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# Hospice care gets thumbs up from pioneer

## Amazing progress made in last 20 years in care of the terminally ill, says expert

BY JESSICA JAGANATHAN & TESSA WONG

WHEN the first home-care service for the terminally ill was being set up here 20 years ago, a team of volunteer nurses held their meetings in Dr Anne Merriman's bedroom.

It was she who sowed the seed for the Hospice Care Association (HCA). Known as HCA Hospice Care today, it has its own building where it runs day-care services for the terminally ill, and satellite centres providing home-care services.

The Government, with an eye on the rapidly ageing population here, has also put resources into end-of-life care and into training more palliative-care specialists.

To Dr Merriman, a 74-year-old specialist in geriatric medicine, the transformation is amazing. The Briton, who spent the last 20 years spreading the cause of palliative care in Africa, was here over the weekend for HCA Hospice Care's 20th anniversary.

More than 150 people attended the public forum yesterday where she and two HCA founding members, Dr Cynthia Goh and Dr Rosalie Shaw, spoke about the hospice's beginnings.

In the late 1980s, HCA cared for about 400 patients and their families. Today, HCA Hospice Care

During her time in Africa, Dr Merriman trained doctors, nurses and volunteers in palliative care and, through them, set up care centres across the continent. Under her leadership, Uganda, in particular, has become a model in palliative care for other African nations.

Dr Merriman, a former senior teaching fellow in the Department of Community, Occupational and Family Medicine at the National University of Singapore, does not feel her work is done.

She will return to Africa where she leads policy and international programmes at Hospice Africa and

looks after hospice programmes in five nations.

At yesterday's forum, HCA Hospice Care president Seet Ai Mee noted that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in his National Day Rally speech last month, said the Government was focusing on integrating health care. PM Lee spoke about the need to contain health-care costs by delivering an appropriate level of care, be it acute or rehabilitative.

She noted that funding for in-patient hospice care has been stepped up but, so far, nothing has been announced for the kind of home-based care that HCA Hospice Care provides.

"I hope it is in the *akan datang* phase," she said, using the Malay phrase meaning "soon to come".

HCA Hospice Care patron Lim Boon Heng, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office who is in charge of ageing issues, noted that the Government is stepping up efforts to make the living environment barrier-free and running social and community services so people can age at home, where they are more comfortable. Home hospice care at the tail end of "ageing-in-place" lets a person remain in the comfort of his home, he said.

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Dr Anne Merriman, a pioneer in home hospice care, does not feel her work is done.

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