

# MOH awards \$60m to 3 research projects

Grants and Clinician Innovator Award aim to support research in health and biomedical fields

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The Health Ministry has awarded \$60 million to three new research projects in the health and biomedical fields.

In addition, close to \$1.8 million has been set aside for a new award recognising medical innovation among clinicians.

The pilot Clinician Innovator Award, which will provide seed funding of approximately \$100,000 for up to eight projects, will open for applications next month.

These initiatives come in a move to support research efforts in the health and biomedical fields, Permanent Secretary for Health Chan Heng Kee said at the National Medical Research Council (NMRC) Awards in Clarke Quay yesterday.

"In healthcare, research is important in seeding new discoveries that can translate into better products, practices, policies and systems that are in line with our needs in the country," he said.

The three new research projects – each of which were awarded grants of between \$10 million and \$25 million – target the areas of lung cancer, virus-induced cancer and age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a medical condition that causes potential vision loss.

All three projects address concerns of particular importance to Singapore and South-east Asia.

For instance, virus-induced cancers make up nearly 40 per cent of all cancers in Asia, making it a key target for research efforts.

"There's an unmet need for research in this area," said Associate Professor Toh Han Chong, the principal investigator for the project, which received a grant of \$25 million. "Since the 1980s, we've started



From left: Associate Professor Toh Han Chong, Associate Professor Daniel Tan and Associate Professor Gemmy Cheung, whose research projects were each awarded grants of between \$10 million and \$25 million. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

to develop better treatments for virus-induced cancers. But we hope to take these efforts even further, and potentially even go into developing preventive vaccines."

AMD, which generally affects patients aged 70 and above, also has a special relevance to Singapore in the light of its ageing population.

"In our clinics, we've been seeing more and more patients with this condition," said Associate Professor Gemmy Cheung, the princi-

pal investigator for the project.

"While treatment has really improved over the past 10, 15 years, there is still plenty of room for improvement. We're looking for ways to treat patients in a manner that is cheaper, easier, faster, and with better outcomes."

Current treatments for AMD – while effective in preventing further disease progression – are not universally effective in restoring vision, with only about 50 per cent of

patients responding to treatments.

With these grants, the NMRC hopes to translate the researchers' work into tangible products that can bring about both economic and healthcare benefits, said NMRC chairman K. Ranga Rama Krishnan.

"Essentially, we want to move from an idea, to finding a product, to delivering it to our patients," he said.

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