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New clinic looks at how to slow ageing, prolong disease-free years

NUHS longevity centre diagnoses person's biological age, prescribes personalised plan

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

A new longevity clinic, where the doctor will diagnose a healthy person's biological age and then provide a customised plan to slow ageing, is being set up in Alexandra Hospital, and the clinic is slated to open by January next year.

Professor Andrea Maier, the co-director of the National University Health System (NUHS) Centre for Healthy Longevity (CHL), told The Straits Times this at CHL's opening on Wednesday.

To measure biological age, a patient will undergo blood tests as well as a series of other tests to check his heart and lung functions, joints and more.

The doctors will then prescribe a personalised plan which can include specific exercise routines, their duration and intensity, as well as specific dietary modifications, said Prof Maier.

Research work at the CHL focuses on finding new biomarkers to measure ageing as well as new ways of disrupting the ageing process to keep diseases at bay. The centre aims to translate laboratory findings to clinical practice.

The urgency is clear as one in four Singaporeans will be above 65 years of age by 2030.

"The hundred-year life may well be the norm for children born in developed countries, if the current trends continue," said the Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies, Mr Heng Swee Keat, at the centre's opening event at the NUHS auditorium in Kent Ridge Road.

"Healthy longevity ensures that the additional years are a boon, rather than a grim millstone of disease burden and fiscal cost. This is particularly salient for Singapore and many parts of the world where populations are rapidly ageing."

Professor Brian Kennedy, CHL's co-director, said the centre, located in Alexandra Hospital and a labora-



Facial ageing test being demonstrated at Alexandra Hospital. A special camera takes photos of the face and the 3D image created will be mapped to a machine learning model that has been developed to predict biological age.
ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

tory at NUS Medicine, integrates pre-clinical and clinical research to test ways of slowing ageing in a South-east Asian population.

The idea is that a person's biological age can tell doctors more about his state of health than what traditional biomarkers for diseases, such as blood pressure, can.

"Somebody is chronologically 60 but, biologically, he may be only 50, or he may age poorly and be biologically 70. We need to be able to measure this to combat ageing and measure whether interventions are working," Prof Kennedy said.

The centre has screening tools that analyse facial ageing and mea-

sure arterial stiffness, body composition and functional ability.

At least 15 studies are ongoing, including Project Abios (Ageing Biomarker Study in Singaporeans), which looks at hundreds of biomarkers in some 450 participants.

The centre will also carry out clinical studies on novel nutritional supplements and repurposed drugs to slow ageing.

A study to test if six months of daily supplementation with alpha-ketoglutarate can slow biological ageing will start soon.

Repurposed drugs include metformin, a drug used to treat Type 2

diabetes, which may slow ageing.

The centre's mission is to enhance health span by three to five years in Singapore's population by slowing biological ageing.

"In three to five years, healthy longevity will not only exist as a lab-proven concept, but also become part of everyone's life," said Prof Maier.

"So next time, tell your GP (general practitioner) your biological age, not your chronological age, for a more targeted, customised and precise prognosis and treatment or intervention plan."

joyceteo@sph.com.sg