

Putting more heart in medical training

BY SALMA KHALIK

IT IS a curriculum aimed at encouraging doctors to treat patients as much with their hearts as with their heads.

For the past two years, students at the Lee Kong Chian (LKC) School of Medicine have been voluntarily providing humanitarian aid, both locally and overseas.

Three in four of the school's 132 students have taken part in that time, with some going on missions to Cambodia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, or helping patients at Dover Park Hospice on weekends.

Yesterday, the school – which is part of Nanyang Technological University and Britain's Imperial College – launched a Humanity in Medicine exhibition highlighting such efforts by doctors and nurses here.

Its dean, James Best, said: "We talk of medical education as developing knowledge, skills and attitudes.

"In a lot of medical education, the attitude part has (been) neglected. We don't want to neglect building the character of our doctors through developing the right attitudes."

Opening the exhibition, Lam Pin Min, Minister of State for Health, said: "The practice of medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling, not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head."

An ophthalmologist by training, Dr Lam has taken part in many such missions in his eight years as a doctor in the air force. He is also trained in aviation medicine.

He was part of the United Nations peacekeeping force in East Timor when it achieved independence in 2000.

Dr Lam highlighted many efforts by Singapore doctors, such as performing cataract operations to restore sight and repairing cleft palates in countries where such treatments are not available or too costly for villagers.

Lee Eng Hin of the National University Hospital and a board member of LKC said that all public hospitals support staff who provide such humanitarian aid.

Dr Lam said he is encouraged to see the school has modules in its curriculum to inculcate "a sense of compassion and humanity in the practice of medicine".

Towards the end of their third year, the medical students will have six weeks of protected time to do something different related to their studies, be it research or humanitarian aid, overseas and locally.

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