

## Campus Spotlight: NUS students bring health screenings to residents' doorsteps

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Photo, Neighbourhood Health Screening Team

Recognising the obstacles that Singapore's needy residents face when it comes to accessing health care, students from the National University of Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM) are bringing health screenings directly to them.

Under the Neighbourhood Health Screening (NHS) project, student volunteers go door to door at public rental flats to offer free health screenings to elderly individuals and low-income families.

These health screenings, which are conducted in residents' homes for their convenience, focus on common diseases - such as diabetes and hypertension - that pose high risks yet offer easy intervention.

Laboratory services, including mobile mammograms, pap smears and blood tests for hyperlipidemia, are provided at the void decks of blocks. Volunteer doctors, many of them specialists, are also on hand for consultation.

Started by a team of NUS medical students in 2008, the project has reached over 1,200 residents to date. The initiative started with Taman Jurong neighbourhood, with grassroots organisations providing key partnerships. In 2011, the project expanded to Macpherson and Bukit Merah View.

Screening sessions will take place in all three neighbourhoods again this year, primarily during the months of August, October and November, with follow-up sessions conducted year-round.

Daniel Goh, a second-year YLLSoM student, emphasises the importance of doing groundwork in the prevention and treatment of diseases. Speaking on the NHS project, he noted, "In a way, we are signposts, pointing them [residents] towards the infrastructure and people who can help."

With an emphasis on follow-up, NHS refers residents to community organisations and public services that can assist them in overcoming barriers to treatment, whether financial or social in nature.

For fourth-year YLLSoM student Nazirul Hannan B Abdul Aziz, witnessing residents' living conditions first-hand has given him a better appreciation of the problems people face in managing their health care. Seeing patients within their homes instead of a clinic "puts everything into perspective," he said.

Through their interactions with the residents, volunteers gain a sense of compassion that will serve them well as future medical professionals. Volunteering with NHS also gives students a real-life opportunity to practice their bedside manners and clinical skills.

From its start, NHS has been a student initiative and the leadership role is handed down to a committee of Year 2 students each year. About 300 students from YLLSoM and the School's Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies take part in the project annually.

A peer teaching element is inherent to the project, with the volunteers travelling in small groups comprising medical and nursing students from different years. Chin Run Ting, a third-year YLLSoM student said, "It's a very nice relationship because the senior students will actually teach the younger students."

Research is also a key element of NHS. An in-house team explores research questions every year, producing feedback to improve the project. Their findings are shared with the medical community through publication in academic journals.

So far, NHS has proven to be largely successful, with major gains in patient outcomes.

After one year of NHS participation by patients with known hypertension, treatment rates increased from 63 per cent to 93 per cent. Blood pressure control among those who were on treatment was also significantly improved from 42 per cent to 79 per cent.

For the student volunteers, these kinds of results bring home why they pursued medical studies in the first place.

Fifth-year YLLSoM student Chiong Yee Keow is grateful to NHS for allowing her to start making a contribution even before she graduates, as she went into medicine in part "to make lives better."