



PRESS RELEASE

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Partnership formed to train community health volunteers for the elderly

Singapore, 20 February 2018 —Wanted: volunteers to be trained to help keep elderly people mentally alert through planned and structured activities. These volunteers will be trained through online courses as well as classroom sessions taught by experts in a new programme that is being developed by a consortium of agencies and headed by the NUS Mind-Science Centre (NMSC) at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS Medicine).

Much of the training will be conducted via a new online portal and is being offered as part of a collaboration among the Centre, the Stroke Support Station (S3) and the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS). The three organisations signed a Memorandum of Understanding today (20 February 2018) to work together on the portal, which they hope will enable people to learn how to care for themselves and their families.

The Age Well Everyday (AWE) programme's e-portal features health education modules on topics that include depression, stroke, dementia, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, exercise, diet, gardening, mindfulness practice and music reminiscence. The AWE programme is an offshoot of the Dementia Prevention Programme from the Jurong Ageing Study. The organisers aim to make the e-portal the reference site for individuals, healthcare professionals and non-profit organisations involved in healthcare delivery.

Through this initiative, the partners also want to train and certify a corps of at least 120 volunteers with the necessary knowledge and skills to reach out to elderly people across Singapore who are at risk of neurocognitive decline. Eighty per cent of the training programme will be conducted online, while the remaining 20 per cent will be taught by trainers in classroom sessions.

Certified volunteers will then deliver the AWE programme through community centres and other community organisations. For research purposes, the organisers will track the physical and mental health of AWE programme participants through annual physical and psychosocial assessments. A volunteer management system will also be established to deploy volunteers efficiently throughout the country and this will be managed by S3.

The NMSC currently delivers the AWE Programme at six community centres. It aims to extend the programme to 40 centres in five years. To do so, NMSC will need to train 120 volunteers to support up to 2,000 elderly participants.

The MOU that the Centre signed today with the Stroke Support Station and the Singapore University of Social Sciences will see the partners combining resources to implement this community-led public health education programme. Specifically, the Centre will develop user-friendly programmes for dementia prevention and volunteer trainers, and also provide the clinical content by doctors and allied health professionals for the training modules. The Stroke Support Station will co-create and develop user-friendly programmes for stroke survivors, caregivers and volunteer trainers, while the SUSS brings its expertise in adult learning pedagogy to bear. This includes know-how in the development of e-learning portals.

The AWE E-portal will be launched in English through the generous support of public donations. It will be translated into Mandarin and other languages eventually to cater to the various communities here.

Associate Professor Yeoh Khay Guan, Dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and the Deputy Chief Executive of the National University Health System, who signed the MOU for NUS said, "Together with our partners, the Stroke Support Station and the Singapore University of Social Sciences, we are embarking on a visionary undertaking to use technology to transform AWE into a community-based health education intervention that is scalable, affordable, accessible and impactful. The creation of an AWE E-portal will offer e-learning in the form of comprehensive self-help preventive healthcare modules. It will enable learners to become active volunteers in the community."

Ms Chew Poh Yim, Chairman of Stroke Support Station added, "By building a structured programme that promotes an eco-system of learning, participants can build social networks at the community level to help maintain the physical and mental wellbeing of not only themselves but also their family, friends and community by empowering them with knowledge."

Associate Professor Wong Yue Kee, Vice President (Learning Services) at the Singapore University of Social Sciences, said, "SUSS is a forerunner in e-learning and we are proud to play a part in this meaningful partnership. Our e-learning platform empowers volunteers to learn anytime and anywhere, and most of all, is customised to their needs. The strong social focus of our programmes such as social work, counselling and gerontology also provide useful insights in the course development and process."

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About the MOU signatories

NUS Mind-Science Centre (NMSC)

The NUS Mind-Science Centre is an academic research centre at the Department of Psychological Medicine under the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. The Centre aims to be a knowledge centre of excellence for psychological research, education and service with a non-drug approach. It will be unique in its distinctive Asian focus and combines the best tradition of Western scientific empiricism with Eastern philosophical thoughts. The Centre's research is tailored to the local context with community-based translational programmes that will be scaled nationally.

Substantial increases in the number of older persons in society pose daunting challenges in healthcare, finance, housing and employment. Successful aging is multidimensional, encompassing the avoidance of disease and disability, the maintenance of high physical and cognitive function, and sustained engagement in social and productive activities.

To cultivate mental resilience and reduce the risk of depression and dementia, this programme on active ageing and cognitive performance builds on ongoing research in our 'Jurong Ageing Study' on mental functions, such as memory and mood changes. The study looks at how the elderly are influenced by genetic, biological, physical and social and environmental factors. Further studies aim to examine whether natural supplements, such as folate, vitamin B12, omega-3, curcumin, anti-oxidants, together with physical, social and programmes, such as mindfulness practice, music, art, and gardening, can improve cognitive, emotional and functional well-being.

NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS 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 enjoys international recognition and respect. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2016 by subject and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by Subject 2017 list NUS Medicine as a leading medical school in Asia.

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>

Stroke Support Station

Stroke Support Station (S3) is a ground initiative started by volunteers to meet the unmet needs of stroke survivors and caregivers in their stroke journey. S3 is volunteer-led and its programmes are supported by medical professionals and therapists from National University Health System (NUHS) and other hospitals.

S3 aims to be the primary reference organisation for stroke survivors, their caregivers, volunteers, professionals and the public by providing innovative programmes, support services, education and training.

S3 helps stroke survivors to Re-learn and Enjoy Active Living (R.E.A.L) for a better quality of life through a wellness program with the social-emotional support that rebuilds confidence and independence. S3 fosters mental resilience in stroke survivors and their caregivers, resulting in social connectedness among stroke survivors, caregivers, family members and volunteers.

Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)

Singapore University of Social Sciences is one of Singapore's six autonomous universities and its mission is to provide lifelong education that equips learners to serve society. Home to more than 15,000 students, SUSS provides an applied education that targets both fresh school leavers and adult learners, with a focus on the social sciences. It adopts a flexible and practice-focused learning approach and offers more than 70 degree programmes in various disciplines. Eligible students taking SUSS's undergraduate programmes enjoy government subsidies and access to government bursaries, tuition fee loans and study loans. For more information on Singapore University of Social Sciences, please visit www.suss.edu.sg.