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# Robots visit homebound seniors, enabling tele-consultations with hospital staff

SINGAPORE - Speaking to a hospital pharmacist on Tuesday (22 Dec), retired container driver Ow Soo Tian recited the five types of medicine he takes, when he takes them, and any side effects.

Such consultations, part of Alexandra Hospital's (AH) routine reviews with patients to help ensure that they know their medication, are usually done in person.

But this time, 71-year-old Mr Ow, who needs a walking stick to get around, spoke to pharmacist Joshua Low via teleconferencing from his home.

The virtual connection was made possible by the hospital's new robot Temi, saving him a trip to AH.

The hospital is trialling the use of smart robots like Temi to visit patients in Queenstown who are homebound, isolated, have multiple conditions, and have limited access to technology, such as Mr Ow.

For Mr Ow, who suffered a stroke and has been living in a rental flat in Mei Ling since his discharge from AH slightly less than a year ago, Temi will help him reduce the number of hospital trips.

Temi and its Ghim Moh counterpart, Ohmni, were sponsored by private and corporate donors. They are part of AH's trial that began on Tuesday (Dec 22).

Dr Jason Phua, chief executive of AH, said: "Right now, it's just not possible for healthcare workers to go to so many different homes. For healthcare workers to see all these patients, we would need the patients to come down to the hospital. But why have them make the inconvenient trip?"

The robots would be "a game-changer" if the scheme could be scaled properly, making house visits more efficient, he added.

AH said that the robots could be used for consultations such as in pharmacy and nutrition, which need not be done in person.



Temi is equipped with a computer screen and camera, and is connected to the Internet via a Wi-Fi dongle brought by human volunteers who accompany it on house visits.

It can also play recorded videos such as physiotherapy exercises customised for every patient, AH said.

Currently, Temi is based in the newly opened Geriatric Services Hub (GSH) at Lions Befrienders Mei Ling Senior Activity Centre, which provides medical services to seniors in the neighbourhood who are above 65, have no regular doctor, and are prone to falling.

Dr Phua said: "We hope to have prompt identification of frail elderly in the community, offer timely education and treatment, and make geriatric service accessible and affordable to Queenstown residents, as well as reduce emergency department visits."

In the future, the robots would be deployed by GSH as well as other AH departments.

Temi is also able to interact with patients, responding to user commands such as playing songs. AH hopes this will interest the seniors and raise their spirits.

The robot played a Christmas song to an amused Mr Ow, who declared it "quite fun".