More therapists needed for an ageing population, say experts
By Loi Kar Yee | Posted: 18 Apr 2014 18:25

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SINGAPORE: Efforts will be stepped up to develop home-based care services for the elderly, said the Ministry of Health during the recent Committee of Supply debate.

This will be done by expanding capacity, making home care more comprehensive, and enhancing caregiver support.

Some healthcare experts said an ageing population could mean a rising demand for more therapists.

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This will benefit patient like 62-year-old Mr Mohan who developed walking difficulties three years ago.

A physiotherapist visits him once a week and it's clear he has made good progress.

Such home care services can be manpower intensive, and industry practitioners said more can be done to encourage people to become therapists.

This includes providing flexible work arrangements and continuing education to those who return to the profession such as women who have left to build and look after their families.

Dr Alan Wong, associate professor and programme director of the Singapore Institute of Technology, said: "The professions of physiotherapy and occupational therapy is still largely female-dominated. There's always that tendency for female colleagues to want to stop work for awhile or at best go into part-time to help build a family and look after the family.

"That in itself, is a bit of a challenge because then we would lose some of these professionals. But the good news is that a few years later, as the kids get older, they will come back.

"So I guess the profession should take into consideration some of these returnees into the profession to provide some continuing professional education to help them keep abreast of recent advances in physical and occupational therapy."

Dr Wong said engaging students at an earlier stage could also encourage more men to join what seems to be a predominantly female profession.

Ms Jacinda Soh, occupational therapist at TOUCH Home Care, said: "Provide adequate support and training for them to better carry out their duties, as well as to have the emotional support systems in place to support these therapists.

"And they (operators) should also consider about retraining or looking at alternative sources of manpower, for example, training of volunteers or training of therapy assistants, as well as utilising of technology... to help with our daily operations."

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