



Head of Duke-NUS Medical School's Centre for Clinician-Scientist Development Koh Woon Puay (centre), who founded a year-long professional leadership training programme that aims to empower women clinician-scientists and scientists to succeed in their research endeavours, with two of the participants, Dr Anita Chan (left) and Dr Wong Ting Hway. ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

Empowering and nurturing women in science

While there are more women in science and engineering than ever, the fields remain largely male-dominated, especially at the top. Two women are addressing this with initiatives aimed at giving their fellow women a career boost.

Gracia Lee

It all started with a lunch break during a research skills workshop for clinician-scientists in 2016.

Dr Koh Woon Puay, who hosted the event, and other female attendees had gathered for a bite to eat and noticed that out of the 30 or so participants at the event, only a third were women.

"We started to talk about the challenges that we faced as women do-

ing dual careers (as doctors and researchers), and the support we could give to one another, and then about setting up such a network to do this," said Dr Koh, a professor at Duke-NUS Medical School and the director of its Centre for Clinician-Scientist Development.

That conversation inspired her to launch the Women in Science network a year later under the SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medical Centre with the aim of providing female medical researchers

opportunities for networking, training and mentoring.

Under the network, Dr Koh, who is also a professor at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, also set up a year-long professional leadership training programme targeted at mid-career female researchers.

Such leadership courses are often offered only to those in top management positions, many of which are occupied by men, said Dr Koh.

The programme, which is conducted in partnership with leadership and management development institute Roffey Park, aims to equip women with skills to help them move up the career ladder while also providing them with a platform to mentor and support one another through facilitated group discussions.

The programme, which kicked off with a two-day session at Amara

Sanctuary Resort in Sentosa last week, will involve the 25 participants attending seven half-day workshops and lunchtime seminars throughout the year.

One participant, Dr Anita Chan, 43, a senior consultant at the Singapore National Eye Centre and head of the translational ophthalmic pathology platform in the Singapore Eye Research Institute, said the programme has helped her discover more about her strengths and weaknesses and how to work around them.

Dr Chan told *The Straits Times* last Friday: "It's important for us to have personal growth so we can deliver better healthcare, better research and better manage our day-to-day relationships."

Fellow participant Wong Ting Hway, a trauma and general surgeon at the Singapore General Hospital who also does research in health services, said the network has given her the opportunity to meet women from the field she can learn from and look up to.

"It always helps to be in a setting where you can look at each other and realise that, even if the other person has a totally different area of research from what you have, they have achieved certain things that you want to achieve too," said Dr Wong, 44.

Dr Koh hopes to run the programme again within the next two years if it proves beneficial and if there are sufficient participants and support.

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DR ANITA CHAN, on how the programme has helped her discover more about her strengths and weaknesses.

NETWORK OF WOMEN TO LEARN FROM

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