, but it will not just focus on delivering care within its walls.

NTUC Health's new facility in Chai Chee Street, which can accommodate up to 350 residents, will aim to get the seniors back home early to continue their rehabilitation in the community.

Mr Leon Luai, head of residential care at NTUC Health, said: "There's no better place to age in place than their own homes. Hence we have devoted resources to make sure that the appropriate levels of rehabilitation are given to residents with potential for discharge."

He added that building "a lot more nursing homes" is not the long-term solution.

"It is our wish that every nursing home has the ability to discharge 5 to 10 per cent of the residents. If we can do that, those with higher care needs can then be admitted."

To help achieve this goal, NTUC Health has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), and another with Changi General Hospital (CGH).

With SIT, NTUC Health will work to develop a pool of allied health professionals and allow students to gain hands-on experience at its nursing homes.

The partnership with CGH will, among other things, help to train nursing home staff in various areas, such as geriatric and dementia care.

This approach of discharging patients in a timely manner will also apply at NTUC Health's two other nursing homes. Combined, the Jurong West, Chai Chee and Geylang East facilities can provide care for close to 1,000 seniors, up from the 600 or so now.

The newest home in Geylang East, while not officially open, began admitting residents in April.

Since 2015, NTUC Health has discharged 21 residents across its nursing homes, with seven from Chai Chee, its biggest facility so far. It hopes to discharge another 20 by the end of next year.

The process involves identifying the patients' conditions and chances of recovery, chatting with the families, knowing what the patients themselves want and providing them with "intensive rehabilitation", among other things.

The Chai Chee facility brings the total number of nursing homes in Singapore to 72. The Health Ministry hopes to provide 17,000 beds in the sector by 2020, up from about 12,800 this year.

In his speech, Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-Jin, who was the guest of honour at the launch, said: "We, as a society, cannot outsource care to just healthcare providers... We, as a community, need to own and be a part of it."

Housewife Ang Cheh Eng, 63, was admitted into the Chai Chee nursing home in February after she was diagnosed with cancer a month earlier, and had to use a wheelchair. Madam Ang, who does not need a wheelchair now, was discharged six months later. She still visits the facility twice a week for outpatient therapy.

Ms Yong Limin, a senior principal physiotherapist at NTUC Health, noted the importance of education in helping people like Madam Ang.

"The biggest challenge is that they are not aware that the journey of regaining their functions is actually possible. Helping them to change their mindset is key to helping them regain their mobility and confidence."

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