

SINGAPORE



Rehab programme helps over 100 seniors with advanced heart failure

TTSH trial patients gain muscle mass, lower body fat, see fewer re-admissions

Zhaki Abdullah
Correspondent

After surviving a heart attack three years ago, Mr Tan Kim Kiang found himself feeling weak and experiencing difficulty in walking.

The heart attack had weakened his heart muscles, leading to heart failure. Walking short distances left him breathless, and even simple tasks such as getting up to go to the toilet posed a challenge.

It was then that Mr Tan – now 65 and working in a renovation company – joined the cardiac rehabilitation programme at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

Starting with slow walks, he progressed to brisk walking on a treadmill and cycling on a stationary bike.

He is one of more than 100 seniors who have benefited from HF Care, TTSH's rehabilitation programme for elderly patients with advanced heart failure.

Trialled for a year between 2022 and 2023, the initiative was created to fulfil an "unmet need", said Dr Violet Hoon, head of the hospital's cardiac rehabilitation services.

Heart failure occurs when the heart is unable to pump enough blood for the body's needs. Its symptoms include shortness of breath, excessive fatigue and swelling of the legs.

Advanced heart failure is its most severe stage, where the heart's ability to pump blood is seriously compromised, impacting a patient's day-to-day activities.

It is a misconception that elderly patients with advanced heart failure should not exercise, said Dr Hoon.

"According to the evidence, cardiac rehab actually improves quality of life, functional capacity, exercise performance, and reduces heart failure related hospitalisations."

Developed by a multidisciplinary team with a cardiologist, physiotherapist and nurse clinician, the programme comprises 12 1½-hour sessions that include personalised exercise training, as well as psychological support and nutritional guidance.

In the first session, the cardiologist assesses a patient's fitness level and clinical symptoms, including stress and anxiety evaluations, and a test to gauge how far a patient can walk over a six-minute



Mr Tan Kim Kiang (seated) with (from left) nurse clinician Tham Lai Mei, senior physiotherapist Keith Chua and Dr Violet Hoon, head of Tan Tock Seng Hospital's cardiac rehabilitation services. Mr Tan, who survived a heart attack three years ago, says TTSH's rehabilitation programme for elderly patients with advanced heart failure changed his life. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

period.

Patients then complete prescribed exercises conducted safely within their individual limits under the guidance of a physiotherapist.

Those who are more frail begin with assisted motorised movement therapy, and gradually progress to other exercises as they become fitter.

A cardiologist monitors patients for breathlessness and abnormal heart rates in between workouts. A nurse clinician provides them with information on healthy lifestyle habits.

Dr Hoon noted that patients who went through the programme saw an 11 per cent mean reduction of body fat, and an 8 per cent increase in muscle mass. Re-admission rates also decreased by 20 per cent.

Between 4 per cent and 5 per cent of Singaporeans live with heart failure, compared with about

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

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DR VIOLET HOON, Tan Tock Seng Hospital's cardiac rehabilitation services head, on the misconception that elderly patients with advanced heart failure should not exercise.

1 per cent or 2 per cent of the population in the US and Europe.

One of the reasons why this is the case is the greater prevalence of comorbidities such as diabetes and hypertension in Singapore and South-east Asia, said Dr Hoon.

For those here aged 65 or older, this number goes up to between 6 per cent and 10 per cent.

Dr Hoon noted that TTSH is seeing more heart failure patients who are elderly and frail, with multiple, complex comorbidities. About 80 per cent of heart failure patients at TTSH are above the age of 65.

This has contributed to higher re-admission rates and longer hospital stays.

This comes as Singapore's population is rapidly ageing, with one in four people here expected to be 65 or older by 2030.

With the success shown in the initial trial, Dr Hoon said she hopes for HF Care to be scaled up, with

30 per cent to 40 per cent more patients coming under the programme over the next two to three years.

The team also plans to partner community organisations to ensure that patients can continue with cardiac rehabilitation even after completing the formal programme.

"We'll continue training our allied health and nursing professionals to be confident in managing heart failure patients," Dr Hoon added.

Meanwhile, Mr Tan now lives a healthier lifestyle, and is able to exercise regularly, brisk walking and cycling on alternate days.

He added that he was thankful to the team who helped him through his cardiac rehabilitation.

"Coming to Tan Tock Seng changed my life," he said.

azhaki@sph.com.sg

Colour-coded price labels for economy rice dishes at Koufu outlets

Tay Hong Yi
Correspondent

Diners at foodcourts and coffee shops run by Koufu will be able to tell at a glance the price of each dish in their economy rice order via colour-coded labels, in a new tie-up with the Consumers Association of Singapore (Case).

For a start, the labels will be rolled out to economy rice stalls operating at all 77 Koufu foodcourts and coffee shops by end-2025 as part of the association's Price Transparency for Economy Rice project.

But Case hopes to extend this to all economy rice stalls islandwide to reduce disputes over how much each plate of food is priced at, im-

prove price transparency, and give consumers more certainty about the cost of their order.

In the case of Koufu, blue labels denote seafood, which costs \$2.50 a serving.

Orange labels are for meat dishes costing \$1.50 per serving, and green labels are for vegetables, which cost \$1 for each serving.

White labels are for "premium items", with the prices handwritten on them.

The initiative was launched at Hong Le Mixed Veg Rice Stall at the Koufu foodcourt at Plantation Plaza in Tengah estate on March 24 by Case president Melvin Yong and Koufu chief financial officer Chua Sher Lin. Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry Low Yen Ling was also present.

Ms Low is MP for the Bukit Gom-



The initiative was launched at Hong Le Mixed Veg Rice Stall at the Koufu foodcourt at Plantation Plaza on March 24. It will be rolled out to economy rice stalls in all 77 Koufu foodcourts and coffee shops by end-2025. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

bak ward of Chua Chu Kang GRC. Tengah estate will be absorbed into the group representation constituency under new electoral boundaries for the upcoming general election.

Mr Yong, who is also MP for Radin Mas SMC, said it is common to hear consumers complain about how much a meal costs after they have chosen the dishes they want.

"The dispute often centres on

the ambiguity of the prices of the dishes on display. Having colour-coded labels will allow consumers to make informed choices and prevent any potential disputes over prices."

Thanking Koufu for its partnership, Mr Yong expressed hopes that all economy rice stalls in Singapore would also work with Case to put up similar labels.

"It is important that we know

More certainty about cost

The colour-coded labels are aimed at improving price transparency for diners and reducing the likelihood of disputes over how much each plate costs.

Economy rice ingredient	Colour	Price (\$)
Seafood	Blue	2.50
Meat	Orange	1.50
Vegetables	Green	1
Premium items	White	Special price (handwritten on label)

Source: CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

clearly the price of what we are buying," he said.

The association hopes to bring on board other operators beyond Koufu in 2025. Those that are interested can contact Case about introducing the labels.

Koufu's Ms Chua said the initiative will help customers quickly recognise the category that each dish falls into.

"This initiative will benefit both customers, by making it easier to understand pricing and choices, and stall operators, by promoting fair and clear pricing."

Ms Low, who is also Senior Minister of State for Culture, Commu-

ity and Youth, lauded Case's initiative to improve the way that prices for a popular staple like economy rice are displayed.

She noted that three other outlets of Hong Le will put in place the new system by the middle of April.

"This system will ensure consumers are aware of the cost of each dish before selecting it," she said. "You will know exactly how much you have to pay for your purchase. Every small step will go a long way in helping everyone better manage their budgets and keep costs down."

hytay@sph.com.sg