



(From left, on top step) Minister for Health Ong Ye Kung; Institute of Mental Health senior nurse clinician Aziz Ab Hamed; KK Women's and Children's Hospital deputy director of nursing Julia Eng Chui Lee; Assisi Hospice senior nurse educator Liu Fang; President Halimah Yacob; Tan Tock Seng Hospital deputy director of nursing Nirmala Karmaroon; Changi General Hospital chief nurse Png Gek Kheng; Sengkang General Hospital assistant director of nursing Zhang Di; and Ministry of Health chief nursing officer Paulin Koh at the ceremony for the President's Award for Nurses at the Istana. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Six nursing leaders receive President's Award for Nurses

They are recognised for their sustained outstanding performance and contributions

Lifelong learning is a common thread among the awardees, even if it means pursuing a master's or doctorate past the age of 45.

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

They are nursing leaders who are always looking to improve the way things are done, constantly learning and inspiring other nurses to do better. Their contributions during the Covid-19 pandemic also did not go unnoticed.

Yesterday, six of them received the President's Award for Nurses, the highest accolade in Singapore's nursing profession, from President Halimah Yacob in a ceremony at the Istana.

At KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), the deputy director of nursing Julia Eng Chui Lee, who studied to be an Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) in Australia in 2002, has groomed 34 APNs. APNs can diagnose and manage chronic illnesses as well as provide complex nursing care to patients.

Ms Eng, 47, who also leads KKH's nursing research and nursing education department, started several APN clinics, including one in 2015

where gynaecological cancer patients consult an APN to prepare for their surgery.

Addressing the patients' needs, such as helping to refer frail ones to a physiotherapist, has helped to cut their post-surgery stay from seven to eight days to two to three days, she said.

"A lot of the time, with bad news, they can't retain information very well and so when they come (to see us), they still have a lot of questions," said Ms Eng.

At the Institute of Mental Health, senior nurse clinician Aziz Ab Hamed, 60, contributed to the transformation of a custodial model to one focusing on recovery care.

At Changi General Hospital (CGH), Ms Png Gek Kheng, 50, became the chief nurse with more than 2,500 nurses under her in the middle of the pandemic in 2020.

This saw her having to rally staff through innumerable workflow changes in order to continue caring for patients in the hospital as well as the migrant worker dormitories, where swab operations and medical posts were set up.

Ms Png is also an APN and co-director of the CGH Wound Healing Centre, the idea for which started a decade ago with a task force she set up to address the pressure injuries of patients.

Assisi Hospice senior nurse educator Liu Fang, 42, played a major role in developing a workshop to help staff communicate with patients and their families in a palliative care setting, which had been made worse by the pandemic.

The challenge is in shaping the right attitude and mindset, which is not just to help patients die peacefully but also to live well till the end, she said.

For Ms Zhang Di, 46, an APN and the assistant director of nursing at Sengkang General Hospital (SKH), her achievements include setting up SingHealth's first Community Nurse Post in a senior activity centre and the development and delivery of geriatric-care training at SKH.

At Tan Tock Seng Hospital, deputy director of nursing Nirmala Karmaroon, 56, managed manpower planning to ensure patient care could be maintained alongside a balance in nurses' work lives, among other achievements in a field that she entered 40 years ago.

Lifelong learning is a common thread among the award recipients, even if it means pursuing a master's or doctorate past the age of 45.

The President's Award for Nurses started in 2000, and has since recognised 90 recipients, including the latest, for sustained outstanding performance and contributions to patient care delivery, education, research and administration, said the Ministry of Health.

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He helps long-staying patients prepare for life outside IMH

At the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), senior nurse clinician Aziz Ab Hamed, 60, has been preparing a selected group of long-staying patients for life outside the hospital.

The work started in 2015 when he and several colleagues spearheaded a rehabilitation programme that included activities like gardening to equip these patients with independent living and vocational skills.

It has since led to the discharge of 120 such patients, whose stay at IMH lasted for about a year to as long as 18 years. They include a man in his 60s now living at a care home and others in their 20s and 30s. The majority have schizophrenia and have never worked.

Yesterday, Mr Aziz was among six recipients of this year's President's Award for Nurses, the highest accolade in Singapore's nursing profession.

Mr Aziz also set up a hydroponics garden where patients grow vegetables, which are now sold at the IMH lobby twice a week. He said this gardening project had started small, with soil gardening.

As motivation, the patients – Mr Aziz calls them clients so as not to treat them as patients – are paid a small hourly rate that corresponds with the difficulty level of the work, from seed sowing to transplanting to harvesting.

