

The doctor will see you now – at a halfway house

Mobile team of Mount Alvernia doctors and nurses treats ex-offenders for free

Ng Huiwen

Ex-offenders at the Pertapis Halfway House in Geylang Road used to walk more than 20 minutes to the nearest polyclinic in Geylang East Central for a check-up. And because of that, some of them would

postpone treatment. But now a team of doctors and nurses visits them at the halfway house in a white seven-seater car. The team from Mount Alvernia Hospital sees patients at Pertapis Halfway House, as well as High-Point Halfway House in Geylang Lorong 23, and the hospital plans to

take its mobile service to more halfway houses this year. Although a mobile medical service has previously been used to care for the elderly, this is the first time it is being used to reach out to ex-offenders at halfway houses. The halfway house initiative is supported by the Yellow Ribbon Project, which helps ex-offenders reintegrate into society. So far, the medical team has seen about 50 ex-offenders at the two halfway houses.



(From left) Mount Alvernia Hospital community outreach senior manager Anthea Neo, Pertapis Halfway House caseworker Thajudeen Muhd Equban and Yellow Ribbon Project secretariat Denise Chow say the mobile clinic brings primary care to ex-offenders who may have previously found it inconvenient or costly to see a doctor. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Yellow Ribbon Project secretariat Denise Chow said: "We realised there is a group of ex-offenders

who will wait until their illnesses become more serious before seeing a doctor. With this, they can now get help at an earlier stage."

The mobile clinic provides preventive care, such as flu vaccinations and health screening for chronic diseases.

The team also conducts general practitioner consultation and dispenses medication for ailments such as the common cold, flu, fever and pains, said Ms Anthea Neo, senior manager of community outreach at Mount Alvernia Hospital.

The team, made up of volunteers and staff, sets up a makeshift clinic or health screening area at any available space in the halfway houses, she added.

Discussions are underway with several halfway houses here to fix a schedule for regular visits, with a focus on primary care services.

Separately, the team aims to have health screening at the halfway houses at least once a year.

Although the car has provided the team with more flexibility, residents of different halfway houses may have to gather at one place to be seen by the medical team.

"We have to look at the needs of the community and figure out the logistic details first. As some of the halfway houses are quite small, we may need to combine a few of them at a time," Ms Neo said.

Ex-offenders sometimes find it difficult to receive medical attention because of accessibility and cost, said Mr Thajudeen Muhd Equban, a caseworker at Pertapis Halfway House.

Ex-offenders have to get approval before they can leave the halfway house to see a doctor, he said.

Mr Thajudeen added: "The nearest clinic is Geylang Polyclinic, which is around a 20-minute walk away, and they will have to be accompanied too."

A polyclinic visit can cost around \$20, which some ex-offenders may not be willing to spend, he said.

Some of the ex-offenders were initially hesitant to approach the mobile clinic when it turned up in May last year, but Mr Thajudeen and his colleagues were on-site to explain the initiative to them.

On the day of the free clinic, the medical team saw about 15 of the 70 residents.

A 35-year-old ex-offender, who wanted to be known only as Mr Roza-idi, said: "I feel happy and assured about my health. I don't have to worry so much about my health, and can focus on being a better person."

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TIMELY MEDICAL CARE

We realised there is a group of ex-offenders who will wait until their illnesses become more serious before seeing a doctor. With this, they can now get help at an earlier stage.



YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT SECRETARIAT DENISE CHOW

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HomeBriefs

Consumer watchdog gets new executive director

The Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) has appointed a new executive director with effect from Sunday.

Case said yesterday that Mr Loy York Jiun would replace incumbent Seah Seng Choon, 64, who will become Case's adviser.

Mr Seah had held the top post at Case since 2002.

Mr Loy, 43, who became Case's deputy executive editor in April last year, previously held various senior appointments within NTUC – among them, the position of director of the Corporate Planning Secretariat.

Mr Loy said of his new role: "Case has been playing a critical role as a consumer advocate and champion with Seng Choon as its most visible face.

"I hope to build on Seng Choon's good work and the strong foundation that he has laid."

During Mr Seah's stint as executive director, Case helped to pass and implement the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act and the "lemon law" in 2004 and 2012 respectively.

He has also been credited with beefing up consumer protection by introducing regular surveys and product testing.

460g of heroin seized at Woodlands Checkpoint

About 460g of heroin was seized from a Malaysia-registered motorcycle at Woodlands Checkpoint on Monday.

The motorcyclist, a 31-year-old Malaysian man, was stopped by a

checkpoint officer at around 3.40am, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority of Singapore and Central Narcotics Bureau said yesterday.

A bag of heroin worth an estimated \$32,000 was found on the man. He was arrested and his motorcycle seized for further investigations.

Under the Misuse of Drugs Act, he could face the death penalty if the amount of pure heroin trafficked exceeds 15g.

Lower postage rates for Chinese New Year

As part of efforts to encourage the sending of greeting cards during major festivals, Singapore Post is offering lower postage rates for Chinese New Year.

The rates will apply to stamped and franked greeting cards posted between this Saturday and Jan 29. Chinese New Year falls on Jan 28 this year.

It will cost a flat rate of 70 cents to send greeting cards weighing up to 40g anywhere in the world. The normal rates range from 70 cents to \$2, depending on weight and destination.

Sending greeting cards of a non-standard size locally will cost 30 cents for cards weighing up to 20g and 37 cents for cards weighing up to 40g, down from the regular rate of 60 cents.

For greeting cards to Malaysia and Brunei, rates will remain unchanged at 50 cents for cards weighing up to 20g and 70 cents for cards weighing up to 50g.

Festive rates are also offered for Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Deepavali and Christmas.

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