

Dr Mala Satku, senior consultant in the department of hand and reconstructive microsurgery at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, examining Mr Chong Kee Kong. Dr Mala said the hospital sees about 600 people aged 50 and above with broken wrists each year. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO



Osteoporosis checks for older patients with wrist fractures

TTSH starts service to diagnose and treat bone disease, cutting risk of hip and other fractures

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Correspondent

In 2020, Mr Chong Kee Kong was on an escalator with his grandson when the boy bent down to pick up his pacifier and lost his footing.

While trying to stop his grandson from falling, Mr Chong, now 79, tumbled down the escalator himself, earning an abrasion and a fractured left wrist.

After undergoing surgery to repair the fracture, Mr Chong found out that he had osteoporosis – a bone disease characterised by an increased fracture risk due to the deterioration of bone tissue.

To help people like him, Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) has started a service aimed at proactively diagnosing osteoporosis in patients aged 50 and above who have had wrist fractures, and managing their conditions.

TTSH hand and reconstructive microsurgery department senior consultant Mala Satku said the hospital sees about 600 people aged 50

and above with distal radius fractures, or broken wrists, each year.

In 2022, the hospital reviewed more than 2,500 patients aged 50 and above who had suffered low-impact wrist fractures between 2013 and 2016.

It found that of the 1,034 patients who had undergone subsequent screening, 56 per cent were found to have osteoporosis, while 37.4 per cent were found to have osteopenia, a less severe condition which can eventually lead to osteoporosis.

The findings of the study were published in The Journal Of Hand Surgery (Asian-Pacific Volume) in 2022.

As Singapore's population ages – with a quarter of the country's population expected to be aged 65 and above by 2030 – wrist fractures are increasingly becoming a concern, Dr Mala said, noting the average age of patients with such fractures to be about 68.

She said that while older patients with hip and spine fractures are often screened for osteoporosis, this is not the case for those with wrist fractures.

However, wrist fractures can be an indicator of a greater risk of hip and spine fractures, she added.

“Studies have shown that anyone with a wrist fracture has a 5.6 times higher risk of a hip fracture com-

pared with someone who doesn't have a wrist fracture,” she said.

Addressing osteoporosis in patients with wrist fracture can help reduce this risk, said Dr Mala.

She said studies have shown that active osteoporosis care after a patient suffers a wrist fracture can lead to an 86 per cent reduction in hip fractures, as well as a 65 per cent reduction in all other subsequent fractures.

The new initiative, said Dr Mala who is leading it, involves first treating the wrist fracture, either through surgery or the use of a cast.

A bone mineral density scan, typically done using a low-radiation X-ray to measure the presence of minerals such as calcium in bone, is conducted to diagnose osteoporosis.

During follow-up visits, patients undergo rehabilitation and monitoring of the fracture.

“At the same time, there is also evaluation and treatment of osteoporosis by our panel nurses,” she said, noting that this is often done during the same appointment to save patients' time.

Even after their fractures heal, patients whose bone densities remain low are referred to polyclinics or their general practitioners for ongoing management.

Osteoporosis treatment is typi-

cally a long-term affair, conducted across three to five years, with regular reviews and scans done at the TTSH Hand Surgery Clinic.

Treatment can include shots of the drug denosumab, to strengthen bone, in addition to exercise and adjusting a patient's diet to include more calcium.

The programme has seen a 60 per cent increase in the number of wrist fracture patients screened for osteoporosis at TTSH after a pilot, which ran between 2021 and 2023, Dr Mala said.

Meanwhile, the number of patients seen for osteoporosis care after wrist fractures tripled between 2022 and 2025 under the programme, which won merit awards at the NHG Quality Day Awards in 2022 and 2023.

TTSH aims to expand the service to other institutions under the NHG Health cluster.

“We would like as many patients as possible to benefit from this programme and discussions are in place,” said Dr Mala.

Mr Chong has since recovered from the fracture, and said the interventions have helped him become stronger, in addition to addressing his osteoporosis. “I can now carry up to 5kg,” he said.

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132 awarded scholarships to boost talent in public healthcare

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A total of 132 healthcare scholarships were awarded this year to students who have a strong calling to serve in Singapore's public healthcare sector.

This is more than the 108 healthcare scholarships awarded in 2024, but fewer than the 161 given out in 2023. The scholarships are given out yearly by MOH Holdings (MOHH) – the holding company of Singapore's three public healthcare clusters – to strengthen the country's pipeline of healthcare professionals.

Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies, conferred the awards at the Healthcare Scholarships Award Ceremony 2025, on July 30 at Raffles City Convention Centre.

The scholarships are for health science and healthcare-related studies. There are several types, including the Healthcare Merit Award for those pursuing a bachelor's in nursing, pharmacy or various allied health disciplines.

Scholars will be bonded for four years, or six if they had studied overseas.

In 2025, there were two awards in the discipline of medicine, 17 in pharmacy, 18 in clinical psychology, 19 in nursing, 23 in physiotherapy, and over 40 in other allied health fields, such as speech therapy, diagnostic radiography, occupational therapy and dietetics.

There were also four recipients in medical social work, with the remaining recipients studying business, accountancy, information technology, engineering and social science.

Mr Ong said they will be joining a public healthcare sector that is transforming to meet the challenge of a fast-ageing population.

The health ministry has implemented preventive care programmes to promote healthier living and is leveraging technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) or precision medicine.

