New infectious disease centre to combat outbreaks

It has features to isolate treatment and reduce risk of cross-infection

By PRISCILLA GOY

A NEW infectious disease centre at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) that aims to improve Singapore’s response to outbreaks, will have a screening centre and ward cubicles that can be turned into isolation rooms.

The National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) can also be locked down during large outbreaks to manage highly infectious agents safely.

Details of this centre and a new training hub for medical professionals were unveiled yesterday, at a groundbreaking ceremony for the two buildings.

Plans for these facilities, part of a master plan to have a “health city” in Novena and to be opened in stages from 2018, were first announced last year.

The NCID will be a 14-storey centre with 330 beds in 17 wards. It will have separate lifts for visitors, patients and staff to reduce the risk of cross-infection.

During the Sars (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak in 2003, TTSH had to use a makeshift tent to accommodate the large number of patients being screened, and this could have increased the risk of cross-infection.

To deal with large outbreaks, the NCID will have a screening centre which can hold 520 patients and a specialist outpatient clinic which can be converted to screen 130 more.

While the NCID will be a self-contained centre, to confine treatment of infected patients to a single place, it is also connected to the main TTSH building and will be able to use resources from the general hospital for more co-ordinated operations.

Professor Leo Yee Sin, clinical director of the Communicable Disease Centre, who is overseeing the building of the NCID, said it was important to constantly improve its processes to protect the community. She added: “Given the constant global movement of populations, no epidemic is too far away from home.”

Details of TTSH’s new Centre for Healthcare Innovation were also unveiled yesterday.

Features of the nine-storey building include simulation labs and multimedia walls so people can learn about the latest digital health-care systems and technologies.

“The groundbreaking today is not merely about new buildings and increasing capacity,” said TTSH chief executive Philip Choo. “It is about being future ready and creating a new workforce that is connected and aligned to population needs.”

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