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Fiona Chan of The Straits Times graduated with a business degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Arts in East Asian Studies from Harvard University on an SPH scholarship.

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One more hospital needed

It will help cope with growing population in the east and north-east, says Health Minister

By April Chong



(From left) Hajjah Nor Aini Hashim, Puspha Meenachi Sundram and Soonthrammal Nalappan were given awards for good work. -- PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

ONE more public hospital will be needed to cope with the growing population in the eastern and north-eastern parts of Singapore, Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan said yesterday.

Changi General Hospital (CGH) on its own will not be able to meet the needs of residents in areas like Pasir Ris, Punggol and Sengkang, which are still growing.

'It is clear to me that at some stage we also have to plan another hospital in the east or north-east,' said Mr Khaw at a nursing awards ceremony.

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If the plans get the go-ahead, it will be the third new public hospital in the works, after the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital under construction in Yishun, which opens in 2010, and one in Jurong, expected by 2015.

Mr Khaw, who gave no other details of the new hospital, also said that as part of beefing up health-care prevention efforts, the school health programme will be reviewed next year.

The programme currently includes school-based screening for weight and sight issues and problems like a curved spine, as well as administering the necessary vaccines.

Mr Khaw also handed out the annual awards for enrolled nurses at the Singapore Conference Hall in Shenton Way.

Enrolled nurses, who hold certificates from the Institute of Technical Education, help registered nurses - the diploma or degree holders - with tasks such as dressing wounds and monitoring patient condition.

About one in four of the more than 22,000 nurses here are enrolled nurses.

Winning the top award - the Challenge Trophy for the Tan Chin Tuan Nursing Awards - was Institute of Mental Health nurse Ms Soonthrammal Nalappan, 46.

The 24-year veteran shows newcomers the finer points of dealing with difficult mentally-ill patients, often a source of much nervousness among newer nurses.

Ms Soonthrammal was also recognised for her work with patients, though she says it has not always been easy.

She has been attacked on a few occasions, but the assaults did not deter her from caring for patients.

Outside her working hours, the former Red Cross member meets long-term IMH patients to teach them how to manage their own money.

The mother of two believes the key to being a good nurse is building a rapport with patients.

'When trust is there, the patients will listen to you.'

Joining Ms Soonthrammal at the award ceremony yesterday were nurses Pushpa Meenachi Sundram and Hajjah Nor Aini Hashim, who received special commendation certificates.

Ms Pushpa is a 42-year-old principal enrolled nurse at the Singapore General Hospital's gynaecology department.

She was lauded for counselling mothers who have lost their children and those who have babies with birth defects.

Ms Nor Aini, 49, was recognised for mentoring some 22 foreign nurses as a senior assistant nurse at Alexandra Hospital.

'I tell them that laughter is good medicine,' said the cheerful nurse.

All three nurses each received a Florence Nightingale gold medallion and \$2,000 cash prize for further training.

Another seven nurses were given certificates of merit.

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