

Developing Singapore as the Healthcare Hub of Asia

1. The Healthcare Services Working Group (HSWG) has recommended that **Singapore take measures to regain its position as the Healthcare Hub of Asia with two key thrusts' clinical excellence and the attraction of foreign patients.**
2. The recommendations include:
 - i. a national marketing initiative;
 - ii. a healthcare consumer forum to encourage greater transparency on pricing and clinical practice norms;
 - iii. reducing rigidities in the supply of doctors, nurses and allied paramedical manpower in Singapore so that supply can better match demand;
 - iv. increasing the porosity of specialists and patients between the private and public sectors to optimize the use of scarce medical expertise;
 - v. supporting clinical research in healthcare institutions;
 - vi. applying existing incentives to attract more investments and capability building; and
 - vii. a championing agency to promote the Healthcare Services industry and spearhead the above initiatives.

These were articulated in the report "Developing Singapore into the Healthcare Hub of Asia", released by the HSWG.

3. In year 2000, Singapore attracted about 150,000 foreign patients, which contributed 0.19% in value-added to Singapore's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The HSWG proposed that Singapore aims to **increase the number of foreign patient visitors to 1 million per annum by year 2012. Of these, 100,000 are likely to be inpatient/day surgery cases while the bulk would be out-patient visits.** This could generate **some S\$2.6 billion in value-added** and add **approximately 1% to the then GDP.** If successful, the HSWG projected that the initiative has the potential to create **13,000 new jobs**, of which a large proportion will be in the medical, nursing and paramedical professions.
4. HSWG Chairman, Dr Loo Choon Yong said, "**Singapore has historically been the Healthcare Hub for patients and professionals from the region.** However, healthcare providers in the region are catching up and competing with our doctors and hospitals. We need to strengthen our capabilities across the whole continuum of services, from primary to secondary, tertiary and quaternary care, as well as hone our clinical expertise in multiple specialty areas, in order to reinforce our reputation for excellence."
5. Dr Loo added, "**Singapore's Healthcare Services sector is also an important partner for Singapore's Biomedical Sciences (BMS) initiatives.** It plays many key roles in this regard such as the conduct of clinical trials which include upstream clinical application and preclinical research. It is thus important to increase the level of support to develop Singapore's hospitals and specialty centres into centres of global excellence. These centres would then be attractive as development partners for BMS companies."
6. The HSWG was appointed by the Services Subcommittee of the Economic Review Committee (ERC) to recommend actions and strategies which would enhance the competitiveness of Singapore's Healthcare Services industry and contribute towards

- Singapore's attractiveness as the total services hub of the Asia Pacific region.
7. The HSWG carried out an extensive consultation process with the various stakeholders of the Healthcare Services community to identify the key issues and challenges facing the sector. In addition, an independent market survey was commissioned to ensure the validity of the assumptions underlying the recommendations.
 8. The report will be submitted as part of the ERC Final Report to the Government in January 2003. The Government will decide on these recommendations later.
 9. A copy of the report is available on the ERC website (www.erc.gov.sg) from 18 September 2002.

**From the Healthcare Services Working Group
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