

HOME PALLIATIVE CARE

Quality over quantity is the current agenda

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THE "slow medicine movement" — an alternative approach to healthcare which emphasises quality over quantity of life spent — or comfort over high-risk medical treatment — is gaining appeal among elderly Singaporeans, according to the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Lim Boon Heng.

Last month, the Health Ministry said it was planning a major push in palliative care, a key aspect of this approach. And yesterday, Mr Lim said more details would be available soon on the Health Ministry's decision to liberalise the use of Medisave for home palliative care.

Mr Lim, who was speaking at a public forum on palliative home care, believes that home care will help bring down medical costs for patients and their families.

But he cited some challenges: "As the population of the aged grows and the numbers grow, the sustainability of a free service is one we have to look carefully at. Naturally, for those who can't afford it, we should extend help funded by public

generosity.

"For those who can afford (it), perhaps it is time for us to consider how we can make a contribution to the care and service they can receive."

The Hospice Care Association (HCA), the largest hospice care provider in Singapore, hopes the government's recent decision to revise its funding for in-patient hospice care would also be extended to home hospice care.

The HCA, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary, looks after some 900 patients at any one time.

Dr Seet Ai Mee, president of HCA, said: "For us to be good in home care, it is necessary for us not only to look at the patient's medical needs, but also their psycho-social needs, and actually provide for that kind of care besides the medical care in the homes.

"We do not want them to get depressed before we can address the problem. Currently, that care is not funded."

Dr Seet said home care should also be given priority because many elderly patients prefer to stay at home during their final days. CHANNEL NEWSASIA