These efforts will usher in a fundamental shift in delivering healthcare – from treating illnesses to sustaining wellness, from delivering healthcare in clinics and hospitals to doing so in communities and in our homes, he said.

In his speech, Mr Ong cited three past recipients. One of them, Ms Charlynn Nerva, started work as an enrolled nurse at Changi General Hospital. She then obtained a diploma in nursing, before pursuing a nursing degree on a Healthcare Merit scholarship.

She is now an assistant nurse clinician with KK Women's and Children's Hospital and part of a team there that focuses on improvement projects, including the development of a pictorial guide manual for medical devices to aid new nurses and nursing students.

Mr Ong said: “Healthcare is ultimately about people and the human touch. A kind word, a listening ear, a consistent presence remains irreplaceable, regardless of how advanced AI technology is.”

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How to cope with rising heat? Hear the experts at ST Podcasts Live event

Joyce Lee

Temperatures are rising due to climate change, and the need to help people – especially those from vulnerable communities – cope with the heat is becoming more urgent.

But with warm temperatures being something that many people living in tropical Singapore are already accustomed to, at what point does the heat become a public health risk?

And how is Singapore taking steps to protect people with high exposure to heat, such as outdoor workers?

Join a timely dialogue with experts on the issue at the fourth ST Podcasts Live event on Aug 12, which will be held at local clothes swopping boutique The Fashion Pulpit in Jalan Besar.

Titled Heat Stress & Us, the dia-

logue is part of The Straits Times' Green Pulse podcast, which provides a South-east Asian perspective on climate change and environmental issues.

New episodes are aired on every first and third Tuesday of the month.

ST deputy foreign editor David Fogarty and assistant news editor Audrey Tan, who co-host Green Pulse, will be speaking with Associate Professor Jason Lee, director of the Heat Resilience and Performance Centre at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

Prof Lee is also the lead principal investigator of Project HeatSafe, a research initiative that studies the threat that heat poses to human health, well-being and productivity in South-east Asia.

The dialogue will also involve Ms Jaime Lim, director of the major hazards and occupational safety and health specialist departments

at the Ministry of Manpower (MOM).

MOM rolled out new measures in 2023 that require employers to take steps to protect outdoor workers from heat. Employers, for example, have to provide hourly rest breaks for workers when it gets too hot.

Following the discussion on heat, a second podcast recording will take place.

The second dialogue will touch on the reasons behind the increasing encounters between humans and wildlife in urban Singapore, and how such interactions should be managed to reduce conflict.

ST correspondents Shabana Begum and Ang Qing, who were the co-hosts of ST's award-winning experiential podcast series Green Trails, will helm the discussion.

They will host Mr Kalaivanan Balakrishnan, chief executive of wildlife rescue group Animal Con-



cerns Research and Education Society (Acres), and Ms Jasvic Lye, campaign manager of Our Wild Neighbours, an initiative to educate the public on wildlife etiquette.

Mr Balakrishnan carried out Acres' first reptile repatriation in 2017 and was instrumental in ensuring the group continued to help animals during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ms Lye, a fine arts graduate, started her ongoing Death By Man

photo series in 2017 to shed light on the devastating effects of urbanisation on wildlife.

Guests who sign up will experience a live podcast recording session, and engage in a Q&A segment with panellists. Those interested can sign up at <https://str.sg/podcastlive>

ST Podcasts Live is a series launched in 2025 to commemorate The Straits Times' 180th anniversary.

The first ST Podcasts Live, on the

topic of historic buildings, took place on Feb 12 at The Foundry. This was followed by the second event on April 15 at The Projector, which discussed diverse definitions of success.

In the third event on June 3 at Rassa at Raffles Place, panellists spoke on how to build a fulfilling career.

The live podcast on Aug 12 on environmental issues is the fourth in the series.

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Maid jailed for repeatedly abusing employer's one-year-old son

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Court Correspondent

A maid was sentenced to two years and six months' jail on July 30 for repeatedly abusing her employer's one-year-old son by hitting his head, slapping his face, pulling his hair and pinching his ear.

Nucom Loreta Talbo, 30, who has

children of her own, told investigators that she had hit the victim because his crying disrupted her sleep and she felt frustrated.

On July 16, the Filipina pleaded guilty to one count of ill-treating the child. She had abused him on more than 20 occasions between March and July 2024.

In earlier proceedings, the court heard that Talbo was a seasoned domestic helper who had been

working in Singapore for the past five years.

She had worked at the victim's household for 11 months since September 2023, and shared a room with the victim.

On Dec 27, 2023, an infant care teacher found injuries on the child's body.

When confronted, Talbo denied causing the injuries, and court documents did not state if she had

caused them.

Her acts of abuse came to light on July 23, 2024, when the boy's parents heard him crying.

The couple checked footage from a CCTV camera installed in the room and saw her ill-treating their child. A further review of earlier footage revealed additional incriminating acts.

Among her many acts of abuse, Talbo used her fist to hit the child's

head and slapped his face. She also pulled his hair and pinched his ear.

On July 16, Deputy Public Prosecutor Heershan Kaur said the victim's parents confronted Talbo after watching the clips.

She denied hitting the victim despite being shown the footage.

The police were alerted before she was removed from the household, and she stayed in a temporary shelter pending investigations.

The child's father later reviewed the other recordings that showed Talbo ill-treating the victim between March and July 2024. He shared the footage with the authorities.

But as the device was faulty, he could not confirm if any abuse occurred between September 2023 and March 2024.

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