

TTSH programme helps speed up post-op recovery

Scheme has led to savings, shorter hospital stays, fewer severe complications for patients

Felicia Choo

Ms Michelle Tan was hoping for a quick recovery after keyhole surgery in January to remove a tumour in her colon.

But little did she expect to walk out of the hospital the next day – three days earlier than the average colorectal surgery patient.

Ms Tan's speedy recovery was due in part to a programme at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) that optimises patients' post-surgery recovery.

Since 2016, the Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ErAS) programme has led to savings of \$2,197 on average for each of the more than 700 colorectal surgery patients, and almost halved the average length of hospital stays from 10.6 days in 2015 to 5.8 days this year.

It has also reduced the proportion of patients who have severe complications post-surgery, from 5.42 per cent in 2015 to 2.8 per cent this year. The proportion of patients who are re-admitted within a month has also gone down, from 10.26 per cent in 2015 to 6.8 per

cent this year.

Most of those who benefited had undergone colorectal surgery, with the remaining patients from specialties such as upper-gastro intestinal, liver, pancreas and urology.

The programme involves steps that aim to reduce patients' stress before the operation and promote their well-being thereafter, said Dr How Kwang Yeong, a consultant in TTSH's Colorectal Service.

For example, patients no longer need to have bowel preparation or fast from midnight before surgery, and need only take clear fluids or a carbohydrate drink two hours before.

After the operation, doctors remove nasogastric tubes and drains – used to remove excess fluid or gas in



Ms Michelle Tan benefited from Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Enhanced Recovery After Surgery programme. She said she was able to get out of bed and walk, four hours after keyhole surgery to remove a tumour in her colon. She is seen here with Dr How Kwang Yeong, a consultant in TTSH's Colorectal Service. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

the stomach – and a few hours later, patients are encouraged to sit, walk, eat and drink, instead of resting in bed for days or fasting until their bowel functions return to normal.

Ms Tan, 49, an administrative clerk, was asked to take nutritional supplements, have a good diet and maintain an active lifestyle.

"I was quite surprised that I didn't feel much pain after the surgery and could eat, and didn't feel like vomiting," she said. "Four hours after surgery, I was able to get out of

bed and walk."

Still, some patients, especially the elderly, are resistant to the programme as they think that they should only stay in bed after surgery, said Dr How. "Sometimes, we have to be a little bit more firm with them, to get them out of bed first and take a few steps to gain confidence."

The programme will be expanded at the end of the year to other forms of surgery, such as breast, ear, nose and throat, as well as knee replace-

ment operations.

Last year, TTSH also started targeted interventions for frail patients older than 65 who are undergoing major surgery. They go through a four-week structured exercise programme to enhance their functional capacity before surgery and improve their tolerance to surgery stress. They also go through more intensive rehabilitation after surgery.

feliciac@sph.com.sg

Gifted education not elitist, says pre-school founder

Amelia Teng

Her pre-schools are named Growing Up Gifted (GUG), but Mrs Deanne Chong-Duffield takes a different approach to the idea of giftedness. For one thing, she is firmly against intelligence tests at a young age.

"An IQ test is like a photograph. You take a picture, and you're set. But you're literally still evolving and growing at such a fast pace," said the founder of two GUG pre-schools in Thomson and Tampines.

She subscribes to Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, which suggests that intellectual capacity alone is not the full picture.

Like him, she believes there are many kinds of intelligence, including musical, interpersonal, spatial-visual and linguistic intelligence.

Other gifted education providers typically use intellect as a marker of giftedness.

"At the pre-school age, it's about developing children in all areas and giving them as much exposure as possible," she said, adding that her centres introduce current affairs, economics or science topics into

lessons. There are no entrance tests for her centres. "All children have potential to have gifts one way or another, in different areas."

"There are socially accepted gifts like being good in music or mathematics, but what about other things like social skills and EQ (emotional quotient), interpersonal and introspection skills?"

Mrs Chong-Duffield, who is in her 50s and has a master's degree in early childhood education and gifted education, crafted her own curricula, starting with a phonics programme for babies.

"Instead of teaching one letter at a time, we use imagery, puppets, gestures, actions, rhyme to teach." The children remember better when they are in action, she added.

In 2006, she opened a kindergarten and enrichment centre at United Square, which evolved into a full-day pre-school in the Thomson area in April. She also started a second pre-school in Tampines in March, and is opening another outlet in Katong next month. The Tampines and Thomson centres have more than 120 children aged 18 months to six years old.

Monthly fees are \$1,700 to \$1,800 for full-day childcare, excluding



At the Growing Up Gifted centres in Thomson and Tampines (above), current affairs, economics or science topics are introduced into lessons, and there are no entrance tests for children. The centres' founder believes "all children have potential to have gifts one way or another, in different areas". ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

subsidies. The centres also offer enrichment programmes.

