

Raffles Hospital to receive non-critical patients sent by SCDF

Fifty of the hospital's 168 beds have been set aside for such patients

By Claire Huang

huangjy@sph.com.sg

@ClaireHuangBT

Singapore

BY the middle of next year, Raffles Hospital will receive patients with non-critical medical conditions brought by Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) emergency ambulances. Under this first collaboration for ambulatory care with a private hospital to improve patients' access to care, individuals sent to the hospital with acute medical conditions such as fractures or acute symptoms from sprains and minor injuries will receive subsidised care if eligible, and pay rates similar to those of public hospitals.

Of the 168 operational beds at the hospital, up to 50 have been set aside for the patients sent in by the SCDF. Patients who require specialised care, such as those with burns or who have gynaecological problems, will not be sent by SCDF to the hospital.

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong said on Monday that, under this arrangement, patients who need in-patient care or specialist outpatient clinic follow-ups after their visit to the emergency department will also be tended to by Raffles Hospital. The ministry is now finalising arrangements with the private tertiary hospital; details will be released in the middle of next year.

Speaking at the ground-breaking of Raffles Hospital's S\$310 million extension, Mr Gan said: "This partnership builds on Raffles' track record of contributing to national healthcare needs. At the height of Sars in 2003, we tapped Raffles to treat patients who required non-urgent surgery to relieve the overwhelming load on our public hospitals."

The move enabled elective surgery to be carried out while the public hospitals battled the outbreak.

Raffles Hospital's extension will house a new medical centre with specialist and family clinics, day-surgery suites and diagnostic services in a 20-storey high tower devoted to ambulatory care. Advances in technology have enabled a shift towards this form of care, which makes it possible for more procedures to be performed in an outpatient setting. This trend, which saves patients time and money, is expected to lighten patient loads at the Singapore General Hospital, KK Women's and Children's Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Raffles Hospital's upcoming tower block, together with the existing hospital building, will yield a gross floor area of about 530,000 square feet, almost twice the size of existing hospital facilities. To be completed in about two years, the medical tower in North Bridge Road will be part of an integrated medical complex that will offer a runway for the hospital's growth in the next decade, said Loo Choon Yong, executive chairman of Raffles Medical Group.

He said that the additional space would enable the hospital to expand its range of sub-specialty services, including radiotherapy for cancer treatment and molecular and nuclear medicine. It will also enable the hospital to expand its healthcare education and clinical research; 10 clinical trials are ongoing now.

The hospital's emergency department now treats about 3,000 patients a month; Dr Loo said that the ambulatory care centre would probably increase patient load by another 10 per cent to 20 per cent.

After the tower is built, the hospital will renovate its existing building to expand its inpatient and critical-care services, including its emergency room, operating theatres and other wards.

Mr Gan noted that all primary-care clinics under the Raffles umbrella were now registered under the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS), and provide subsidised primary-care services to holders of the CHAS card and the Pioneer Generation card.

Source: The Business Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited.

Permission required for reproduction.