

Community care career track rolled out for eldercare sector

Shermaine Ang

Mr Fabian Tan conducts exercise sessions and arts activities for the elderly as a senior community care associate at All Saints Home's senior care centre in Yishun.

"It really gives me a lot of joy, which I never had in my over 20 years in logistics," he said, recounting how an elderly woman opened up to him about her family and wanted to go to the centre more often to see him and her friends.

The 48-year-old made a career switch to eldercare in 2022 after more than 20 years in the logistics industry. He wanted to contribute back to society after his father died seven years ago.

He said: "I didn't do my duty as a son, so when he passed on, it was hard for me."

Mr Tan was promoted to senior community care associate in March 2024, and tasked to lead the activity team to plan activities and better engage seniors. He is among the roughly 500 workers who have taken on redesigned roles under a new career track which was piloted for support care staff.

The new track will be rolled out across the sector, said Minister of State for Health Rahayu Mahzam on Oct 2.

She was speaking at the Community Care Manpower Development and Excellence Awards Ceremony organised by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

"The new track provides new opportunities for support care staff progression, by broadening their roles and enabling cross-deployment across various care settings," she said.

The community care career track provides a progression pathway for professionals through four roles: community care associate, senior community care associate, community care executive and community care manager.

The hiring for these roles will be done in nursing homes and senior care centres. There are around 500 community care associates and senior community care associates now.

AIC and the Ministry of Health (MOH) embarked on a pilot to trial the four new redesigned roles in eight organisations from 2021 to 2024.

The community care associate and senior community care associate roles involve providing basic clinical and rehabilitative care for seniors, and administrative and operational support for supervisors. These roles can be taken up by junior care staff, such as healthcare assistants.



Mr Kenneth Ng managed the administration and operations in a church for 15 years before joining St Luke's ElderCare Active Ageing Centre (Care) Clementi as a senior community care associate. PHOTO: AGENCY FOR INTEGRATED CARE



Mr Fabian Tan, a senior community care associate at All Saints Home's senior care centre in Yishun, made a career switch to eldercare in 2022. PHOTO: ALL SAINTS HOME

The community care executives and community care managers can take on more strategic responsibilities such as establishing external partnerships and improving the psychosocial care of seniors. These positions are suitable for centre supervisors and managers to transit to.

To prepare support care staff for these new roles, AIC, in partnership with MOH, SkillsFuture Singapore and industry stakeholders, have accredited the training of community care associates as part of the national Skills Framework for Healthcare.

In July, the first group of 12 staff started training for up to 12 weeks. Upon completion, they will be awarded the Workforce Skills Qualifications Higher Certificate in Healthcare for Community Care.

One of them is Mr Kenneth Ng, who managed the administration and operations in a church for 15

years before joining St Luke's ElderCare Active Ageing Centre (Care) Clementi as a senior community care associate.

The 56-year-old said the training has helped him gain confidence as he had no prior experience in the sector.

He said: "We learn skills such as infection control, to prevent seniors from getting sick. The training focuses on person-centred care, where we develop care plans for the seniors. That's where we must observe, understand their needs."

Mr Samuel Tan, chief executive of All Saints Home, said the organisation's three senior care centres have over 40 care staff, most of whom have been trained for the new roles.

He said they take on some basic nursing duties and will free up nurses to do more complex clinical work.

Mr Samuel Tan stressed the challenges of hiring in the sector.

He said: "Care jobs are not easy, especially when trying to attract younger people. When you look at remuneration, the sector has actually stepped up quite a lot, but we still face competition from other lines of businesses."

"For mid-career (joiners), it's also difficult to say who are the ones who will stay for the long term, because some people may just take it as a transitional or temporary job."

But he was optimistic that the new career track will ensure staff are well trained, increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes.

"There's a systematic programme, there's career progression, then they can have better pay and benefits, and that can help with the retention of people."

shermaineang@sph.com.sg