

Raffles Hospital to treat subsidised ER patients

Patients in SCDF ambulances can be taken there and pay only public rates

By LINETTE LAI

PATIENTS in emergency ambulances may soon be taken to the private Raffles Hospital and pay only the subsidised rates of public hospitals.

The tie-up, which is the first of its kind between the Government and a private hospital, comes amid efforts to take some strain off emergency units in public hospitals.

But only non-critical cases, such as fractures and dislocations,

will be directed to Raffles Hospital, as the demand is greatest in this target group, said a Health Ministry spokesman yesterday.

Critically ill patients – for instance, those having a heart attack – will continue to be taken to public hospitals.

Patients taken to Raffles Hospital must also be conveyed by Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) ambulances and not non-emergency private ambulances.

Announcing the move yesterday, Health Minister Gan Kim

Yong said Raffles Hospital will also provide subsidised inpatient care and follow-ups at specialist outpatient clinics.

“This partnership builds on Raffles’ track record of contributing to national health-care needs,” he said of the move, which will start by the middle of next year.

“At the height of Sars (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in 2003, we tapped Raffles to treat patients who required non-urgent surgery to relieve the overwhelming load on our public hospitals.”

Raffles Hospital, which sees around 3,000 patients in its emergency department each month, will set aside 50 of its 168 beds

under the collaboration.

Raffles Medical Group executive chairman Loo Choon Yong said the collaboration could help ease public hospitals’ bed crunch.

“From time to time, (they) may be short of beds,” said Dr Loo, referring to the public hospital system. “Sometimes – seasonally – there could be more patients and they cannot cope.”

Mr Gan announced the tie-up at Raffles Hospital’s groundbreaking ceremony for its \$310 million extension – a 20-storey building dedicated to outpatient traffic. It includes day surgery facilities, specialist clinics and radiotherapy facilities.

The new building will take



Raffles Medical Group executive chairman Loo Choon Yong (left) showing Health Minister Gan Kim Yong a model of Raffles Hospital’s \$310 million extension – a 20-storey building dedicated to outpatient traffic. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

around two years to complete, following which the hospital will renovate its main building to expand inpatient facilities such as wards and operating theatres.

Dr Loo said the extension will enable Raffles Hospital to expand its medical research and staff

training. “We will also provide health-care and other skills training to countries in the region, helping to strengthen Singapore’s position as a regional centre for not only excellent health care, but also advanced health-care treatment.”

✉ linettel@sph.com.sg