

Health Sciences Authority signs MoU to promote public health

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Singapore: Singapore's Health Sciences Authority has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH). The MoU signing ceremony between Associate Professor John Lim, chief executive officer of HSA, and Professor Chia Kee Seng, Dean, NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, was witnessed by Dr Amy Khor, minister of state, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Manpower.

The ceremony was held in conjunction with the 1st Singapore International Public Health Conference.

The MoU seeks to encourage knowledge exchange, enhance academic and professional competencies and develop scientific leadership to promote the protection of public health and the advancement of public health science. It covers four public health domains of epidemiology, biostatistics, health promotion and education, and health systems and policy. In line with the theme of the 1st Singapore International Public Health Conference, the MoU seeks to also "translate public health research into practice" and advance issues from a global and regional perspective linked to HSA's key areas of focus in regulatory, forensic and analytical science, and transfusion medicine.

The areas of cooperation include participation in joint research projects that are of common research interest, such as in the area of pharmacogenomics, developing of a health information system that enables researchers to analyze health and disease, and policymakers to evaluate the long-term outcomes of proposed healthcare and public health policies and interventions, providing exposure to both SSHSPH students and HSA staff through attachments and developing and conducting regulatory and scientific courses to meet national talent needs.

The two organizations have been developing tools to allow comparisons of genetic variation between the main ethnic groups in Singapore - Chinese, Malays and Indians - and the other populations from around the world, by using the genetic variation databases maintained by the SSHSPH. The team's aim is to develop a user-friendly internet portal to the database in 2013 to enable regulators, clinicians, and scientific researchers to better understand and assess how drug response established in one population or ethnic group might differ in another.

By knowing the effect of genes on drug response and metabolism, clinicians can tailor the treatment and drug dose for each individual patient. HSA will also be able to assess the advisability of genetic testing to improve efficacy and safety of treatments, thereby protecting and advancing overall public health.

Associate Professor John Lim said, "This MoU will strengthen the fundamental public health orientation of our work, and supports HSA's aim of advancing thought leadership and innovation in our scientific and regulatory areas of expertise, both locally and globally. By collaborating with SSHSPH in research, teaching and training, we can develop and implement innovative public health solutions relevant to regulatory and analytical science, and transfusion medicine. This fits in well with our established international network of MoU partners and will also help to define key topics for scientific roundtables and research projects under the HSA Academy."