

All systems go in case of attack

Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) officers attending to a "victim", following a drill simulating an attack by gunmen yesterday.

Shots had rung out earlier in Jurong West, as gunmen attacked the Sunday morning crowd at a market. Fortunately, it was just an emergency preparedness exercise, held next to Block 495 Jurong West Street 41.

Jurong GRC MP Ang Wei Neng was present to witness the Jurong Central Emergency Preparedness Day event. During the 20-minute exercise involving the SCDF and the Singapore Police Force, about 40 residents and volunteers demonstrated key survival skills such as "Run, Hide, Tell", and improvised first-aid skills. At the event, there were also booths to let visitors learn these skills.

"In this climate, our community needs to do its part in the fight against terror, and work together with the Government to prevent and deal with a terrorist attack," said Mr Ang.

He said the Jurong Central Community Emergency and Engagement Committee conducts free classes on cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automated external defibrillator use.

ST PHOTO: SYAMIL SAPARI



Student acquitted of hurling table from school building

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

A district judge acquitted a teen of hurling a classroom table from the third storey of a secondary school block, finding doubts in the claims of two other students who pointed to him.

District Judge Eugene Tay in the Youth Court noted that the two witnesses who said the boy was the culprit were both inside a classroom in the opposite block some 30m away, and it was raining heavily then as well.

"I was not convinced that the line of sight of the (two witnesses) was totally clear or unobstructed," he said in judgment grounds last month.

"This, coupled with the fact that the incident would have taken place in a matter of seconds and that the person who had thrown the table would have been moving instead of being static, I concluded that (they) would not have seen the culprit for more than a few seconds," he explained, adding that he accepted the submission of the defence on this aspect.

The then 15-year-old boy was charged with committing a rash act to endanger the personal safety of others.

The incident happened at a school in Jurong on May 22 last year at about 11am.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Derek Ee had argued that both witnesses were 100 per cent sure of the identity of the culprit.

He said that even though there was bad blood between them, and they had motive to frame the youth, they had withstood cross-examination and stood firm on their evidence.

They had nothing to gain by framing the youth and were credible witnesses, as were the other four witnesses, including a teacher.

But defence lawyer Hannah Tjoa countered that of the six prosecution witnesses, only two were direct eye-witnesses, and they had discussed the evidence between them and confirmed each other's version, "thus implanting false memories in both of their minds".

District Judge Tay noted that the two direct eye-witnesses were unable to recall what the teen was wearing then, which weakened the strength of their testimony.

He also found that the evidence of the other witnesses did not help prove the case beyond reasonable doubt. The identities of the parties involved were redacted.

The prosecution is appealing.

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Concerns over lack of regulation of home-care sector

Stakeholders push for better laws as more seniors opt to age in place

Rahimah Rashith

The issue of better regulation of home and centre-based care services for seniors is among the more pressing concerns facing the aged care sector.

A Lien Foundation report released last Tuesday said 14,000 seniors used subsidised home and centre-based services last year – surpassing the 10,000 in nursing homes, which used to be the main option for seniors' long-term care.

The preference to age in place, coupled with a fast-greying population – the number of people in Singapore aged 65 and above crossed the half a million mark last year and is set to double by 2030 – has prompted stakeholders to push for action.

Associate Professor Elaine Ho, who authored the study with fellow National University of Singapore colleague, Associate Professor Shirlena Huang, said regulation is one of the two biggest concerns highlighted in the report, the other being funding. Said Prof Ho: "Regulation, especially among private providers, is currently very limited; only two (out of at least 60) are regulated. There are many other providers out there, and not enough information about them."

Ms Pamela Ong, 61, is one caregiver who could have benefited from an accredited list of service providers.

She, with a maid's help, has been taking care of her 85-year-old semi-paralysed mother's everyday needs for eight years. But when her mother developed high

BENEFITS OF REGULATION

Having a regulatory framework does not only protect older persons and families, but it can also help operators make better business decisions, from identifying baseline costs for essential deliverables to setting mark-ups for elective services.



MS PEH KIM CHOO, chief executive of the Tsao Foundation.

fever last year, she employed two home nurses from a company to help administer antibiotics through an intravenous drip. The nurses were not only unable to insert the needle into her mother's hands, but also advised Ms Ong against sending her mother to the hospital even when the fever failed to subside.

Ms Ong did send her mother to the hospital where an intravenous drip was administered. The doctor in the emergency department had no issues inserting a needle into her mother's hand.

She lodged a complaint with the Singapore Nursing Board and the company, and filed a claim at the Small Claims Tribunals. The matter was resolved through mediation and she was refunded the full amount charged by the company.

But she remains wary. "I found out that their company was only three months old and not listed as a provider of nursing services."

While the Ministry of Health (MOH) has guidelines on home and centre-based care for providers, these are not legally binding. Unlike nursing homes and childcare centres, home and centre-based care is not licensed in Singapore. Only providers that receive government funds are subject to government regulation, including on care processes and staff qualifications.

Licensed care professionals, such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists, are regulated by their respective professional bodies. However, in the case of any professional misconduct, disciplinary action is taken only against the indi-

vidual, rather than his errant employing agency. A private provider can simply replace one poor worker with another and carry on, said the Lien report.

Ms Peh Kim Choo, chief executive of the Tsao Foundation which has been championing community and home care since the early 1990s, said that without a regulatory framework on minimum service standards, families may not know what to expect when sourcing for help.

"When things go wrong, it can also be difficult to establish responsibility or seek recourse to help and compensation. Having a regulatory framework does not only protect older persons and families, but it can also help operators make better business decisions, from identifying baseline costs for essential deliverables to setting mark-ups for elective services."

In response to the report, the MOH said application of the proposed Healthcare Services Act (HCSA) to home care and centre-based care needs to be studied more fully "to determine if, how and when the sector should be regulated under HCSA past 2020".

Allied health and non-physician nursing services are under the scope of the proposed HCSA.

The MOH explained that since home care and centre-based care are "nascent and evolving sectors", "a decision to regulate should balance both the potential risk to patient safety and welfare, whilst not imposing excessive restrictions which may stifle growth".

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