

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

St Luke's Hospital and Lien Foundation Launch Singapore's First Primary Palliative Care Programme

The S\$2.2 million OPAL programme aims to partner GPs and Healthcare Specialists to support more than 1,200 patients over four years

Singapore, 27 October 2026 — St Luke's Hospital (SLH) and Lien Foundation today marked the official launch of **OPAL**, Singapore's first programme that embeds palliative care into primary care.

The programme aims to support patients living with serious life-limiting illnesses and their families by bringing palliative care earlier into the healthcare journey, offering coordinated and holistic care alongside ongoing treatment and follow-ups.

General Practitioners (GPs) handle about 80% of all primary care needs in Singapore. This reach is central to the national vision of improving access to general palliative care, with GPs playing a key role. Backed by a S\$2.2 million investment from Lien Foundation, OPAL is a milestone in realising that vision, establishing a new service model benefiting SLH's primary care patients as well as patients from partner GPs.

Mr Lee Poh Wah, Chief Executive Officer of Lien Foundation, said, "The future of palliative care cannot depend on specialists and hospices alone. It must increasingly become part of everyday healthcare, delivered in the community by the family physicians who already know patients best. OPAL is Singapore's first major step towards embedding palliative care into primary care, so that patients receive support earlier, families are better equipped to navigate uncertainty, and conversations about what matters most become a natural part of care."

Meeting a Growing Need for Earlier Palliative Care

As Singapore transitions into a super-aged society, more people are living longer with multiple chronic conditions and serious life-limiting illnesses such as dementia, cancer or end-stage kidney or heart failure. This highlights a growing need for palliative care to be introduced earlier in the disease course, before symptoms and care needs become more complex.

GPs play an integral role in patient's lives, building long-term relationships with patients and their families and supporting them across different stages of health and illness. Their understanding of patients' medical histories and evolving healthcare needs places them in a strong position to identify when palliative care may be beneficial.

OPAL marks Singapore's first step of integrating general palliative care into primary care, enabling family physicians at SLH and participating GP partners to deliver primary palliative care. Through systematic screening and early identification, patients and caregivers can receive support while there is still time to hold goals of care conversations, understand their care options, manage symptoms before they worsen, plan ahead, and make care decisions aligned with their personal goals and values.

Prof Tan Boon Yeow, Chief Executive Officer of St Luke's Hospital, said, "Living with a serious illness can involve many changes over time — in a patient's health, priorities and the support that families need. OPAL allows us to identify and address these needs earlier, so that care can be aligned with what matters most to each patient. Through our multidisciplinary approach, we can support patients beyond their medical needs and journey with them as their condition evolves. In this way, we hope to bring light to what matters, while giving patients and families greater continuity, confidence and dignity throughout the journey."

The programme supports the national direction for palliative care - achieving the objectives of Singapore's National Strategy for Palliative Care, by growing the number of general palliative care providers, improving access to timely palliative care and strengthening the quality of care. It also reflects the role envisioned for Healthier SG GPs as a first point of contact for patients receiving palliative care in the community.

Bringing Coordinated Support into the Community

As the anchor organisation for the programme, St Luke's Hospital is well-positioned to deliver quality primary palliative care. With long-standing palliative care expertise, SLH supports more than 300 palliative care patients annually through its 40-bed inpatient hospice palliative care wards and home-based palliative care services.

As a community hospital, St Luke's Hospital provides a comprehensive range of care services, including St Luke's Community Clinic, its outpatient primary care clinic. With OPAL delivered at the clinic, SLH will extend its palliative care services into the outpatient setting, enabling patients and their families to access coordinated support earlier in the course of illness.

OPAL is delivered by a multidisciplinary team comprising family physicians, advanced practice nurses (APNs), medical social workers, and counsellors, who work together to address patients' clinical, social and emotional needs.

Family physicians oversee medical care, including symptom management and personalised treatment plans, while APNs support symptom monitoring, caregiver education and care coordination. For patients and caregivers with more complex social or emotional needs, they will be supported by medical social workers who can provide

assistance in navigating social challenges, financial assistance and community resources, while counsellors offer emotional and psychosocial support to help them cope with the challenges of serious illness.

Through tele-support and regular follow-up reviews at St Luke's Community Clinic, the team can pivot quickly as a patient's health or family circumstances change.

Since its pilot commenced in November 2025, the programme has enrolled more than 90 patients.

Strengthening Support for GPs in the Community

To extend the reach of primary palliative care, OPAL is progressively building collaborations with GPs and Primary Care Networks (PCNs).

GPs play a central role in managing chronic illnesses in the community. For patients with more complex palliative care needs, access to additional multidisciplinary expertise and care coordination resources can help GPs provide more comprehensive support.

Depending on the patient's needs and preferences, GPs can either transfer care to the OPAL team or continue to lead their patient's medical management, with support from OPAL's multidisciplinary team. For patients enrolled in OPAL, the team can provide assistance with Advance Care Planning facilitation and referrals to appropriate providers and community services, including hospices.

SLH is currently actively collaborating with a growing network of GP and primary care partners, such as **iCARE PCN** and **National University Health System (NUHS) PCN**, to establish referral pathways and shared-care arrangements. Embedding palliative care into primary care networks seeks to optimise the broader healthcare system.

As patients' needs become more complex or their conditions progress, SLH can also support transitions across its wider palliative care ecosystem, including **inpatient hospice care and home-based palliative care**. This provides patients and families with greater continuity as their needs change, while reducing the burden of navigating different care services on their own.

Strengthening Continuity Between Specialist and Primary Care

To better support patients who may benefit from palliative care in the community, OPAL is also working with acute hospital specialist outpatient teams to identify suitable patients.

The programme has begun collaborating with the National University Hospital (NUH), including specialist departments such as Geriatric Medicine and Nephrology, which often care for patients with serious life-limiting conditions.

Patients who continue to require specialist treatment at the acute hospital can be referred to OPAL for ongoing palliative care in the community, continuing disease-directed treatment from their specialist teams while accessing support for care planning, psychosocial and caregiving needs. For suitable patients, the model can also help streamline care and reduce visits to multiple hospital specialists where their needs can be met closer to home.

Importantly, patients can access palliative care earlier in their illness, rather than only when their condition has progressed to the point of needing hospice care.

By strengthening coordination between specialist and primary care teams, OPAL aims to provide greater continuity across care settings and help reduce avoidable emergency department visits and hospital admissions.

Learn more about the programme here:

<https://www.slh.org.sg/st-lukes-community-clinic/opal/>

About St Luke's Hospital

St Luke's Hospital (SLH), named after the patron saint of the medical profession, was the first hospital in Singapore dedicated to the care of older persons. An Institution of a Public Character, we care for more than 7,200 patients and beneficiaries each year, regardless of race, language or religion. Through our Clinical, Social, Pastoral (CSP) care model, we transform lives holistically beyond physical health.

To learn more, please visit www.slh.org.sg

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, rehab and maternal & child health. For more information, visit www.lienfoundation.org.

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