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Headline: How Singapore wants to attract tech talent to healthcare

How Singapore wants to attract tech talent to healthcare

The country hopes to leverage on the high mobility of tech workers as the face of healthcare rapidly evolves.



It takes a village to raise a child – and this also applies to patient care. A whole support system of nurses, doctors, and other medical staff work together to guide patients on their journey to recovery.

Add to that list the teams of network engineers, designers and software developers who chug away quietly in the background, building technology that makes it all possible – and often, without recognition for their work.

In Singapore, health tech is becoming ever more crucial as citizens age and the pool of healthcare workers shrinks. The healthcare system needs “talent from all sectors” to overcome this, said Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information and Health Chee Hong Tat.

Growing the talent pool

Singapore will need an estimated 30,000 more healthcare workers until 2020. By the same year, there will be 610,000 people above the age of 65, according to the government.

Driven by the ageing population, an estimated 1,200 jobs will open up in health-related tech over the next three years. “If we can innovate new solutions to tackle our healthcare challenges, we can provide better care for our people,” SMS Chee noted at the recent Health Tech Day event on 16 March.

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Tech workers are “highly mobile, as tech skills can be applied to many industries”, he said, adding that many health tech professionals in Singapore do in fact come from other sectors.

As Singapore’s health tech scene grows and matures, the benefits are twofold. It will mean innovative new ways to care for an ageing population, and the health tech companies themselves will have the opportunity to “export their solutions to other cities around the world that are also experiencing similar demographic shifts”, SMS Chee pointed out.

The government is taking steps to boost the health tech talent pool by offering training and skills conversion programmes. Health IT provider Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS), the

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Infocomm Media Development Authority and Workforce Singapore are collaborating to support 50 mid-career professionals in their transition to the healthcare sector.

This partnership is part of a broader programme called the TechSkills Accelerator, which will train 21,000 ICT professionals in Singapore.

Meanwhile, the Singapore Management University is launching a degree in Health Economics and Management. Graduates will be “well-versed in tech skills such as data analytics, which will play an increasing role in the healthcare sector”, SMS Chee continued.

IHiS has also organised the National HealthTech Challenge this year, and will provide support for piloting ten of the most promising solutions – helping innovators to navigate regulatory and ethical approval, secure funds, and set up clinical trials, for example.

Robot nurses

Players in the healthcare ecosystem are already using technologies such as robotics and automation to free up nurses from manual, repetitive tasks, and support limited manpower.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), for instance, wants to explore using robots to care for elderly patients. “We have looked at whether robots can be involved in managing patient falls,” Chief Nurse Yong Keng Kwang told GovInsider.

Health insurance provider Prudential Singapore is also harnessing new technologies to simplify and shorten the process of administering medical claims from eight major hospitals. “We are using a machine learning-based solution to shorten the claims processing time from what used to be weeks to seconds now. This is part of our drive to improve productivity and make insurance simpler for our customers,” Government Relations lead Magdalene Loh told GovInsider.

On the flipside of all these new innovations, traditional health professions must adapt their roles to work with tech. Nurses will get “more broad-based training” in a bid to revamp nursing education and move away from specialisation in particular diseases, according to TTSH’s Yong.

Tech professions will always be in demand, but now, the need for health tech talent in particular is greater than ever. Technology and future skills are two sides of the same coin, and Singapore is building a strong foundation to support the changing demographics of tomorrow.

This article was produced in partnership with Prudential Singapore.