

## New hospitals will be built faster, could cost less: Minister

Having standard design guidelines in place will benefit all parties, says Ong Ye Kung

Yap Wei Qiang  
Correspondent

With standard design guidelines in place, new hospitals can now be built faster at a potentially lower cost.

Key to this effort is the Healthcare Facility Design Standards (HFDS) – the first framework in Singapore that harmonises hospital design principles across the public healthcare system.

“Singapore has built wonderful hospitals over the decades that served our people well, and we can be very proud of them,” said Health Minister Ong Ye Kung at the launch of the standards on Dec 9.

“But with an ageing population and rising healthcare demand, we will need to build and redevelop more and more hospitals. So we not only have to build good hospitals now, but also have to do so better, faster, and with greater cost-effectiveness.”

Standardising hospital designs will accelerate design processes for every new hospital development

and make construction more predictable.

“A shorter project timeline is not an end in itself. It brings many benefits... makes construction more predictable. It means we reduce cost variability and risks throughout the project.

“These will all lead to improved project costs.”

Stressing that the system would benefit all parties, Mr Ong said having standard designs for clinical spaces, such as wards, operating theatres and operational areas, such as disposal rooms, meant that clinicians would not need to learn about a new layout every time they went to a different hospital.

“This improves efficiency and supports better care delivery,” he said, pointing out that patients would receive faster and better care at hospitals.

In addition, the care environment would also be safe as infection control measures are standardised and made consistent among other public hospitals.

“The ultimate beneficiaries are the patients we serve, by hospitals

that are delivered faster and better,” he said.

“Further, HFDS will enhance clinical safety and quality by ensuring consistent infection control measures, such as standardised sink placement, and clearly defined ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ workflow zones.”

The standards draw from the insights of clinicians and operators, and build on the accumulated lessons from past healthcare development projects.

Areas of standardisation include aspects of architecture, interior design, medical planning, mechanical and electrical systems, and construction methods.

The first public hospital project that fully applies HFDS and will see time savings in construction is the Tengah General and Community Hospital (TGCH).

It will take about seven years to be completed, and is targeted to be ready in the early 2030s.

In comparison, the Woodlands Health Campus, which was officially opened in 2024, took 10 years to build.

This was partly because the construction was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, said Mr Ong, who is also Coordinating Minister for Social Policies.



Health Minister Ong Ye Kung at the Dec 9 launch of the Healthcare Facility Design Standards – the first framework in Singapore that harmonises hospital design principles across the public healthcare system. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Separately, the new Eastern General Hospital (EGH) will take about 8½ years to build. When fully opened around 2029 to 2030, it will have about 1,400 beds.

TGCH will be operated by the National University Health System.

Associate Professor Victor Koh, the pro tem chief executive officer of TGCH, said that HFDS allows various stakeholders to work on hospital plans concurrently, instead of having to follow a sequential workflow, saving time.

On whether standardising designs will result in new hospitals looking and feeling similar, he said this was indeed a concern initially.

However, he added that HFDS works like Lego blocks – though they are somewhat similar, the final products built with them can be different.

Besides TGCH, HFDS will also be used for the building of the new Tan Tock Seng Hospital Medical Tower, which will add about 600 acute beds and is set to have a bigger emergency department.

The redevelopment of the Na-

tional University Hospital (NUH) in Kent Ridge will also tap HFDS.

Under the redevelopment plans, NUH is expected to replace half of its 1,200 beds and add another 100 new ones by 2033. By 2038, the remaining older beds will also be replaced, and another 200 beds will be added, taking the hospital's total to 1,500.

HFDS was developed by MOH Holdings (MOHH) with all three public healthcare clusters, and drew from the best practices and lessons learnt from past projects.

It benefits those involved in the planning and running of new hospitals, said Mr Ong.

Consultants can draw on proven hospital designs, instead of having to start from scratch.

Contractors can enjoy better time and budget management, allowing them to explore the adoption of new technologies and improve their productivity as they can cut down on reworking designs. Having uniform designs will also make prefabrication possible.

Developers, such as the Ministry

of Health and MOHH, also get to deliver new hospitals faster, with possible savings through economies of scale and mass fabrication.

This has already happened due to the bulk procurement of lifts for both EGH and the redevelopment of Alexandra Hospital.

Clinicians can benefit from working in wards and operating theatres with layouts that they are familiar with, even if they go to different hospitals.

Mr Ong said that having standard designs does not mean stagnation, as the design standards continue to be refined, and hospitals continue to have room to differentiate themselves through how they deliver care, and how they design the hospital environments or the use of green spaces.

At the opening of the Woodlands Health Campus in 2024, Mr Ong pointed out, Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong had posed a worthy challenge.

“He said the time taken to develop hospitals such as Woodlands Health was quite long, and with rising demands for healthcare, we can definitely do better, and the next hospital should probably take less time. The long timeline for hospital development has been an issue that we have been grappling with, and SM’s challenge gave us the greatest impetus.

“In meeting the challenge, we focused on three things: first, standardising our hospital designs as far as possible; second, compressing the project review processes; and third, involving contractors earlier in the development and design processes.”

With the addition of the new TGCH and the EGH Campus in Bedok North, there will be a total of 13 public acute hospitals and 12 community hospitals in the early 2030s.

yapwq@sph.com.sg