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Spotlight: Professor Ho Lai Yun

Professor Ho Lai Yun is a pioneering figure in paediatrics and neonatology in Singapore. He is recognised for his works in clinical innovation, child welfare and protection, and early childhood education and intervention.

As the Founding Head of the Department of Neonatology (SGH) and the Child Development Unit (KKH), Professor Ho helped build the core institutional backbone for paediatric care in Singapore, creating a centralized, structured pathway for children with special needs to seek support. We had the privilege of having Professor Ho Lai Yun share his thoughts on Singapore's autism care ecosystem and where it is headed.



Professor Ho Lai Yun
Emeritus Consultant, SGH

1 How has our understanding of autism in Singapore evolved?

Autism care in Singapore has evolved significantly from limited awareness and basic support in the 1980s to a more structured, inclusive and lifelong system of care today. Awareness increased in the 1990s, alongside the growth of early intervention and parent advocacy. The 2000s marked a major turning point, with expanded hospital-based services, more specialised schools and programmes, and organisations improving public understanding and support. Recently, Singapore has increasingly adopted a lifespan approach, with support spanning early diagnosis, education, employment, caregiver assistance and adult services. We have come a long way towards inclusion, independence and lifelong support, but there is still more that needs to be done.

2 What do you think are the biggest gaps between hospital-based services and community support for autism care locally?

In my view, the biggest gaps are transition and continuity of care after diagnosis. Hospital service is a strong starting point, but not a complete long-term support system. After diagnosis, families often need to navigate a much broader and complex system. The transition from hospital to community can feel uneven, with fragmented navigation, waiting times, limited day-to-day support, and insufficient caregiver support. Services are also generally more developed for children than for adults, making the transition after school a major concern.

3 What are your greatest lessons learnt working with children and caregivers with autism?

The key lesson is that autism care must go beyond diagnosis. A diagnosis is only the beginning; families need clear guidance, early support and practical help in managing daily challenges at home, in school and in the community. Every child with autism is different, so care plans should be individualised rather than one-size-fits-all. Caregivers need care too, through training, counselling, peer support, respite care and long-term guidance. We must also recognise that behaviour is often communication. We should plan for transitions early and focus on strengths rather than only difficulties.

“Effective care requires a family-centered, coordinated, lifelong approach built on empathy, early action, and teamwork.”

4 What would you envision the autism ecosystem to be in the next 5 years?

Singapore's autism care ecosystem should move towards a more connected, person-centred system that supports autistic individuals from early childhood through to adulthood. Key priorities should include earlier intervention, better coordination across services, stronger caregiver support, inclusive education, and lifelong employment and housing options.

Read the full feature with Professor Ho here:



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Key Sharing: INSAR Highlights



Professionals from the Institute of Mental Health, KK Women's and Children's Hospital, and National University Hospital represented Singapore at this year's International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting (INSAR), joining over 2,000 delegates from over 75 countries. The conference reflected a field in confident stride. The central questions have shifted - less "what is autism?" and more "how do we support autistic individuals well, and at scale?" Genomics, epidemiology, clinical science, and policy were featured and enriched by neuroaffirming perspectives and autistic voices. Several encouraging developments stood out. Research on adult autism is now gaining the traction it deserves. Community-based implementation science is growing - studies conducted in everyday settings rather than controlled environments make findings more likely to translate into real-world impact.



Capable task-sharing models, where trained community workers deliver evidence-based support, drew interest as a practical response to care inequities. In genomics, there is cautious excitement about future integration into translational research - though ethical safeguards must come first.

We are delighted to congratulate Autism Collaborative member Dr Wong Chui Mae from KKH on her appointment as Singapore's first representative to the INSAR Global Senior Leaders Committee - a proud milestone for our autism research community.

Research Update: Parental Perspectives on Mental Health Screening and Support for Parents of Children With Autism



NUH has embarked on a series of studies to examine the role of various stakeholders towards mental health screening of caregivers of autistic children. It is well-established that caregivers of autistic children have greater incidence of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety and also experience greater parenting stress. Yet, caregiver mental health is not routinely assessed as part of child-focused healthcare encounters due to various reasons although these are ideal opportunistic touch points to do so.

This first in this study series highlights the perspectives and experiences of caregivers (predominantly mothers) of autistic children towards routine caregiver mental health screening. The results of the qualitative study show that mothers recognise the benefits of mental health screening; but stigma, lack of awareness and logistical challenges remain significant barriers to accessing such care during child-focused encounters.

Upcoming Events:



6th July, 5:30pm - 6:30pm

Talk by Click Pte Ltd on planning for post-school



August, 5:30pm - 6:30pm

Community of Practice by IMH



20th Sep, 5:30pm - 6:30pm

Talk by NUH on feeding difficulties

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