

NEWS RELEASE

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NTU Singapore's medical school launches new professional growth programme to nurture resilient and effective doctors

Programme focuses on fostering mental well-being and a strong professional identity as part of LKCMedicine's curriculum enhancements

In August, the **Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore)** will launch **Professional Growth**, a new programme that prepares its medical students for the demands of the medical practice by fostering a strong professional identity and mental resilience.

This will be done through regular structured discussions, seminars, and clinical transition workshops which will be conducted throughout the five-year Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) curriculum degree programme.

The content for Professional Growth is curated and aligned with key transition periods for medical students, such as when they embark on their clinical postings or enter the healthcare workforce. The curriculum covers topics including burnout, effective help-seeking strategies, and dealing with grief in the medical profession.

The new programme complements national efforts¹ to address issues faced by junior doctors, by equipping its students with the right tools to manage their well-being as doctors.

Professor Joseph Sung, NTU Senior Vice President (Health and Life Sciences) and Dean of NTU LKCMedicine, said: "When medical students leave the safe confines of their school and become doctors, they are confronted with not just a new working environment, but also greater expectations from their colleagues, patients and caregivers. These changes can be emotionally and mentally daunting, and as a medical school, it is necessary for us to acknowledge these challenges and adopt a holistic approach that goes beyond teaching practical skills and knowledge. NTU LKCMedicine's greater articulation and emphasis on self-care and professional identity through the new Professional Growth programme will ensure our students

¹ In December 2021, the Singapore Government set up the National Wellness Committee for Junior Doctors to address issues such as workload, career development, and mental wellness.

have the right resources to manage their well-being and develop positive collegial relationships, so that they can better serve their patients.”

Associate Professor Michelle Jong, Group Chief Clinical Education Officer, National Healthcare Group (NHG), the primary clinical training partner of LKCMedicine, said, “This new programme is timely and much needed to further empower our medical students to excel on their professional journey. It is an exemplar of how LKCMedicine keeps pace with the ever dynamic healthcare landscape, a beacon in medical education!”

Structured discussions and seminars to enhance students’ well-being

The new **Professional Growth programme** leverages LKCMedicine’s current pastoral care programme, which is delivered through a House System. Students are assigned to one of five different Houses at the start of their studies and assigned a House Tutor (an LKCMedicine faculty or staff member) for guidance and mentorship.

Mr Emmanuel Tan, Assistant Dean of Student Wellbeing, NTU LKCMedicine said: “The House System provides students with different forms of support, be it from their peers from the same House or the House Tutors who are present for them during the entirety of medical school. From observing how it has helped students broach difficult conversations with their House Tutors and House-mates, we realised that expanding the existing system would be the best and most impactful way to develop the Professional Growth programme.”

Currently, House Tutors meet with students four times a year for group discussions plus one-on-one meetings which provide a safe space for tutors to check in on students and offer support to students who may be facing personal challenges.

Under the new programme that was developed with input from current and former LKCMedicine students, these **meetings will take on a more structured approach, with clearly defined topics of discussion and learning outcomes** that closely match the challenges students face at different stages of their education, such as adjusting to the rigour of medical school as freshmen and recognising the purpose and value of their profession before they graduate. (*See below for full list of discussion topics*).

Muhammad Ariffin Bin Mohd Zahrin, a fourth-year NTU LKCMedicine student, said: “The discussion topics were developed with feedback from student representatives in the workgroup. I advocated for mental health-related topics because it is necessary for students to recognise signs of distress, know how to manage it, and to normalise such experiences. Professional Growth is definitely a step in the right direction.”

House Tutors will continue to offer support and guidance to students during one-on-one meetings. They will review students' academic progress through **a new Learning Progress Dashboard** that gives a comprehensive view of each student's competencies. This dashboard will facilitate conversations with students about their academic goals, fostering greater ownership and responsibility among students as independent learners – attributes that will shape them into effective medical professionals.

With their role evolving, House Tutors will undergo regular training in coaching techniques to carry out these focused discussions with students.

