



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **NUS MEDICINE'S BIOETHICS CASEBOOK TO HELP THE COMMUNITY CARE FOR THE AGED**

*Singapore, 23 May 2017* – NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine's Centre for Biomedical Ethics (CBmE) will launch a Singapore Bioethics Casebook titled 'Caring for Older People in an Ageing Society' on 24 May 2017. The Casebook features 10 case studies with situations that go beyond the clinic and into the community, and beyond mainstream issues in medical ethics to focus on the everyday ethical challenges faced by family caregivers, domestic workers, case managers, volunteers, and the aged themselves. Several cases also focus on special ethical challenges facing nursing home administrators and staff. Each case is supported by expert commentaries highlighting ethical issues and a perspective by a Singaporean healthcare or social care professional offering practical advice and insight. Additional support is provided by informational backgrounders, a glossary of terms, and a teaching and learning guide, and can be used by medical practitioners and even the general public.

'Caring for Older People in an Ageing Society' is the second volume of the innovative web-based Singapore Bioethics Casebook, developed by Associate Professor Jacqueline Chin of CBmE, in collaboration with scholars from The Hastings Center (USA) and the Ethox Centre (UK). The first volume was published in 2014. Both volumes aim to support professionals and others in providing care to people living with life limiting illness. They can be accessed at [www.bioethicscasebook.sg](http://www.bioethicscasebook.sg).

The Singapore Casebook aims to reflect the reality of providing care in Singapore today, and to help readers recognise and respond to situations that may feature ethical uncertainty, in which it is unclear how to 'do the right thing.' Over 180 healthcare and community care professionals in Singapore, including physicians, nurses, therapists, social workers, and programme administrators, have participated in the development of the Casebook.

"The signal importance of the Singapore Casebook as a contribution to bioethics is its focus on the home and community contexts that are invisible to most health care professionals, but are where most people experience ageing and caregiving. Understanding the ethical challenges faced by Singaporeans and by other ageing societies worldwide requires attention to the experiences of nonprofessionals and to non-health-care settings," said Nancy Berlinger, a scholar of healthcare ethics, focusing on ageing, chronic illness, and the end of life, at The Hastings Center, the world's oldest bioethics research institution, based in Garrison, New York.

Practitioners in workshops held in Singapore to develop and pilot the Casebook identified the hidden challenges of 'ageing-in-place'. Families – and older adults themselves – grapple with ongoing or changing care needs, and with out-of-pocket costs for medical and non-medical services. Unclear sharing of filial obligations within families, lack of flexible work hours for caregivers, lack of information about the foreseeable courses of different chronic illnesses and related care needs, reliance on foreign domestic workers and lack of structural support for collaborating with them, are further sources of stress.

Key issues that 'Caring for Older People in an Ageing Society' engages are:

- 1) The reality of day-to-day caregiving and how ageing people cope with frailty and chronic conditions and make decisions about their own lives and those of loved ones. (Read the cases, commentaries, and practice perspectives on: Mdm Kwok, Mr. Goh, Mr. Tan)
- 2) The experiences of ageing family caregivers whose own health is deteriorating, and who face new challenges in caring for a disabled spouse or adult child. (Read: Mr Yap, Mr Ali, Mrs Kumar)
- 3) The experiences of foreign domestic workers hired to care for older adults, often facing unrealistic expectations pushed to them by the healthcare system and by employers. (Read: Mr Ali, Mr Tan, Mdm Cho)
- 4) Ethical challenges arising in the nursing home setting and among nurses and aides, including the consequences of time-saving short cuts, unintended harms of common practices such as diapering, tube feeding, and restraint, and the importance of discussing these challenges with staff (Read: Ms Yeo, Mrs Kulkarni)
- 5) The roles of volunteer befrienders and community members encouraged to care for ageing people, and the ethical challenges they face. (Read: Mr Tsao, Mr Goh)

"There is a pressing need for helpful and practical support to be provided to people who work in community care so that they can make good ethical decisions with older people and their families. There is a lack of resources worldwide for how ethics education and support should reach beyond hospitals. The new volume of the Singapore Bioethics Casebook project shows that Singapore is leading the way in developing change in this area, focused on building ethical awareness and skills amongst professionals working in people's own homes, in nursing homes, and other community settings." said Dr Michael Dunn of The Ethox Centre, Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford, a collaborator in the project.

The Singapore Casebook project, which includes an earlier volume of case studies focused on ethically challenging situations faced by professionals in clinical settings, such as hospitals, polyclinics, and in general and specialist medical practice, earned a place among 12 projects in bioethics education that were featured in a special series commissioned by the US Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues in 2015.

According to Michael Gusmano, Associate Professor of Health Policy at Rutgers University and Research Scholar at the Hastings Center, "All global cities are adjusting to the new challenges and opportunities associated with population ageing, including the desire to help people live at home and in the community as long as possible. Health and social care

professionals, along with policy makers around the world, will benefit from the opportunity to reflect on how to address this challenge in the context of Singapore, a densely populated and culturally diverse global city with an advanced health care system.”

‘Making Difficult Decisions with Patients and Families: A Singapore Bioethics Casebook’ and ‘Caring for Older People in an Ageing Society’ are part of ongoing efforts by CBmE to promote continuing ethics education beyond graduation and the walls of the Medical School, in the interest of improving the care of patients and families in Singapore society. We are grateful to the Lien Foundation for three consecutive gifts in support of the Centre’s work and this open-access resource for anyone working in health and social care, or interested in learning about these issues,” said Assoc Prof Chin.

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## **About National University of Singapore (NUS)**

A leading global university centred in Asia, the National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education and research, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise.

NUS has 17 faculties and schools across three campuses. Its transformative education includes a broad-based curriculum underscored by multi-disciplinary courses and cross-faculty enrichment. Over 38,000 students from 100 countries enrich the community with their diverse social and cultural perspectives.

NUS has three Research Centres of Excellence (RCE) and 30 university-level research institutes and centres. It is also a partner in Singapore's fifth RCE. The University has established many research partnerships and joint laboratories with academic institutions, industry leaders and government agencies. Research activities are strategic and robust, and NUS is well-known for its research strengths in engineering, life sciences and biomedicine, social sciences and natural sciences. The University also strives to create a supportive and innovative environment to promote creative enterprise within its community.

For more information on NUS, please visit [www.nus.edu.sg](http://www.nus.edu.sg).

## **About NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine**

Established in 1905, the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine is the first institution of higher learning in Singapore and the genesis of the National University of Singapore.

The School offers one of the finest undergraduate medical programmes in the Asia Pacific region and commands international recognition and respect. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2016 by subject and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by Subject 2016 list NUS Medicine as Asia's leading medical school.

It admits 300 students to the MBBS degree programme annually and its principal missions are to educate and train the next generation of healthcare professionals, and foster research that will help to advance the practice of medicine.

The 18 NUS Medicine departments in the basic sciences and clinical specialties work closely with the Centre for Medical Education, the Centre for Biomedical Ethics, the Centre for Healthcare Simulation as well as the restructured public hospitals to ensure that teaching and research are aligned and relevant to Singapore's healthcare needs. The School is a founding institutional member of the National University Health System.

For more information about NUS Medicine, please visit <http://nusmedicine.nus.edu.sg>