

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Publication

NCIS ON THE GO EXPANDS SERVICES AT COMMUNITY TREATMENT CLINICS

*Patients can now save time by getting intravenous infusions of
bone-protecting drug in the community*

SINGAPORE — A cancer programme that shifts healthcare from acute hospitals to the community, much like what Healthier SG aims to do, has expanded its service for patients.

Since March, Jurong Medical Centre – one of three community treatment clinics running the “NCIS on the Go” programme – has begun offering intravenous infusions of zoledronic acid to patients, a procedure that used to be offered only at the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS) in Kent Ridge.

NCIS has plans to further expand the service to two other NCIS on the Go clinics, Keat Hong Family Medicine Clinic in Choa Chu Kang and Frontier Family Medicine Clinic in Clementi.

Zoledronic acid is given to prevent problems with the bones, such as fractures caused by myeloma and cancers that have spread to the bone. In patients with early breast cancer, it is given to protect against osteoporosis while they are on adjuvant (preventive) hormonal therapy; zoledronate also has the added benefit of reducing the risk of breast cancer spreading.

For early breast cancer, the medicine is given every six months usually for at least two to five continuous years. Those with advanced breast cancer will receive the drug every four to six weeks.

Since February 2017, NCIS on the Go allows cancer patients to receive selected cancer services and treatments in the community. These include blood taking, caring for long-term intravenous lines, anti-cancer or supportive treatments that can be administered under the skin, and the removal of chemotherapy infusion pumps.

Patients are seen by qualified oncology nurses so they are assured that the care received at the community treatment clinics is no different from that at the hospital.

Professor Lee Soo Chin, Head and Senior Consultant, Department of Haematology-Oncology, NCIS, who leads NCIS on the Go, said the programme is a care model to right-site patients while ensuring they receive appropriate care.

She likens patients on the programme to customers queueing in the express checkout lane of a supermarket, with an intravenous infusion of zoledronic acid taking no more than 15 minutes.

Prof Lee said: “We move simple cases to the community and concentrate on complex cases in the tertiary centre. This will allow better utilisation of limited health resources and helps patients save time on travel or waiting for their turn at specialist clinics.”

This model of care has also been shown to be financially sustainable as it does not require upfront capital investment. Healthcare institutions from the region, including those in China, Thailand and Malaysia, have approached NCIS to learn more about the implementation of the programme.

Senior Staff Nurse Chua Siew Fang, who is part of the nursing team running NCIS on the Go, said: “I feel privileged to be part of the NCIS team who are pioneers in Singapore to deliver active cancer care in the community. With medical advancements, cancer can be managed like a chronic disease, much like diabetes or heart disease.

“The nurse-led clinics in this programme have benefited patients by enhancing accessibility to cancer care and reducing their trips to the hospital. Our nurses also feel empowered to make a difference to patients’ care. Within their scope of practice, they exercise autonomy in clinical decision-making and collaborate with doctors to ensure timeliness of care delivery which enhances teamwork and staff satisfaction.”

The community treatment clinics for NCIS on the Go are meant to cope with growing demand at NCIS, as cancer patients rise in tandem with Singapore’s rapidly ageing population.

The number of patients who have benefited from NCIS on the Go has risen from some 1,000 in 2021 to almost 1,600 in 2022, with close to 2,000 patients expected this year.

In 2022, 8.7 per cent of treatments at NCIS were taken over by the community treatment clinics, up from 5.7 per cent in 2021. In the first quarter of 2023, 9.4 per cent of treatments were moved to these clinics, freeing up healthcare resources at NCIS.

What a survey shows

A survey of 40 patients in May 2023 showed the top two reasons for patients to join NCIS on the Go programme was the proximity of the community clinic to their homes and a shorter waiting time at such clinics compared with being seen at NCIS, with an overwhelming 88 per cent saying they saved 20 minutes or more.

