

# Launch of centre for Parkinson's disease

By PRISCILLA GOY

PEOPLE with Parkinson's disease can now go to a new centre in the heartland for therapy.

Located in a void deck in Bishan Street 13, just a five-minute walk from an MRT station, The Parkinson Centre will officially be opened today by Minister of State for Health and Manpower Amy Khor.

"There is a need to bring these services to the heart of the community, since many patients have difficulties travelling to hospitals on a regular basis," said Ms Julie Lau, the president of Parkinson's Disease Society Singapore (PDSS), which runs the centre.

Parkinson's disease affects motor functions, causing tremors, stiff muscles and poor balance. It is the second most common neurodegenerative disease here, after Alzheimer's, affecting three in every 1,000 people aged over 50.

And numbers are set to rise given Singapore's ageing population, said Associate Professor Louis Tan, a National Neuroscience



Patients undergoing physiotherapy at the Parkinson Centre in Bishan. Such activities were usually previously held in hospitals. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Institute senior consultant.

Around 2,000 people in Singapore had Parkinson's in 2000, but that has now gone up to 4,000. Ms Lau said more younger people, generally in their 40s, are also being diagnosed with Parkinson's.

Before, patients usually went to hospitals for physiotherapy, or to the PDSS office in Dunearn Road for other activities such as speech therapy and dexterity programmes. The new centre in Bishan Street 13 puts all these under one roof. PDSS now offers physiotherapy as well as it has bought the necessary equipment. The centre and a PDSS office beside it cost \$600,000 to build.

PDSS has more than 400 members, including caregivers, and

about 60 patients taking part in its activities. With the new centre, Ms Lau expects the figure to grow as hospitals refer more cases to PDSS.

Retiree Peter Tan, 63, who started participating in PDSS activities such as art and calligraphy classes last year, finds the location of the centre, which has been operating since last December, more convenient. And with more people being able to use the bigger premises, there are more chances for him to meet other patients.

He said: "Instead of being holed up, repeatedly asking 'why me', I have now learnt to reach out to the friends and families of those with Parkinson's disease."

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