He also started a fund with the excess money, and set up a cafe in the long-stay wards to train selected patients in cooking local dishes and kitchen management skills, and is now thinking up new projects.

"In the past, we made sure they ate and slept well. Now, we embrace recovery", which means helping patients pick up skills to survive on their own, said Mr Aziz, who pursued a master's in nursing (mental health) at the National University of Singapore at the age of 48. "I believe I can do more to instil hope in my clients, to make their lives more meaningful."

Before joining nursing 30 years ago, Mr Aziz, who has two adult children, had other jobs, including being a production operator, birdkeeper and forklift driver.

Joyce Teo

HELPING PATIENTS RECOVER

In the past, we made sure they ate and slept well. Now, we embrace recovery.



SENIOR NURSE CLINICIAN AZIZ AB HAMED, on helping patients at IMH pick up skills to survive on their own.



Mr Aziz Ab Hamed, one of six recipients of the President's Award for Nurses this year, at the hydroponics garden he helped to set up at the Institute of Mental Health as part of a rehabilitation programme. ST PHOTO: SAMUEL RUBY

Sri Lanka asks China for help with trade, investment and tourism

BEIJING • Sri Lanka has asked China to help with trade, investment and tourism to help it grow sustainably, Colombo's envoy to Beijing said as it negotiates for an emergency US\$4 billion (S\$5.54 billion) package to help it emerge from an economic meltdown.

The island nation of 22 million people is suffering its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948 after running out of foreign reserves. Protesters angry about shortages of fuel, food and medicine toppled the Rajapaksa ruling family.

Ambassador Palitha Kohona's emphasis on China as a key to Sri Lanka's economic recovery reflects Beijing's status as one of Sri Lanka's two largest foreign creditors, along with Japan.

China also holds some 10 per cent of Sri Lanka's external debt.

In an interview with Reuters at Sri Lanka's Beijing embassy on Monday, Mr Kohona said Colombo wants China to ask its companies to buy more Sri Lankan black tea, sapphire, spices and garments and to make Chinese import rules more transparent and easier to navigate.

He said Beijing could also help by pouring further investment into vast China-backed port projects in Colombo and Hambantota, adding

that major Chinese investment plans had not materialised because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, Sri Lanka would like to see more Chinese tourists, whose numbers fell from 265,000 in 2018 to almost zero after 2019's suicide attacks and the pandemic.

Mr Kohona said new Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe has plans to visit China to discuss cooperation on matters including trade, investment and tourism.

Mr Wickremesinghe is no stranger to China. A photo of him shaking hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping when he visited Beijing in 2016 as prime minister hangs in the hallway of the embassy.

Mr Kohona said he expects no fundamental change in the new government's policy towards China.

He said he understands China is finding it hard to act quickly to help Sri Lanka because as a major global creditor it is also financially exposed to many other countries in financial difficulty.

For several months, Sri Lanka had been in talks with China for a US\$4 billion aid package, consisting of a loan of US\$1 billion to repay a roughly equivalent amount of Chinese debt due this year. It is also asking for a US\$1.5 billion credit



A police officer ordering people not to jump the queue at a Ceylon Petroleum Corp fuel station in Colombo yesterday. Sri Lanka has canvassed oil companies in petroleum-producing nations to sell their products in the country. PHOTO: REUTERS

line to pay for Chinese imports.

Mr Kohona said these imports are mainly inputs needed by his country's lucrative garment industry, such as buttons and zippers.

Sri Lanka also hopes to persuade China to activate a US\$1.5 billion bilateral currency swap.

Mr Kohona said discussions on financial aid with China are still un-

der way, but no date for the next meeting has been set.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said this month that Beijing is willing to work with other countries

and international financial institutions to "play a positive role" to help Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka also hopes China can help it buy fuel, fertiliser and other urgently needed supplies. China pledged 500 million yuan (S\$102 million) of emergency support for Sri Lanka in April and May. "We need a lot more," Mr Kohona said.

Sri Lanka canvassed oil companies in petroleum-producing nations yesterday to sell their products in the Indian Ocean island, opening its market to resolve acute shortages of fuel.

"An advertisement was published today calling for expression of interest (EOI) for oil companies to import, distribute and sell petroleum products in Sri Lanka," Mr Kanchana Wijesekera, the Power and Energy Minister, tweeted.

The approvals for oil firms to be picked in the new process will effectively end a market duopoly involving a subsidiary of India's state-run Indian Oil Corp.

State-run Ceylon Petroleum Corp, which controls about 80 per cent of the market with a national network of 1,190 fuel stations, will give a share of its resources and pumps to the new entrants, the government said in its notice.

REUTERS