

Centre to boost infectious disease management

New facility designed to manage outbreak on scale of Sars set to be fully operational by May

Rei Kurohi

A state-of-the-art national centre for managing infectious diseases is set to be fully operational by May.

The 330-bed National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) is designed to manage an outbreak on the scale of Sars in 2003, said its executive director Leo Yee Sin at a media briefing yesterday.

It stands next to the new Ng Teng Fong Centre for Healthcare Innovation and, together, the facilities in Novena cost \$900 million to build.

Professor Leo said the rooms in the 17 wards are spacious, allowing the centre's capacity to be increased quickly if necessary. Doctors and nurses also have ample space to move around while wearing protective gear.

The NCID takes over the functions of Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Communicable Disease Centre (CDC), which closed on Dec 13.

Since then, the NCID has been treating patients at its outpatient clinic.

A key feature of the centre is its high-level isolation unit (HLIU) for treating high-risk pathogens, including haemorrhagic fevers caused by the Ebola and Marburg viruses, as well as bio-threat agents such as smallpox and anthrax.

Patients with or suspected to have these diseases are admitted through a special pathway, including a lift just for them.

The HLIU is a first in Singapore, Prof Leo said.

The unit has four negative-pressure rooms for patients as well as a laboratory for samples to be ana-

lysed on-site. At the old CDC facility, samples were sent out to other laboratories.

Said Prof Leo: "If we need to confront conditions that are highly contagious, we can effectively lock down the unit while ensuring that patients can still receive the maximum level of care with all the integrated support facilities and infrastructure that are in the building."

She added that the care received by HLIU patients is equivalent to that in an intensive care unit.

All sections in the centre that handle patients or samples have special features to further prevent contamination.

The centre's ventilation system is designed for air to always flow from higher-pressure "clean" areas like the corridor to lower-pressure "dirty" areas such as the patient's room or laboratory suites where samples are analysed.

Air is passed through high-efficiency particulate air filters, which remove 99.999 per cent of particu-

late matter, and is treated with ultraviolet radiation before being circulated out of the building.

An alarm is triggered if doors are left open for too long. Separate doors leading in and out of rooms are also programmed to open one at a time.

The NCID houses public health, research and training facilities, and will also facilitate national programmes targeting specific diseases like human immunodeficiency virus and tuberculosis.

The facilities include the National Public Health Laboratory, which carries out tests to track infectious diseases and detect emerging pathogens such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus.

During a recent spate of food poisoning cases, the laboratory tested samples from the eateries involved - Spize restaurant and the Mandarin Orchard hotel - for salmonella and norovirus.

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A key feature of the 330-bed National Centre for Infectious Diseases is its high-level isolation unit for treating high-risk pathogens, including haemorrhagic fevers caused by the Ebola and Marburg viruses. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Man jailed 40 months over PIC scam

Selina Lum
Law Correspondent

A businessman who tried to hamper investigations into a \$13.6 million Productivity and Innovation Credit (PIC) scam involving multiple people and more than 200 entities was yesterday sentenced to 40 months' jail for obstruction of justice.

The PIC scheme grants cash payouts and bonuses to businesses to spur productivity.

The sentence imposed on Lim Chit Foo, 35, was the highest handed down for obstruction of justice offences.

Lim was found guilty last September of instigating four others, including TV host Tom Lee Teng, to give false information to Commercial Affairs Department investigators.

Lim instigated his employees Stephanie Tan Mui Shan, Maurice Tan Wei Qiang and Wong Kwong Weng to lie to investigators and shift the blame to Chinese national Wu Hai Jun, to deflect investigations from focusing on him.

He also instigated Mr Lee, who was his business partner, to falsely inform investigators that Mr Lee had bought and seen software used by the company Micbo Remix Jay (MRJ), to mask his own involvement in a PIC application made by the company.

Lim's role was to handle government-related issues, including Ministry of Manpower, CPF and tax applications. Mr Lee gave Lim his SingPass details to submit forms for government-related issues as he was mostly overseas for his show business engagements.

In 2013, Lim told Mr Lee PIC applications could be made for expenses incurred on purchases made by the company, and a portion of such expenses would be paid back as a rebate under the PIC scheme.

Mr Lee was aware of PIC applications made in 2013 and 2014, because he signed the application forms.

In 2015, the two had plans to open a standalone outlet to promote products under the MRJ brand. Lim suggested that another company be set up.

Mr Lee agreed and incorporated MRJ. Although the company did not operate any business, PIC applications were made for software purportedly bought and used by MRJ.

Separately, Lim has been charged with multiple offences, involving 25 for allegedly cheating the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore out of \$1.3 million through the submission of false PIC applications. These are pending.

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