



New centres enhance S'pore as medical hub

By NARENDRA AGGARWAL

SINGAPORE'S aim to be a premier medical hub in the region has received a boost with two new private sector facilities to augment what's already an advanced infrastructure.

The new Novena Medical Centre houses specialist clinics with state-of-the-art facilities and there's direct access to the neighbouring Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH). A 400-room hotel is to be built next door by the same developer, the Far East Organization.

The other new set-up is the West Point Hospital in Jurong, which is close to the HDB heartland community and the Jurong industrial area, where there are many foreign executives and workers.

Medical tourism is big business these days and some experts note that Singapore is well on its way to achieving its target of drawing one million medical tourists by 2012.

Last year, there were 555,000 medical tourists and the receipts from this segment reached a record \$1.295 billion.

Despite the rapid growth of rival medical hubs in Malaysia and Thailand, Singapore has seen 18 per cent annual average growth in the number of foreigners who visit the republic to seek medical help in the past five years.

"Singapore is a medical hub of a different sort," says Dr Jason Yap, director of Singapore Medicine, the healthcare services unit of Singapore Tourism Board which connects foreign patients to Singapore's world class health care facilities.

Unlike other countries, Singapore is not just looking at boosting the revenue in medical tourism. It also wants to improve the expertise and research in the healthcare sector, and having more patients here for treatment will help the process, he adds.

Novena Medical Centre, at Square 2 sited above the Novena MRT station, comprises

145 medical suites.

The top four levels of the building are dedicated to the medical suites, while another four levels and the basement, which connects to Novena MRT station, are for the retail business.

Mr G. L. Yap, the executive director (property services) of Far East Organization, says: "As a white site, we were free to develop it as we wanted. Developing another condo was a choice, but we see Novena taking shape as a medical hub."

"Talking to medical professionals, we found that there was demand as they wanted to buy units rather than lease them to get over the insecurity of having to renew their lease every few years. For the specialist doctors, the in-patient facilities at TTSH are a great attraction. At the same time, the hospital is looking for better patient feed for the higher paying A and B class beds, which are not fully taken up."

A highlight of the development is a pedestrian traveller linkbridge at the third level to TTSH.

Mr Yap estimates that the wide range of specialist clinics in the medical centre will get between 40 per cent and 70 per cent of their patients from overseas.

Developed at a cost of over \$250 million, the Novena Medical Centre is already 90 per cent sold. Some of the clinics are already being fitted out and the first doctor is expected to start practising there before the end of this year.

One of the specialists, Dr Goh Hak Su, is excited about being located at Novena Medical Centre.

He says: "The private sector can play an important role in the national push to be a medical hub. The Novena Medical Centre will be able to provide comprehensive medical services. Over time, I expect it to build up a



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name for good quality services."

The deputy director for industry development and international cooperation at the Ministry of Health, Mr Foo Siang-tse, says that one of the objectives of being a medical hub is to raise the level of medical research, as this improves the quality of service for local as well as foreign patients.

"We are not looking to be a factory. We want to achieve good quality and will benchmark ourselves against the best in the world," he says.

At West Point Hospital, a modern 58-bed facility has taken shape at what used to be Jurong Hospital some decades ago.

Mr Ong Chu Poh, group chairman and chief executive officer of stock market-listed China Healthcare Ltd, which owns the hospital, discloses that plans are being firmed up to add a new 200-bed building to the hospital.

"West Point is the only private hospital in Singapore with both acute and convalescent licences," says Dr Madeleine Chew Him Lim, its chief executive officer and medical director.

Over a third of West Point's patients are foreign executives and foreign workers from the nearby Jurong industrial area.