

First college for clinician scientists in Asia launched in Singapore



Professor Pierce Chow, the president of the College of Clinician Scientists, Academy of Medicine, PHOTO: NATIONAL CANCER CENTRE

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SINGAPORE -Doctors who want to be trained as clinician scientists can now get more support.

With the launch of the first college of clinician scientists in Asia on Friday (Aug 26), doctors who want to conduct research can now approach the college based in the Academy of Medicine at Kim Keat Road.

The president of the College of Clinician Scientists, Professor Pierce Chow, said: "It is challenging for a clinician to be a clinician scientist as medical school does not primarily teach doctors how to do research. They need mentors who can help them with their early projects."

The college is meant to "create a corporate body" for junior doctors to be trained in biomedical research, he said, adding that he hoped that it would be a space for clinician scientists in Singapore to mentor junior doctors.

The college, he added, could potentially serve as a repository for biomedical expertise that both the government and industry can tap on.

Colleges of clinician scientists have been set up in countries such as Canada, the United States and Britain.

On Friday (Aug 26), a workshop was held at the National Dental Centre along with the launch of the college.

Called the Investigator-Initiated Trials Workshop, it aims to identify important clinical gaps and come up with research questions that will interest industry collaborators.

The workshop, which drew 100 participants, also included sessions headed by some of the existing 100 clinician scientists in Singapore.

Participants came from other countries in Asia such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand.

Dr Senthil Sockalingam, vice-president and head of the medical and therapeutic science and strategy Unit at a clinical research company, Quintiles, said: "It is important that investigators, who manage patients, lead and get involved in clinical research. It is particularly important in Asia as even though we are 60 per cent of the world's population, we do not represent majority of the academic work that are produced. Research is still heavily produced by the West."

Dr Senthil noted that Asian patients have different medical needs and hopes that the college will be able to produce local and regional data.

An example is the research on myopia done by Singapore National Eye Centre and Singapore Eye Research Institute in 2013 that has produced an eyedrop that slows down the degenerative effects of myopia.

"This type of research has improved lives of Asians here. Today's workshop is an acknowledgement that more should of this should be done," Dr Senthil said.

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