



Professor John Abisheganaden, NHG Health's chief of health services and outcomes research, who is also a senior consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), with Madam Merly Hong at TTSH Medical Centre on Jan 28. Madam Hong, 69, who has had asthma since she was 35, has been using biologics to keep her asthma under control since August 2022. She injects them herself once every four weeks, on top of taking the conventional asthma medication.
ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Patients empowered to play bigger role in own healthcare journey and decisions

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Now more than ever, patients are taking their health into their own hands.

With the implementation of patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs), which could be simple questionnaires to complete, some patients in public hospitals can assess and report their own health statuses.

The PROM scores are then used to determine if they can be discharged from hospital to continue receiving care in the community, or if closer medical attention is warranted instead.

The three public healthcare clusters in Singapore have implemented PROMs in some of their disciplines, said Senior Minister of State for Health Koh Poh Koon in October 2025.

This gives patients a voice in clinical decision-making, helping them to better understand their own progress and become more engaged in managing their own care, he said when speaking at the Singapore Health and Biomedical Congress about how the Republic is prioritising the implementation of appropriate and value-based care (AVBC).

PROMs are an example of AVBC, which focuses on what truly matters to patients and ensures healthcare is delivered in a way that is guided by evidence, with patient outcomes that improve their lives while ensuring every dollar spent delivers optimal value.

NHG Health in the central region has implemented the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) PROMs at its specialist outpatient clinics and polyclinics.

The questionnaire for patients includes queries on whether they have experienced daytime asthma symptoms more than twice a week in the past four weeks, and woken up at night because of the symptoms.

When completed, the questionnaire gives them a GINA score, a measurement of whether their asthma is well-, partly or badly controlled.

NHG Health's chief of health services and outcomes research John Abisheganaden said the questionnaire helps clinicians focus on the specific asthma attacks that patients might not have told their doctors about.

A standardised scoring system can help with patient care, too, by providing a common clinical language across the care team.

"For instance, we know exactly what 'this patient has a GINA score of 2' means, just like different doctors can understand blood pressure or blood sugar level readings", said Professor Abisheganaden, who is also a senior consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

More importantly, the longer-term tracking of these scores can give clinicians a clearer picture of whether the patients have well-controlled asthma. Those who keep their GINA score at zero for at least six months can be considered for discharge from the specialist clinics to primary care, said NHG.

Patients also find the system to be useful.

Madam Merly Hong, who has been a patient with TTSH since 2016, started using the GINA questionnaire in August 2022.

The 69-year-old retiree, who has had asthma since she was 35, finds it useful to be able to track her GINA scores from several visits.

"It gives me the reassurance that I am doing well when the scores remained low. Filling up the questionnaire also helps me to recall the times when I had attacks and identify possible triggers to avoid future attacks," said Madam Hong.

As her asthma was relatively poorly controlled, she has been using biologics – targeted biological therapies that act on specific inflammatory pathways – since August 2022.

She injects them herself once every four weeks into her stomach area or thigh, on top of taking the conventional asthma medication. With those therapies, she has seen a marked improvement of her asthma.

NHG has implemented PROMs in other areas of patient care, including total knee replacement

and polypharmacy, and is exploring using them in other clinical areas such as mental health.

The National University Health System (NUHS) in the west has implemented PROMs for the sleep management of infants and children, as poor sleep can affect a child's mood, behaviour, learning and growth, and cause great stress to parents.

Under the Sleep Easy Programme, parents fill out an online questionnaire about their baby's sleep shortly before the child is due for well-baby checks and recommended immunisations, said NUHS.

The PROM answers provide the doctors with insight into the child's sleep quality, and screening can be arranged for those with potential sleep problems, said Associate Professor Daniel Goh, a senior consultant at the National University Hospital's paediatric pulmonary medicine and sleep division.

He also said that the use of standardised parameters allows for tracking and monitoring of the child's sleep quality over time.

NUHS' preliminary findings showed that the questionnaire is able to effectively screen infants' sleep and, with NUHS' intervention, improve sleep quality, said Prof Goh. Parents also reported better confidence in managing their infants' sleep.

NUHS' director of the Value Driven Outcomes Office, Ms Shikha Kumari, said PROMs have been rolled out across the healthcare cluster, including the sleep-related screening programme at its polyclinics and for other conditions such as total knee replacement, total hip replacement and stroke.

She said NUHS' future PROM roll-outs will prioritise high-value clinical areas.

The rheumatology and immunology department of Singapore General Hospital (SGH), which is under SingHealth, developed an automated monitoring system in June 2025.

It helps in the regular monitoring of patients with axial spondyloarthritis, a chronic rheumatic disease with inflammation of the spine and the sacroiliac joints that

connect the base of the spine to the pelvis. Over time, the condition can lead to structural spinal damage.

The online system allows patients to report their symptoms before their scheduled virtual appointments.

Among other things, they are asked to indicate their overall fatigue level; whether there is pain in the spine, hip or other joints; as well as the severity and duration of morning stiffness, said Associate Professor Warren Fong, a senior consultant at SGH's department of rheumatology and immunology.

Combined with their blood test results from a polyclinic near their home or SGH, the system can then analyse their health status.

Patients with well-controlled conditions will have their routine appointments automatically rescheduled to a later date.

Associate Professor Hairil Rizal Abdullah, director of SingHealth's Office of Value Driven Care, said that the use of PROMs is meant to complement, not replace, the clinician's assessment of the patients' condition.

"It is to increase the completeness of the data to include what is important for the patients themselves, in their own perspectives, rather than just the paternalistic model of only what is important clinically," said Prof Hairil.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, the Ministry of Health (MOH) said that international research, including an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) health working paper on PROMs, has shown that systematic PROM implementation can improve patient engagement and outcomes through enhanced communication and personalised treatment.

The OECD paper looked into the implementation of PROMs in 38 countries in a survey in June 2024. A randomised control trial in the US of patients in New York also showed that the integration of PROMs into routine care of patients with cancer was associated with increased survival.

Those in the PROM group had a median survival of 31.2 months, five months more than the 26 months for those in the group without PROMs.

With PROMs introduced across different specialities by the health clusters, MOH said it is now working with the clusters to select appropriate PROMs to be translated to other official languages to support their adoption nationwide.