

# Speeding up patient visits at NUH

**Linette Lai**

A faster method to treat serious infections and partnerships with community clinics are among the ways National University Hospital (NUH) is trying to make visits for its patients more fuss-free.

The hospital has started giving patients rapid infusions for five commonly used drugs, meaning that they can be done in less than a quarter of the time taken previously.

In the past, some patients with serious infections used to have to go in for antibiotic infusions almost every day for weeks, with each session lasting up to 45 minutes.

The time reduction comes at no cost to patients' health, said Professor Dale Fisher, who is senior consultant in NUH's infectious diseases division.

"We were at a conference in Australia and we heard about a group that was doing this, so we looked at the literature on the subject," Prof Fisher said.

He estimates that now, around half the people in the hospital's outpatient pharmacy are getting such rapid infusions.

One of them was Mr Jimmy Chin, a retired business owner who underwent a liver transplant and had a serious bacterial infection.

He had to go for two rounds of treatment, the first of which was administered using the old method.

"It saved quite a lot of time," recalled the 56-year-old. "Sitting for 15 minutes was not as bad as sitting for 45 minutes."

NUH has also embarked on a separate scheme where patients are given appointments with doctors in their neighbourhood, rather than specialists in hospital.

For example, a patient may have issues with his heart, kidneys and eyes, and has to see a different doctor for each.

The new scheme is meant to help



Retired business owner Jimmy Chin, who underwent a liver transplant and had a serious bacterial infection, is one of the patients who have gone for speedier antibiotic infusions at the National University Hospital. PHOTO: NUH

consolidate visits and simplify things for patients, who would otherwise be seeing a host of different doctors.

"It can result in a lot of fragmentation of care, and also poses a significant burden to the patient and caregiver," said Dr Sue-Anne Toh, who is clinical director of the regional health system planning office at the National University Health System.

The hospital is working with doctors based in the community, such as those at St Luke's Hospital and Lakeside Family Medicine Clinic.

In most cases, hospital specialists are called upon only when needed, said Associate Professor Tan Boon

Yeow, who is chief executive officer at St Luke's Hospital.

"If the patient is stable and can manage, that's good," he said. "If a new problem arises, we might need

a specialist to order new tests, interpret test results or make a diagnosis."

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