

New private hospital to be set up in Jurong

150-bed facility that offers full suite of services will be ready in three to four years

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A NEW private hospital will be ready in the western part of Singapore in three to four years.

It will offer the full suite of services – emergency and intensive care, surgery, specialist clinics offering cancer, geriatric and orthopaedic care, and a Traditional Chinese Medicine clinic.

To be operated by China Healthcare, it will retain its present name, Westpoint. The premises, at the site of the old Jurong Hospital, is now run by China Healthcare as a convalescent home.

China Healthcare's chief executive officer Ong Chu Poh plans to spend up to \$15 million to transform it into a 150-bed hospital offering acute and convalescent care.

News of a new hospital in Jurong was welcomed by Madam Halimah Yacob, an MP for Jurong GRC. "It fills a need. It's good that they will offer both acute and convalescent care, making it easier to move between the two seamlessly. It will also give residents more options," she said.

She has been concerned about the shortage of hospital beds and had queried the Health Minister about it in Parliament recently.

The ministry sees a need for 60 to 100 new subsidised beds every year for Singapore until the population stabilises.

Mr Ong said patients can expect to pay lower rates than the B1 and private room rates charged by other private, and even public hospitals, which start from \$150 a day.

"They can also use their Medisave," he said. But there will be no subsidised care, except for those who qualify under the ministry's convalescent home subsidy.

China Healthcare runs five Medicare centres under the Econ-

Healthcare name, and two nursing homes in Singapore as well as a Medicare centre in Kuala Lumpur.

It took over full ownership of the 20-year-old, 58-bed Westpoint last September and has spent the last few months renovating the place.

Its lease on the land at Corporation Drive, owned by Jurong Town Corporation (JTC), has been extended by another 30 years, giving it a total of 39 years. Mr Ong is now in talks with JTC to build a new five- or six-storey building at the premises.

He is confident that the Health Ministry will give its approval for a licence to run a full hospital, based on his company's track record and its ability to meet the requirements.

Dr Madeleine Chew, the hospital's chief executive officer and medical director, said the plan is to offer complete community care.

In cases of serious accidents that require sophisticated surgery, for example, Westpoint will treat the immediate trauma, stabilise the patient and then send him to the National University Hospital.

With the purchase of a CT or computed tomography scanner, it will be able to deal with most accident cases, she said.

But the niche it wants is holistic community care.

Mr Ong said having both an acute and convalescent hospital in the same place means a patient

who is getting better can easily move to a cheaper bed in the convalescent section, while having doctors nearby in case of need.

He added: "Since we also run two nursing homes, it will be easy to get a place for patients needing longer nursing care."

Westpoint already offers home physiotherapy and nursing services, which it will expand as needed.

And as the population ages, the number of cancer patients will increase. Dr Chew said that offering cancer treatment, possibly in a tie-up with a tertiary hospital, will give patients living in Jurong the convenience of doing chemotherapy near their homes.

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