Group of pharmacists, nurses certified to prescribe medicine

Isabelle Liew

An initial group of highly qualified pharmacists and nurses can now prescribe medicine and order tests for patients without needing a doctor’s prescription.

They are from different healthcare clusters, and are the first to finish a national programme certifying them as collaborative prescribing practitioners (CPP). The programme is led by the National Healthcare Group (NHG), the national healthcare system, and SingHealth will have to wait until their hospitals attain a licence, for which they can now apply, for them to start.

Having such qualified personnel who are able to provide the medicine as order tests would save patients time, said healthcare professionals.

Said Associate Professor Tham Kum Ying, education director and senior consultant for emergency medicine at Tan Tock Seng Hospital: “For the APNs in the emergency department who work with, my estimation is that they save each patient about eight minutes.”

Prof Tham also chairs the committee overseeing the curriculum for the National Collaborative Prescribing Programme.

A graduate of the programme, Dr Karen Koh, 42, an APN at National University Hospital who set up four APN-led clinics in collaboration with cardiologists at NHG, said collaborative prescribing practitioners would become even more important with an ageing population.

She said: “It gives us satisfaction to know we can get that extra mile for our patients, to give them that continuity of care. Otherwise, they would have to face prolonged waiting times while we consult the doctors and sort our prescriptions for them.”

McGoon Toh, 40, principal district pharmacist at the Institute of Mental Health, said the most valuable part of the programme was learning to conduct physical assessments and patient evaluations.

With these skills, he may be able to spot health issues faced by patients with schizophrenia, for instance, after referring them to the attention of a doctor, he said: “It increases the population to co-manage patients within the collaborative prescribing agreement, and hopefully that can improve the continuity and access of healthcare to them.”

For all this work, said NUS Department of Pharmacy Associate Professor Priscilla Leong, 42, inter-professional education is key, she said: “Through the course, I see a lot of camaraderie because the nurses, doctors and pharmacists all came together to help and teach one another. It was really heartening to see all the different medical professions come together.”

The National Collaborative Prescribing Programme is a six-month programme organised by National University of Singapore’s Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies and Department of Pharmacy. It is conducted twice a year, and its next intake is in Aug 14.