

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Publication

NUH PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE PROGRAMME PROVIDES A LIFELINE TO FAMILIES OF PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC CONDITIONS

A unique hospital initiative in Singapore, the Child and Adolescent Family Support Services (CAFSS) programme offers psychosocial support to the parents and siblings of young patients, as well as to children of adult patients

SINGAPORE — When Mdm Tan’s son developed severe eczema and asthma, her caregiving journey became overwhelming. Similarly, Mdm Adilah, a mother of three, struggled after her youngest daughter, who has Down syndrome, was diagnosed with a chronic kidney condition. The stress of caregiving affected their families, with siblings displaying behavioural changes including tantrums and emotional outbursts.

“The psychological burden of caregiving for a child with chronic illness is great, impacting not only their parents who are often the primary caregivers but other family members indirectly involved in the care of the ill child, such as their siblings,” said Ms Ng Siau Hwei, Head, Psychology (Paediatrics), Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI), National University Hospital (NUH). Ms Ng leads the Division of Paediatric Psychological Services, which comprises psychologists, child life therapists, art therapists and play therapists, providing psychological services to patients up to the age of 18.

In 2022 and 2023, both mothers, whose children are patients of NUH’s KTP-NUCMI, sought help from the Child and Adolescent Family Support Services (CAFSS), a pilot programme offering psychosocial support to families of young patients.

Direct access to subsidised care for family members

CAFSS provides specialised psychosocial support to families of young patients with chronic illnesses, from allergies to severe conditions like renal failure. The programme, made possible through a \$100,000 gift from EtonHouse Community Fund (ECF), is Singapore’s first hospital service that extends subsidised psychological care to both parents and siblings and aims to strengthen family resilience.

Paediatric psychologists at NUH have observed a rising trend of family difficulties when a child is diagnosed with a chronic condition, including behavioural issues in siblings and declining mental wellness in parents due to the mental, financial and emotional stress of caregiving.

Ms Ng, the lead of CAFSS, added: “Currently, the needs of family members impacted are provided for indirectly through referrals made to community support networks such

as Family Service Centres or community counselling centres. As greater coordination and collaboration can enhance this system of care, CAFSS hopes to bridge this gap by enabling direct access to subsidised, family-centred psychosocial care in a public hospital setting.”

Since its inception in 2022, the programme has supported nine families through individual and group therapies, improving mood, reducing anxiety, and helping families cope with change. Families are also connected to external social support networks for further follow-ups.

With the programme running till 2026, the team is recruiting 12 families and has expanded its reach to include families of adult patients with chronic illnesses, whose children have trouble coping with their parents’ diagnosis.

Helping families one at a time

Mdm Adilah’s family benefitted from 11 months of CAFSS family-centred therapy, which improved their communication, emotional well-being and quality of life. Her daughters learnt to express their emotions more effectively, leading to a more harmonious family. “I’ve learnt how to process my feelings and emotions, and now, I know I’m not alone,” said Mdm Adilah.

Similarly, Mdm Tan and her family received counselling and psychosocial support. Mdm Tan and her husband also learnt positive parenting strategies, helping them create a more secure and nurturing environment for their son, who suffers from food allergies.

With ECF funding covering 80 per cent of each session with a psychologist or therapist, beneficiaries only co-pay 20 per cent of the charges. This funding goes beyond financial savings as caregivers would typically forgo seeking help for their own mental health even when they are in crisis, due to the strain of hefty medical bills brought about by chronic illness that requires long-term care.

Both Mdm Adilah and Mdm Lee expressed gratitude for the CAFSS programme and the financial support by Etonhouse Community Fund, highlighting the tailored care and attention their families received.

“Given the lack of local studies on such care models in Singapore, we hope the programme will provide valuable insights into supporting families with a chronically ill patient,” said Ms Ng.

Ms Fannie Lim, Chief Executive Officer of ECF, added: "For every child and youth to thrive, we need to take a holistic lens in their developmental/growing up journey. At EtonHouse Community Fund, we are glad to play a small part in supporting this first pilot programme in NUH to offer psychosocial support to families of young patients. By reviewing the results of this pilot, we're glad to see overall improvements in these patients and their families' quality of life and hopefully would set them up for more positive life milestones ahead, individually and as a family unit."

Chinese Glossary

National University Hospital (NUH)	国立大学医院 (国大医院)
Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI)	邱德拔-国立大学儿童医疗中心
EtonHouse Community Fund (ECF)	伊顿基金会
Child and Adolescent Family Support Services (CAFSS)	儿童与青少年家庭支持服务
Ms Ng Siau Hwei Head, Psychology (Paediatrics) Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute National University Hospital	黄晓慧 心理学主任 邱德拔-国立大学儿童医疗中心 国立大学医院
Ms Fannie Lim Chief Executive Officer EtonHouse Community Fund (ECF)	林竹慧 首席执行官 伊顿基金会

For media enquiries, please contact:

Justine LAI
Senior Assistant Manager
Group Communications
National University Health System
Email: justine_lai@nuhs.edu.sg

Cheryl CHEN
EtonHouse Community Fund
Email: cheryl.chen@ecf.org.sg

About the National University Hospital (NUH)

The National University Hospital (NUH) is Singapore’s leading university hospital. While the hospital at Kent Ridge first received its patients on 24 June 1985, our legacy started from 1905, the date of the founding of what is today the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. NUH is the principal teaching hospital of the medical school.

Our unique identity as a university hospital is a key attraction for healthcare professionals who aspire to do more than practise tertiary medical care. We offer an environment where research and teaching are an integral part of medicine, and continue to shape medicine and transform care for the community we care for.

We are an academic medical centre with over 1,200 beds, serving more than one million patients a year with over 50 medical, surgical and dental specialties. NUH is the only public and not-for-profit hospital in Singapore to provide trusted care for adults, women and children under one roof, including the only paediatric kidney and liver transplant programme in the country.

The NUH is a key member of the National University Health System (NUHS), one of three public healthcare clusters in Singapore.

About the EtonHouse Community Fund (ECF)

The EtonHouse Community Fund (ECF) is an Institution of Public Character (IPC) charity, founded in 2015 by EtonHouse International Education Group. ECF believes that every individual deserves the opportunity to grow holistically. Recognising that children and youth benefit from support beyond formal education, ECF works to uplift children, youth, and families from disadvantaged backgrounds through quality, family-centred programmes focused on emotional well-being, cognitive growth, and physical health.

Over the years, ECF has championed numerous initiatives, including a mindfulness programme for at-risk youth to support their emotional well-being, and "Teacher Everywhere," that trains volunteer teachers to deliver its signature Joyful Learning programme to pre-schoolers from vulnerable backgrounds to nurture a love for learning. ECF's work has positively impacted low-income families, earning recognitions such as The President's Volunteerism and Philanthropy Awards 2020, MSF Community Cares Award in 2019 and the Community Chest Bronze Award.

By collaborating with like-minded organisations and individuals in establishing a comprehensive support system, ECF creates pathways for children and youths to discover and develop their unique gifts and talents to fulfil their potential, creating a brighter future for generations to come.