

# Nurses take on doc roles in polyclinics

BY LEE HUI CHIEH

NURSE clinicians in some polyclinics are taking over from doctors in treating chronically ill patients, thus allowing doctors to deal with more serious cases.

The programme also aims to help patients better manage their conditions, and to offer more challenging careers for nurses.

These nurse clinicians are senior nurses who have been given further training on chronic diseases. They also get hands-on practice in attending to patients, with the doctors present.

Queenstown Polyclinic, the last of SingHealth Polyclinics' nine outfits to implement the programme, revealed yesterday that it began doing so last month. The others have adopted it in phases beginning over a year ago.

The nurse clinicians see pa-

tients suffering from asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Their conditions are stable and they do not need adjustments to their medication.

Instead of being seen by a doctor for each visit - usually once every three months - these patients now see a doctor on one visit, and a nurse on the next.

But if a patient becomes unwell, the nurse can refer him to a doctor, who will attend to him on the same day.

The main advantage of the programme is that patients can save time and money.

The average wait to see a nurse clinician is about 20 minutes and costs \$6, while that for a doctor is an hour and costs \$9.

Each consultation with the nurse clinician also lasts longer than that with the doctor - about 20 minutes instead of 10.

This is because the nurse has

more time to spend on counselling patients and helping them set personal goals, said Ms Jasmine Heng, a nurse clinician in the programme at Pasir Ris Polyclinic.

Retired bank officer Wang Jer Hsiang, 63, has been seeing nurse clinicians at Pasir Ris Polyclinic for his high blood pressure for more than a year.

"My condition is under control and I'm just there to get my medication, so it's good that I don't have to wait so long. And if I don't feel well, I can still get to see the doctor," he said.

Also yesterday, Queenstown Polyclinic's new Stirling Road premises were officially opened by Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan. It moved from Margaret Drive in December last year.

A satellite clinic of the Institute of Mental Health, previously in Viking Road, occupies the fourth storey of the new building.