Well-being seminars to reinforce themes

The topics covered during House meetings will be reinforced by **three well-being and resilience-themed seminars** to further guide and furnish students with the necessary skills to effectively handle the emotional and physical toll of challenges. This will enable them to have a better understanding of their profession and reinforce their commitment to care for patients as medical students and junior doctors.

An **introductory seminar for second-year students** will focus on adapting to change in expectations, academic rigour, and environment as students progress to their clinical postings in their third year. In this seminar, students will learn the concepts of resilience and self-care in relation to being a medical student.

These concepts will be explored on a deeper level in an **advanced seminar for fourth-year students**, who would have gained sufficient clinical experiences and experienced some complexities of the profession. The seminar will also prepare students for their final year at medical school.

Fourth-year students will also be required to attend another **advanced seminar about moral distress, grief and loss**, which will be co-developed with LKCMedicine's Professionalism, Ethics, Law, and Leadership (PELL) programme, which comprises courses that equip students with the skillsets to deliver ethical and professional care in an increasingly sophisticated medical landscape. Students will learn how to develop strategies to address these issues as medical students and junior doctors.

These three-hour seminars will be delivered by professionals with relevant expertise, including senior healthcare practitioners, leaders, and alumni.

Workshops to help students adapt to the clinical setting

LKC Medicine will also introduce **clinical transition workshops** for third-year students before they embark on their clinical postings, and for graduating students before they enter the workforce.

These workshops will utilise concepts from PELL and Medical Humanities curricula to give students a clear idea of the structural and cultural nuances of the workplace for a medical student or a junior doctor.

Each clinical transition workshop comprises two 3½-hour seminars that will guide students to explore and analyse the expected roles and behaviours in a clinical setting as a medical student or a junior doctor. Students will also be taught to identify any maladaptive learning behaviours and professional identity issues, as well as develop positive coping and workplace learning strategies.

The workshops also include an 8-hour clinical shift observation activity to help students better understand interprofessional relations in the clinical setting.

Professor Jennifer Cleland, Vice-Dean of Education, NTU LKC Medicine said: “The integration of Medical Humanities and Professionalism, Ethics, Law, Leadership (PELL) with Professional Growth will give medical students right concepts, language and ethico-legal framework to understand their experiences in a clinical setting with different healthcare professionals and patients. This will empower them to be better team players, develop a strong professional identity, and make better decisions for themselves and their patients.”

An enhanced, holistic MBBS curriculum for new students

The new Professional Growth programme is part of an **enhanced Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) curriculum** that the School will roll out from August 2024.

The enhanced curriculum will feature **more course content related to artificial intelligence (AI) and digital health** as these solutions continue to drive healthcare delivery.

More **tech-enabled teaching tools** will be implemented throughout the MBBS degree programme to help students become doctors who are discerning and confident users of technology.

This tech focus will be balanced out by **an expanded scope in medical humanities**, which will bring together concepts from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines to nurture doctors who are agile and adaptable in navigating uncertainties

and will deliver compassionate and patient-centred care. Originally taught in the first two years of the MBBS programme, medical humanities will now be expanded and integrated across all five years of the MBBS from August.

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Notes to Editor:

List of topics for structured discussions guided by House Tutors:

- Adaptative coping
- Effective help-seeking strategies
- Resilience
- Burnout
- Fatigue, sleep deprivation, and substance abuse
- Uncertainty
- Self-care

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About Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

A research-intensive public university, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has 33,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Engineering, Business, Science, Medicine, Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, and Graduate colleges.

NTU is also home to world-renowned autonomous institutes – the National Institute of Education, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering – and various leading research centres such as the Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Environment & Water Research Institute and Energy Research Institute @ NTU (ERI@N).

Under the NTU Smart Campus vision, the University harnesses the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources.

Ranked amongst the world's top universities, the University's main campus is also frequently listed among the world's most beautiful. Known for its sustainability, NTU has achieved 100% Green Mark Platinum certification for all its eligible building projects. Apart from its main campus, NTU also has a medical campus in Novena, Singapore's healthcare district.

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