

# Hear, hear: NUS offering master's in audiology



Mr Lothar Herrmann (from left), CEO of Siemens Asean-Pacific, Health Minister Gan Kim Yong and Associate Professor Benjamin Ong, CEO of National University Health System, at a presentation held yesterday in the new soundproofed classroom built for the audiology course. ST PHOTO: CAROLINE CHIA

## New course will grow pool of experts trained to detect ear-related health issues

By POON CHIAN HUI

ASPIRING hearing-disorder experts no longer have to travel abroad to study, with the National University of Singapore (NUS) now offering a two-year master's degree in audiology.

The course is the first local training pathway for audiologists, who work alongside doctors to diagnose ear-related health problems among patients and fit hearing devices.

Its first intake of 18, comprising students aged between 22 and 46, started classes in August.

The move will help to increase the number of these professionals in Singapore from the current 60 – all of whom were trained overseas, in countries such as the Philippines and India.

But Singapore's greying population means that the demand for their services will grow.

Already, the latest National Health Survey found that one in five Singaporeans aged 50 to 59 suffers from some form of hearing impairment. The rate rises to one in four for those between 60 and 69.

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong described the new NUS programme as “a significant milestone”.

“To meet the health-care needs of our rapidly ageing population, we need to grow our audiologist manpower pool and continually develop their capabilities,” he said yesterday at the launch of the degree. Nine scholarships for the course have been given out, mostly by the Health Ministry.

Associate Professor Lynne Lim, a specialist at National University Hospital (NUH) who heads the new programme, pointed out that the level of training can be “uneven” across different countries. For instance, some schools may not focus on research.

So having a local programme paves the way for a more tailored approach. “Upon graduation, our students will be familiar with the local health-care ecosystem,” she said. “They will be mindful of the nuances of policy, culture and language differences.”

The \$76,000 course is open to working adults and fresh undergraduates with a bachelor's degree – preferably in allied health, science, life sciences or engineering – from a recognised university. It was created with the help of a \$19.5 million donation from medical technology giant Siemens.

Part of the money went to building a classroom in the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, containing the latest audiology equipment. The soundproofed classroom is also digitally connected to a new clinic at the NUH Medical Centre. Video feeds from NUH's Centre for Hearing, Speech and Balance allow students to observe real-life patient consultations and the hearing tests they undergo.

Among the first batch of home-grown audiologists is Kenneth Chua, 24, who joined the course after studying life sciences at NUS. He hopes the training will enable him to help his grandmother, 80, who has hearing loss.

“Even after seeing the doctor, she rejected the use of hearing aids,” he said. “I hope that she will be my first patient after I graduate.”

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