"There might be some people who have the misconception that gifted education is 'elitist', but parents who come and find out more realise this isn't true," said Mrs Chong-Duffield, who plans to hold work-

shops for parents to change the way people think about giftedness.

The first five years in a child's life are the most critical, she said, because there is a clear growth spurt in brain development. "The more stimulation there is, the richer the environment, the more connec-

tions the synapses make."

Medical doctor Daniel Chan, whose three-year-old son is attending the GUG pre-school in Thomson, said he likes that the school is strong in academics and exposes children to general knowledge.

"The definition of giftedness is

very much influenced by the GEP screening test, but I think it's not as simple. These days, being able to invent something, read the trends and do something to disrupt it is also gifted."

ateng@sph.com.sg

Exclusive Distributor: John Ackerman Pte Ltd
 Blk 34 Upper Cross Street #04-138 S050034 • T: +65-6532 3733
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Catering to children with different learning needs

FROM B1

said: "Parents send their children for psychological assessment to better understand their children's learning potential or to find out why their children are not doing as well as their peers in school, perhaps due to the possibility of having a learning difficulty."

But some experts note that IQ tests are not conclusive.

Associate Professor Leher Singh, from the National University of Singapore's department of psychology, said: "There is very limited evidence that pre-school IQ testing predicts long-term academic achievement in elementary school and beyond."

"In general, pre-school IQ testing is useful for identifying developmental delays, but not for identifying the potential for academic 'superstardom'." She added: "IQ testing also does not measure non-academic skills like self-regulation and executive functions like planning."

Insights Mind Centre psychologist Daniel Koh said: "Intelligence levels may change and fluctuate while children are going through the developmental stages. External distractions and emotional distress can also affect a child taking the test."

"Parents need to understand the purpose of an IQ test and how to use the score to help overall progress rather than as a number."

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Support in social skills should accompany academic programmes, said Dr Kang, who added: "Gifted

children, like any other, have needs, along with weaknesses as any other human being."

Ms Sharon Howe, principal of Kindercampus, a childcare centre that started a gifted education programme, said many children are transferred from other pre-schools or referred by psychologists.

"Some of these children can be a bit lonely or feel misunderstood. They are told they are difficult or can't fit in," she said.

"Some parents try to send them to more enrichment classes, but this may stifle children's curiosity. It's more important to develop their creativity and work on their socio-emotional development."

Mr Chng said: "Most people assume that those with high IQ will do well in life. But actually there's a risk of them performing less well than the average Joe because they're demotivated in the wrong setting."

Gate Junior centres use the same curriculum, which is developed in-house by a team of specialists.

Current affairs are weaved into lessons, which cover topics in history, geography or sociology. There are also coding and robotics modules, complex problem-solving and mathematical reasoning tasks.

Do these programmes run counter to the country's efforts to reduce academic pressure?

Hardly, said Ms Claudia Yu, Gate's managing director, who emphasised that its centres do not have worksheets, tests or any activities that "drill" children.

"Gifted education is not about hot-

COMMON MISCONCEPTION

Most people assume that those with high IQ will do well in life. But actually there's a risk of them performing less well than the average Joe because they're demotivated in the wrong setting.



MR CHNG HOCK HUAT, Gate chairman.

housing; it's a form of special education for children who need a different diet," she added. "A lot of them lack social and emotional awareness, or have speech issues."

Interpersonal skills are also a key part of Gate's programmes, so that children learn sensitivity towards others, and how to work in teams.

"The key question is whether your child enjoys the activities or he feels stressed. That's the difference between healthy and unhealthy pushing," said Ms Yu.

Mr Sonny Panesar, 52, whose six-year-old daughter Akina has been attending Gate Junior since last year, said she had trouble adjusting to another pre-school previously.

"She asked a lot of questions, and the teachers didn't have time to answer her, so she shut down and got bored easily," said the information technology director. He and his wife sent her for an intelligence test and found that she had an IQ of 130.

"Now she's excited to go to school every day, because learning is made fun and the curriculum is very broad, from astronomy to Shakespeare to Bach."

Sometimes, her parents have to do a search online or borrow books to give Akina answers themselves.

Similarly, Mr Matthew Wong and his wife were told by teachers at their son's previous kindergarten he could not keep still in school, and often shouted answers in class before others had a chance to respond.

The couple, who have two older daughters, had to take time off from work to meet his teachers to discuss Isaiah's behaviour. They then decided to switch him to Gate Junior after doing some research.

Isaiah, now five years old, has since happily settled into school.

"His classmates are equally outspoken so they spur each other on," said Mr Wong, 41, a property agent.

Both families said they try to find a balance between letting their children push themselves and pulling them back so they have as "normal" a childhood as possible.

Ultimately, parents must adapt to each child's learning style, and be flexible, said Prof Singh.

"We all want to stimulate our children's intellectual growth, but that happens by introducing experiences in which children are truly engaged, not by putting pressure on children to acquire knowledge as quickly as possible under high academic pressure."

ateng@sph.com.sg