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SINGAPORE'S FIRST MOBILE HEARING CLINICS TO SCREEN 8,000

One-stop clinic provides comprehensive hearing test, hearing aid fittings and aural rehabilitation services

Over the next two years, 8,000 residents aged 40 years old and above will benefit from a hearing diagnostic test conducted in a roving Mobile Hearing Clinic (MHC) at a Community Centre/Club (CC) or Residents' Committee Centre (RC) near their homes. It is estimated that more than 400 of them will also be fitted with a hearing aid to enhance their quality of life.

The MHC is an initiative by the National University Hospital's Department of Otolaryngology (ENT) – Head and Neck Surgery to make hearing services more accessible and to raise public awareness about how hearing loss can impact daily life adversely. International studies have shown that elderly with hearing loss are also more likely to develop Dementia and Alzheimer's disease, as compared to their counterparts with normal hearing. Untreated hearing loss can result in depression, anxiety, frustration, social isolation and reduction in the quality of life.

There are currently two such roving clinics and each clinic is equipped with two audio testing rooms comprising a comprehensive suite of hearing test equipment and hearing aid fitting systems.

In partnership with People's Association (PA) and as part of its Wellness Programme, the MHC which started on 14 December 2015 has screened about 500 residents living in Bukit Panjang, Tampines West, Yuhua and Nee Soon Central. The PA Wellness Programme seeks to engage seniors in activities which help them stay mentally, physically and socially active. One such activity is health screening with intervention.

About 82% of the 500 people screened suffer from some degree of hearing loss. Among them, 70% were diagnosed with mild to moderate hearing loss, which may progress to a more severe form of hearing loss. About 50 of them also had their hearing aid fitted, with 30 more expected to be fitted in the coming month.

NUH will continue working closely with the PA to increase awareness of this service. By March 2016, this service will be extended to residents in Queenstown. The MHC services will be expanded in phases to serve more than 20 CCs or RCs. It is open from Tuesday to Saturday, 9am – 6pm. Residents can find out details about the screening locations at <https://www.nuh.com.sg/ent/mobile-hearing-clinic.html> and make an appointment through the CC or RC where the screening will be held.

“The mobile hearing clinic project aims to increase the accessibility of hearing health and raise hearing awareness by bringing the services closer to the community. Hearing aid is a medical device that needs to be prescribed and fitted by trained personnel to ensure optimum outcome. Getting one off-the-shelf without proper review and advice can cause more hearing problems for the individual,” says Ms Chong Sheue Lih, Programme Director of the Mobile Hearing Clinic and an audiologist at the NUH ENT Clinic.

Ms Chong observes that among the residents who have been diagnosed with hearing loss, many of them did not go to a hospital for a hearing check-up. She believes one of the factors may be the lack of awareness of the negative effects of hearing loss. “Although hearing loss is not life-threatening, it causes communication difficulties and affects the daily activities and quality of life of hearing-impaired individuals and their families,” Ms Chong explains.

Clinical Advisor to the MHC and a Visiting Ear, Nose, Throat Surgeon at NUH, Dr Lynne Lim agrees that the importance of hearing well is underestimated. She says, “Only 1 in 10 who can be helped by hearing aids is using them. This is a pity as the great advancements in hearing aid technology now offer tailored solutions with improved performance. Fitting a hearing aid early rather than when the hearing loss is severe achieves better outcomes, as the brain has had less sound deprivation, and adapts faster.” Dr Lim is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Department of Otolaryngology at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore.

The cost of screening is \$5 and an additional \$15 for those who require further evaluation. Hearing aids range from \$1,800 to \$3,200 and eligible individuals can enjoy at least 90% in financial assistance (capped at \$2,700 or whichever is lower) through the Seniors’ Mobility & Enabling Fund (SMF) or the Health Services Development Programme (HSDP) fund.

Residents who sign up for the service will be part of a research that aims to study the cost effectiveness of active screening for the public and how hearing aids help to reduce the burden of the disease. They are required to fill out some questionnaires and be committed to follow through the treatment that is prescribed for them (please refer to the Fact Sheet on page 4).

The MHC is funded by the Ministry of Health’s HSDP at S\$4.6million. It is officially launched today by Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Member of Parliament for Yuhua Constituency, at Yuhua Community Club. “I commend NUH for bringing this Mobile Hearing Clinic to the community, thereby benefitting our senior residents. The community-based event will help raise awareness on managing hearing loss and complement the suite of wellness and health-related programmes designed for our seniors. This is another step towards making Yuhua a great place to age gracefully. People’s Association (PA), through the PA Wellness Programme, will bring in more partners to serve our senior residents better,” says Ms Fu.

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About the National University Hospital

The NUH is a tertiary hospital and major referral centre for a comprehensive range of medical, surgical and dental specialties. The Hospital also provides organ transplant programmes for adults (in kidney, liver and pancreas) and is the only public hospital in Singapore to offer a paediatric kidney and liver transplant programme.

Staffed by a team of healthcare professionals who rank among the best in the field, the NUH offers quality patient care by embracing innovations and advances in medical treatment.

In 2004, the NUH became the first Singapore hospital to receive the Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditation, an international stamp for excellent clinical practices in patient care and safety. Today, patient safety and good clinical outcomes remain the focus of the hospital as it continues to play a key role in the training of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals, and in translational research which paves the way for new cures and treatment, offering patients hope and a new lease of life.

A member of the National University Health System, it is the principal teaching hospital of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and the NUS Faculty of Dentistry.

For more information, please visit www.nuh.com.sg

Factsheet

Eligibility

Singaporeans or Permanent Residents, 40 years old and above, who are not currently using hearing aids and do not have any cognitive impairment (i.e. Dementia) or ear infections and/or tumours .

Part One: Hearing diagnostic tests

Residents will undergo a one hour hearing diagnostic test which includes the following.

- Video-otoscopy – the use of an otoscope (equipment used to look into ears) that has a small video camera to capture images of the ear canal and ear drum.
- Middle ear analysis – an examination used to test the condition of the middle ear and mobility of the eardrum and the conduction ear bones by creating variations of air pressure in the ear canal.
- Pure tone audiometry – This test determines the hearing threshold of an individual to assess the extent and type of hearing loss.

The test results are reviewed by a specialist from the NUH Department of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery (ENT) remotely to provide a diagnosis and treatment plan. Those who require further medical treatment for conditions such as ear infection and middle ear diseases will be referred to a hospital.

Part Two: Hearing Intervention

Residents with hearing loss who agree to take up hearing aids will go through the following stages of hearing intervention.

- Hearing aid evaluation

Residents will go through a two-hour long hearing aid evaluation where they will try a few hearing aids. An audiologist will explain the features of the hearing aids, customise the setting based on the type and degree of hearing loss, and help select the best hearing aid based on the individual's hearing profile and lifestyle.

- Hearing aid fitting

Once a hearing aid has been selected, the audiologist will help to programme it and also show the resident how to care and maintain the hearing aid.

- Aural rehabilitation

There will be two sessions of group aural rehabilitation which involves the residents and their caregivers. The residents will learn about hearing aid use, strategies for communication to maximise hearing aid function. Rehabilitation is especially important for new hearing aid users as they need time to adapt to sounds that are previously inaudible to them. The caregivers will also learn communication tips such as how to help their loved ones adapt to hearing aid use.

- Follow-up

At the last session, the audiologist will help to fine-tune the hearing aid and evaluate the outcome of the hearing aid treatment.