

How Mount Alvernia keeps its patients' bills low

Mount Alvernia Hospital has consistently been praised by insurers for charging the lowest among all private hospitals here because it does not see itself as a profit centre.

While such a statement may raise the eyebrows of sceptics, the data on hospital bills from the Ministry of Health will show that this is the case: Its bills are usually 30 per cent to 50 per cent lower than the highest bill of other private hospitals for patients with similar illnesses.

Dr Djoni Huang, Mount Alvernia's director of clinical services, says: "Although we need to ensure that we are self-sustainable, we are not driven by the need to generate a great amount of profit.

"As a mission hospital, it is our intention to try to keep our prices reasonable and costs low for our patients."

The hospital, which started receiving patients in 1961, is celebrating its 60th year of founding by the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood Sisters.

It does not believe in fund raising: Its annual surplus goes into developing and upgrading the hospital so that it can grow and serve more people.

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A single room at Mount Alvernia Hospital. The 319-bed hospital in Thomson Road has tertiary medical capabilities and two multi-disciplinary medical specialist centres. It has around 1,200 accredited doctors, with more than 200 specialists operating there. PHOTOS: MOUNT ALVERNIA HOSPITAL

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Many of these doctors are on the panel of Prudential Singapore, which has a concierge counter sit-

uated there to answer questions from its policyholders, who are entitled to free taxi and parking vouchers.

This is because Mount Alvernia is the insurer's "panel hospital" – Prudential is the only insurer in Singapore to accord special privileges

to customers who seek treatment at its accredited private hospitals.

Dr Huang knows that when patients are hospitalised, both they and their family members will face a lot of stress.

"By keeping costs low and prices reasonable, we hope the financial

stress on our patients and their family members will be minimised, allowing our patients to focus on getting well. This way, we can touch more lives with our compassionate care to every patient who enters our doors."

That said, the operational costs –

including talent recruitment and retention – of running a hospital are very high, and this is where the bulk of its revenue goes.

The hospital also has to spend on new technology and equipment.

In addition, it has a unique service – clinical pastoral care – to de-



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liver spiritual and emotional support to patients as part of its holistic care model.

But the hospital's secret weapon to keeping costs low appears to be its team of medical professionals.

"We do try to be prudent in our spending, as we inculcate a cost-

consciousness mindset among staff at all levels," Dr Huang says.

For instance, before the hospital implements a new treatment, service or procedure, the team will discuss the merits, with the patients' welfare in mind, such as by asking whether it is necessary to make pa-

tients undergo the new treatment and pay the new charges.

And when it comes to providing for patients in the wards, the hospital takes care in ensuring that the comfort that aids their recovery does not come with excessive spending on sumptuous meals and

other non-essential frills.

"Our toechew porridge is just as good," Dr Huang says, referring to the popular hawker fare of plain porridge that is served with side dishes such as braised meat, tofu, salted vegetables and steamed fish.

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