

MEDIA RELEASE

Lien Foundation and Tan Tock Seng Hospital commit S\$5.8 million to build Singapore's first Breathlessness Ecosystem

The *Air Master* service is part of the ecosystem to help patients better manage chronic symptoms and improve overall quality of life

SINGAPORE, 16 November 2023 — Lien Foundation and Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) have launched the Air Master service, which aims to help patients with chronic lung and heart conditions learn to manage their breathlessness, pain and other symptoms. The service has started with three community care partners: AWWA, Ren Ci Hospital and St Luke's ElderCare.

Air Master is part of a larger Breathlessness Ecosystem, a network of care services that will be developed over five years with funding support of S\$5.8 million. When fully expanded, the ecosystem will benefit patients across the National Healthcare Group (NHG), including patients identified by TTSH, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, Woodlands Health, seven polyclinics, and a growing primary care network of general practitioners (GPs).

Burden of Breathlessness

Up to 5.9% and 4.5% of Singaporeans have chronic lung and heart diseases respectively. 60 to 90% of them are affected by breathlessness. Patients often associate their breathlessness with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. This deters them from exercising, resulting in diminished muscle strength, poorer mobility, and self-isolation. Up to a third of patients experience depression or anxiety.

Without the right knowledge in symptom and chronic disease management, patients experiencing breathlessness can be overwhelmed by panic and seek help at the emergency department every few months. After being discharged, nearly 1 in 4 are readmitted within 30 days, placing a high burden of care on hospitals and caregivers.

Cardiopulmonary rehabilitation can help with breathlessness and other symptoms, but few community partners are equipped to manage these patients who are severely underserved. Moreover, financial difficulties and challenging transport arrangements act as additional barriers for patients seeking rehabilitation.

Air Master Brings Targeted Rehabilitation Closer to Patients

Air Master's holistic rehabilitation service with community care partners will provide structured support much earlier for patients with chronic heart and lung conditions. TTSH will collaboratively train community care partners and enable them to deliver the Air Master service.

The ten-week service includes:

- Cardiopulmonary rehabilitation sessions to progressively build physical strength and endurance
- Education to help patients better manage their conditions, reduce anxiety, learn how to perform daily routines comfortably and safely, and improve their quality of life
- Comprehensive nurse-led assessments for frequently neglected physical and psychological ailments associated with chronic breathlessness
- Referrals to GPs and specialists for further intervention when required
- Peer support activities to encourage social engagement and prevent self-isolation

To ensure greater access, the Air Master service is fully subsidised and includes providing patients with transport vouchers. It aims to recruit approximately 800 patients across five years.

"Air Master is bringing together care from different specialities – rehabilitation, cardiology, respiratory, palliative, and allied health – for a community-based approach to helping patients manage their breathlessness and other debilitating symptoms. Through continued efforts to increase awareness and access to early rehabilitation, we want more patients to start managing their symptoms early, slow their functional decline, and reduce the need for hospitalisations throughout the trajectory of their disease, which can last for many years. We want patients to better understand and manage their conditions, which will then translate to more independent and meaningful lives," said Dr Neo Han Yee, Breathlessness Ecosystem Project Lead and Head of Palliative Medicine, Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

The Breathlessness Ecosystem

In line with the national agenda to transform our healthcare system through Healthier SG, Air Master and the wider Breathlessness Ecosystem aim to shift the focus of care into the community, by empowering community partners to educate patients on how to cope with sudden episodes of breathlessness at home as well as manage more complex patients.

Beyond tertiary hospitals, polyclinics and GPs will be recruited to screen, identify and refer suitable patients early, to services in the ecosystem. These include Air Master, other rehabilitation services for frailer patients, as well as Active Ageing Centres which will eventually deliver preventive education and interventions related to exercise and diet.

TTSH will operate and expand the ecosystem, as well as conduct research to evaluate its impact on both patients and the healthcare system. The tiered approach to the ecosystem matches patients to the appropriate services based on the severity of their condition and symptoms. Dedicated case coordinators act as a central point of contact for both patients and providers, allowing for more accessible care for patients and seamless information flow.

The ecosystem also aims to reduce healthcare costs by helping patients manage better in the community. Currently, heart and lung failure see the highest healthcare expenditure in Singapore (\$49,900 and \$42,900 respectively) during the last year of life, almost 60% higher than cancer

(\$31,200). With sufficient patient volume and time, TTSH and Lien Foundation hope to demonstrate the effectiveness of bringing targeted rehabilitation and symptom-related care upstream, as well as the strength of strategic collaboration among community partners.

"Breathlessness is a common and highly distressing experience for patients with advanced chronic diseases. To help more people better manage their condition, the coalition of hospital and community partners will integrate a palliative care approach early in the disease trajectory. By building the ecosystem of services in the community, we hope to alleviate suffering of vulnerable patients and their caregivers while averting unnecessary hospitalisations," said Mr Lee Poh Wah, Chief Executive Officer, Lien Foundation.

To find out more about the service, visit <https://for.sg/airmaster>

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About Lien Foundation

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative models of care, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action at the intersection of health and social care. The Foundation's focus areas include palliative care, eldercare and maternal & child health.

For more information, visit www.lienfoundation.org.

About Tan Tock Seng Hospital

Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) is the flagship hospital of the National Healthcare Group, Singapore. As a pioneering hospital with strong roots in the community for 179 years, TTSH is recognised as the People's Hospital, serving a population of a million residents living in Central Singapore.

We work closely with our primary and community care partners to build Communities of Care in every neighbourhood. Together, we bring care beyond the hospital into the community as an integrated care network – Central Health.

As one of the largest multi-disciplinary hospitals in Singapore, TTSH operates 2,000 beds with centres of excellence including the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), Institute for Geriatrics & Active Ageing (IGA), NHG Eye Institute (NHGEI) and TTSH Rehabilitation Centre. TTSH is set to open a 600-bed Integrated Care Hub to advance recovery and rehabilitative care.

As a healthcare leader in population health, systems innovation, health technologies and workforce transformation, TTSH hosts Singapore's largest purpose-built innovation centre for healthcare - the Ng Teng Fong Centre for Healthcare Innovation (CHI) and its Co-Learning Network of 85 local and international partners and affiliates.