Being in the programme helped 78 per cent of the respondents save 20 minutes or more in travelling time, with half saying they saved between 21 and 30 minutes.

In addition, 45 per cent of respondents saved more than \$20 by going to one of the three NCIS on the Go clinics.

When asked to assess the service at these clinics, 80 per cent of the respondents said they were very satisfied and 18 per cent were somewhat satisfied with the service rendered as part of the programme.

Chinese Glossary

National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS)	新加坡国立大学癌症中心 (国大癌症中心)
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About National University Cancer Institute, Singapore

The National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS) is a national specialist centre under the National University Health System (NUHS), and is the only public cancer centre in Singapore that treats both paediatric and adult cancers in one facility. NCIS (*n-sis*) offers a broad spectrum of cancer care and management from screening, diagnosis and treatment, to rehabilitation, palliative and long-term care. NCIS's strength lies in the multi-disciplinary approach taken by our clinician-scientists and clinician-investigators to develop a comprehensive and personalised plan for each cancer patient.

NCIS cancer services span across several acute hospitals: NCIS @ National University Hospital, NCIS @ Ng Teng Fong General Hospital, NCIS @ Alexandra Hospital, and the NCIS Radiation Therapy Centre @ Tan Tock Seng Hospital. We also deliver a range of cancer services for our patients' convenience at satellite clinics in the community, as well as in the comfort of their homes. For more information, please visit www.ncis.com.sg.

Annex A: Participants in NCIS on the Go

Ms Iffat Ara Nurjahan, 57

Four years ago, the interpreter was diagnosed with stage 2B breast cancer. She underwent a lumpectomy on her right breast and radiotherapy and is now receiving hormone therapy to prevent her cancer from coming back.

Her doctor, Professor Lee Soo Chin, Head and Senior Consultant, Department of Haematology-Oncology, NCIS, also prescribed her zoledronic acid to protect her bones from osteoporosis while she is on hormone therapy, as well as to reduce the risk of her cancer spreading to the bones and other parts of the body. As a patient under NCIS on the Go, she received this medicine intravenously in March at the NCIS clinic in Jurong Medical Centre.

Mr Khairuddin Bin Haron, 34

He was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma (a type of cancer that affects the lymphatic system) last June and started receiving chemotherapy through a peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) in August that year. Every 15 days, the assistant manager receives chemo drugs through this line that goes into a vein in his arm. To keep this line clean and prevent it from being blocked and causing infections, he needs to get it cleaned by a nurse at least twice a week.

Instead of travelling 30 to 45 minutes by train to NCIS, he takes a 10-minute walk from his house in Jurong West to the clinic in Jurong Medical Centre.

Mr Edward Chua, 51

He was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in December 2022 and is now receiving chemotherapy every fortnight through a peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) in his right arm. This line is also used to take samples of his blood for testing.

The Taman Jurong resident takes 20 to 30 minutes to travel to Jurong Medical Centre for these procedures. It takes him approximately an hour to travel to NCIS by bus. On days when he feels weak, he will take a taxi to NCIS instead.

Annex B: NCIS on the Go clinics

Location	Jurong Medical Centre (Level 1)	Keat Hong Family Medicine Clinic (Room 2)	Frontier Family Medicine Clinic (Room 6)
9am – 10am	Laboratory tests only [#]		
10am – 12pm	Line Care/ Off-Pump		
10:30am – 4pm~	Treatment [Aza & Velcade from 12pm onwards]		
Directions	<p>Diagnostic Centre, Level 1 60 Jurong West Central 3 Singapore 648346 (3 mins walk from Boon Lay MRT Station)</p>  	<p>Keat Hong Community Club 2 Choa Chu Kang Loop, #03-02 Singapore 689687 (3 mins walk from Choa Chu Kang MRT Station)</p>  	<p>Grantral Mall 3151 Commonwealth Ave W, #04-01, Singapore 129581 (3 mins walk from Clementi MRT Station)</p>  