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Media Release

For immediate release

## VOLUNTEERS TRAINED IN NEW AREAS TO IMPROVE THERAPEUTIC OUTCOMES FOR SENIORS

- 1 Volunteers serving across the NTUC Health's eldercare services and programmes can look forward to developing their volunteer capabilities further, in order to understand and better serve the different needs of seniors.
- 2 At the NTUC Health Volunteer Appreciation Lunch, an event held annually to appreciate the dedication and contribution of volunteers across various services and programmes, Chairman NTUC Health Ms Tan Hwee Bin shared that the number of volunteers in NTUC Health had grown from 240 last year to close to 600 volunteers by the end of 2016, and noted that the role of volunteers in caring for seniors is an important one that continues to evolve over time.

### INCREASING DEMAND FOR SENIOR CARE

- 3 By 2030, the number of Singaporeans aged 65 and above is projected to double to 900,000.<sup>1</sup> Based on the Individual Giving Survey 2016 conducted by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), volunteers are increasingly doing more in the areas of health (e.g. nursing, therapy) and human services (e.g. befriending)<sup>2</sup>. They also serve as a valuable extension to the workforce amid the current tight labour market in the health and eldercare sector.
- 4 Said Mr Leon Luai, NTUC Health's Head of Clinical Services & Wellness and Head of Residential & Home Care, "To meet the rising demand to care for seniors in the community, the roles of volunteers have shifted. From conducting

1. Population SG, "Older Singaporeans to double by 2030"  
2. Individual Giving Survey 2016, National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre  
3. "One Size Does Not Fit All", National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre, 2014

ad-hoc events and activities in the centre, volunteers are now encouraged to develop skills that help to improve therapeutic outcomes for our seniors.”

- 5 For instance, through government initiatives, such as the Community Befriending Programme, and Caring Assistance from Neighbours or CAN programme, NTUC Health’s volunteers reach out to vulnerable and isolated seniors through regular home visits. In addition to befriending them, the volunteer roles also include medication reminders, and monitoring the mental and emotional well-being of the seniors.

## **DEVELOPING VOLUNTEER CAPABILITIES TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF SENIORS**

- 6 Findings of NVPC’s Volunteer Engagement Survey conducted in 2013<sup>3</sup> also reveal that many students and younger working adults viewed skills-based volunteering as opportunities for personal and professional development. To encourage volunteers to grow with NTUC Health, and to better serve seniors in the community, NTUC Health provides training to develop volunteer capability. For instance, qualified care professionals from NTUC Health Cluster Support conduct mental health training to help volunteers identify and manage seniors with depression and dementia. Through the session, volunteers are able to understand the ageing process – the physical and mental changes that occur with age, and learn about the warning signs and causes of common mental conditions in seniors like depression and dementia. In addition to learning how to communicate effectively with seniors with these conditions, volunteers are also taught useful tips on overcoming depression, how to modify the home environment to suit the needs of seniors with dementia, and the types of activities that are suitable for them.
- 7 Mdm Puvanadevi Sivagnanam (Joanna), 86, had been a nurse for 65 years before she retired and joined NTUC Health Cluster Support in 2015, to continue caring for seniors in the community. Despite having a breadth of experience in

nursing, Mdm Joanna did not undergo specific training to deal with clients with dementia. “The training teaches us how to deal with them in a unique way that is different from other patients; what we would expect from them, and the right way to treat and talk to them,” shared Joanna.

- 8 Joanna felt that the training reinforces and supplements what she has already learnt through her prior interactions with seniors and her experience as a senior herself. She shared, “One of my clients will claim that he is 100 years old when he is not, and wanders on his own down the block. When I tell him that he is not supposed to go downstairs, he loses his temper. I would then use different tactics I learnt to calm him down - for instance, touch him on his shoulder, hold his hands, and assure him that I wouldn’t want him to fall and be admitted to hospital. It’s very important to be friends with clients who suffer from dementia or depression, make them feel wanted and cared for, so that they would respond to you more positively, and share their problems more openly.”
- 9 Most recently, NTUC Health has piloted “Strong Again!” programme, an initiative by NCSS which aims to motivate frail seniors to feel encouraged and confident through strength training. In March this year, volunteer befrienders and staff from the Community Befriending Programme underwent 2 days training where they learnt how to build relationship, to empower the frail seniors in goal setting and to conduct strength training with the seniors. NTUC Health is one of the four partners to pilot this programme.
- 10 Ms Judy Leong, 39, a volunteer Befriender of NTUC Health’s Community Befriending Programme, was one of the volunteers who were trained in the Strong Again! programme. Her client, Mdm Fan Keu Moi, 82, stays alone in a studio apartment in Marsiling. Before Judy started Mdm Fan on the weekly strength training routines, Mdm Fan was frail and wheelchair-bound, and had difficulty lifting herself up. She was not motivated or confident that she can continue her usual activities. Each week, Judy would spend between 30 to 45 minutes to befriend Mdm Fan and motivate her to do the simple yet specific stretches with Mdm Fan. A goal would be set for each week. The improvement

was evident as Mdm Fan eventually gained confidence and was able to get up from the chair and walk confidently with a walking frame for approximately 7 metres from her room to the entrance of her home just after 8 sessions.

## **HELPING MORE SENIORS PLAN FOR THEIR FUTURE CARE ARRANGEMENTS**

- 11 Going forward, NTUC Health is planning to train more volunteers on how to approach seniors on the important topic of Advance Care Planning (ACP) and engage them in meaningful discussions to help them prepare for the future. Through training provided by the Agency of Integrated Care (AIC), volunteers learn to initiate this non-legally binding and voluntary discussion that helps seniors to express their wishes about their care preferences in the event that they are incapable of making their own healthcare decisions. As part of the training, volunteers are taught to assess whether a senior is ready to embark on a conversation about ACP, as well as how to approach the subject and handle common questions and reactions. Together with an healthcare or social care professional, volunteers can also learn to record the senior's wishes through a specific questionnaire

## **PROVIDING A MORE REWARDING VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE**

- 12 With more volunteers dedicating time and effort to care for seniors, NTUC Health has partnered with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) since 2016 to develop a framework to more effectively manage and work with volunteers. NTUC Health is also currently working with NCSS on the Service Based Volunteering model, which matches the skills and interests of regular volunteers to the needs of seniors. A volunteer roadmap offers volunteers opportunities for personal and professional development through further training. Not only does this position them for potential future careers in the eldercare industry or to provide caregiving for their elderly loved ones, it also enables them to enjoy a more meaningful and rewarding volunteering experience.

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