

NUH to add 300 beds, replace older ones by 2038

Move will take total bed count to 1,500; clinical facilities will also be enhanced

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The National University Hospital (NUH) is expected to replace half of its 1,200 beds and add another 100 new ones by 2033 as part of ongoing efforts to redevelop the hospital campus.

By 2038, the remaining older beds will also be replaced and another 200 beds will be added, taking the hospital's total to 1,500.

The emergency departments, operating theatres and specialist outpatient clinics will also be enhanced.

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung gave this update on Feb 22 in his speech at a dinner and dance commemorating the hospital's 40th anniversary.

"The redesigned campus will be much more user-friendly, with shorter travel distances between facilities, and services that are easier to locate. The campus will be greener, with more plants and trees, and less carbon emissions," Mr Ong said to an audience of 4,000 at Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

"This will be a major upgrade of the healthcare infrastructure in the western part of Singapore."



The redevelopment of the National University Hospital campus aims to meet the western region's evolving healthcare needs. The redesigned campus will also be more user-friendly and greener. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

The redevelopment of the NUH campus aims to meet the western region's evolving healthcare needs.

It is expected to take about a decade to be completed.

Mr Ong said that in the next decade, while NUH will continue to uphold its ethos and excellence, the landscape in which it operates will be different.

The population will be older, the conditions of patients will be more complex, medical technology will take multiple leaps forward, and resources will become tighter as national healthcare expenditure goes up, said Mr Ong.

Given such factors, NUH is likely to go through three major transformations, he added.

One is the physical transformation, as the hospital is already 40 to 50 years old. Its campus layout is far from ideal, and facilities are getting time-worn, the minister said.

"The process is quite complex, as you can appreciate, because the hospital will still be operating even while undergoing redevelopment. New wards will therefore have to be constructed in order to facilitate a musical chair process of relocating existing wards and redeveloping their current sites," said Mr Ong.

Another transformation is in the area of technology, for it permeates many hospital processes.

Before long, every care team will have an artificial intelligence

(AI) companion to help them diagnose patients and prescribe care pathways.

The AI companion's predictive powers will help the care team anticipate what could go wrong with a patient and take action to prevent it.

Scans will be read by AI software and known anomalies will be highlighted.

Medical records will also be auto-generated, with AI tools listening in on conversations between patients and doctors.

Sensors and algorithms will monitor the movements of patients and keep them safe.

Robotic surgery may become cost-effective, with lower prices of equipment and consumables, discipline in application, and consolidation of case volume.

Finally, there will also be a population health transformation.

Mr Ong said there will be much stronger collaboration between acute and community hospitals, family doctors, nursing homes, hospices and other community care providers.

Patients will be seen where it is most conducive for their recovery, and rehabilitation and transitions will be more seamless.

NUH will also plug into the network of active ageing centres, and through its health posts, deliver clinical and preventive care in the community.

There will probably be stronger partnership with even fitness coaches, coffee shops and hawker centres to encourage exercise and better diet.

"In other words, I believe in the next 10 years, there will be a decisive shift away from hospitals to the community in giving care," said Mr Ong.

"Manpower will increasingly be deployed to multiple settings, especially those in communities, closer to residential homes."

He added: "NUH, as a brand, as an identity, will no longer be synonymous with a hospital, but a health system, from acute to preventive, from curative to rehabilitative to palliative, for communities in the west."