

Expanded roles for therapy assistants

Staff being trained to take on more duties to ease load of physio and occupation therapists

Felicia Choo

There is a move to get support staff to physiotherapists or occupation therapists to take on more skilled duties, in much the same way nurses are trained to perform some roles done by doctors.

Take Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), where more therapy support staff now perform tasks previously handled by only occupational therapists or physiotherapists after job roles were expanded three years ago.

This has freed up therapists to focus on complex cases, such as patients with a higher level of physical dependency or cognitive problems. TTSH studies also found that sessions run by therapy support staff

are as effective as those by occupational therapists or physiotherapists.

Two of the studies showed that patients had comparable improvements in walking speed, endurance, balance and ability to perform activities of daily living.

So far, 23 of the 48 therapy support staff at TTSH have completed two months of theoretical and practical training, followed by a competency assessment. They can now conduct exercise classes and occupational therapy for patients, as well as help them integrate back into the community.

"Job redesign creates an opportunity for our therapy support staff to learn and grow within the department," said Ms Doreen Yeo, chairman for TTSH's Allied Health Ser-

vices and Pharmacy. "Therapists now have more time to tend to more complex patient cases."

Mr Arvic Penaranda Mandawe, 40, a therapy support associate at TTSH, has been taking on additional duties since August 2016.

Besides the standard training, he has learnt skills in robot assisted rehabilitation, treadmill and circuit training programmes.

"I feel empowered to do more things for patients," said Mr Arvic, who has been at TTSH for five years. "Having the chance to see the patient independently is really a big thing for me," he said.

In the past, he could carry out only individual treatments, and assisted or led group therapies under the direction of a therapist.

Mr Arvic's expanded role allows him to provide therapy to patients like Mr Manimaran Manikam, 38, who suffered a brain injury in a hit-and-run accident 10 years ago.

TTSH is also working with the In-

stitute of Technical Education to develop a new work-learn technical diploma programme to train higher skilled therapy assistants.

The National University Hospital has also expanded its therapy assistant roles since 2016. For example, therapy assistants in its neurological rehabilitation outpatient service are trained to set up and monitor patients on Armeospring, an upper limb rehabilitation device.

SingHealth also plans to beef up the skills of therapy assistants.

Its College of Allied Health will offer a part-time training programme for 18 of 80 physiotherapy therapy assistants from next year.

This will enable them to provide therapy for patients, such as those who have undergone total knee replacement and do not have post-operative complications, said Professor Celia Tan, SingHealth's group director of Allied Health.

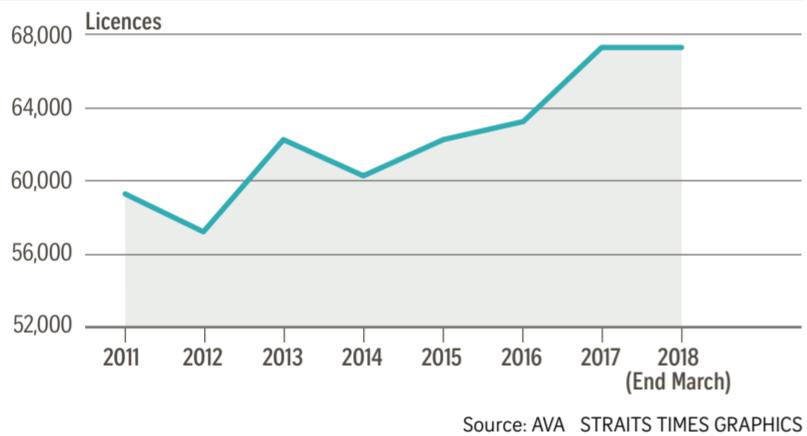
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Mr Arvic Penaranda Mandawe, a therapy support associate at TTSH, helping patient Manimaran Manikam with gait training. ST PHOTO: LEE JIA WEN

Increasing number of dog licences issued

Last year, about 67,000 dog licences were issued, an increase from some 59,000 in 2011. Tighter licensing regulations and a growing interest in pets are reasons for the increase, said animal welfare groups.



Many consider the breed and age first

FROM B1

are busier, said Wag-A-Tail's co-owner Jes Tay. "Bonuses are issued during those months, and some use their 'hongbao' to buy a puppy," she said, referring to the Chinese tradition of dispensing red packets with cash during the new year festivities.

In contrast, June and December are slower months as families are usually away for the school break.

Adopting a dog can cost between \$70 and \$300, depending on its age. Usually, the cost will cover microchipping, three vaccinations and sterilisation. The cost of buying a dog can range from \$2,000 to \$10,000, depending on the breed.

Couples who are moving into

their first home usually get a puppy as their first pet, said Ms Tey. Another group of buyers is young working adults who get puppies for their parents. "They hope that the puppies can keep their parents company and to let them have a more active lifestyle," she said.

Buyers and adopters usually consider a dog's breed, age and likelihood to cause allergic reactions in their decision to get a pet.

Dr Jaipal Singh Gill, executive director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said that some adopters preferred younger or pedigree animals.

Ms Tey said: "Owners usually look out for their favourite breeds first." Popular breeds include small

dogs like toy poodles and bigger ones, such as golden retrievers.

The AVA encourages potential owners to consider adoption first.

A spokesman said: "We support rehoming and work with our rehoming partners (animal welfare groups) to rehome pets assessed to be suitable, in terms of health and temperament."

A national initiative that supports rehoming dogs is HProject Adore, formalised by the Ministry of National Development (MND), AVA and Housing Board in May 2014. Under this, HDB flat owners can adopt mongrels no heavier than 15 kg or taller than 50 cm, which an MND spokesman described as "a slight increase from the size of toy breeds al-

lowed in HDB flats". Last June, it was expanded to let dog handlers from some Home Team agencies and the military rehome retired sniffer dogs in HDB flats.

Mr Jeff Yeo, 37, adopted a mongrel from SOSD in December 2016. "I decided to adopt a dog to not only keep us company, but to also teach the kids a sense of responsibility."

The father of three recalled the first time the dog was left alone at home. The family returned and were pleased it had not messed up – or so they thought. "We gave her hugs and pats on her head, only to discover later in the night that she left us 'presents' on our bed," he said.

Over time, the family understood their puppy was learning to adapt to its new environment. Mr Yeo said: "I learnt to be more patient as well. This, I believe, is a lesson in life."

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