



Helping to meet caregivers' needs

CAREGIVERS' needs are extremely diverse and very much a reflection of each family unit's social-economic situation ("Who cares for those who care?"; Monday). Hence, planning for caregiver support has to be configured appropriately.

The question that policymakers need to address is: Who can best help caregivers navigate the many schemes and services offered by government agencies and voluntary welfare organisations?

Unfortunately, many caregivers have to approach multiple partners to solicit advice and assistance, be it financial, medical or social. This adds to the burden of caregiving, and the social health sector should collectively adopt a "no wrong door" policy.

It is encouraging to know that home-, respite- and day-care services are gradually being increased. Even though it may seem intuitive that this is the sort of infrastructure that all caregivers need, the low take-up rate may be attributed to the mismatch of caregiver needs and available services.

We cannot overlook the complexity of caregiver dynamics within each family, and this is recognised as the

silent suffering that may compound or fracture family relationships.

The caregiver's and patient's needs have to be assessed in tandem. Current health-care funding is directed towards the patient, and it may be timely to consider indirect funding for caregivers as they play a pivotal role in maintaining the patients' health.

The present gap in knowledge for caregivers and their needs assessment requires professional help. The problem is that many caregivers are unaware of what they really need, and we need to acknowledge that caregiving is a life journey that is constantly changing.

The question is: How can we string together a complete end-to-end care plan for both patient and caregiver that caters to both their health and social needs? This entails deepening partnerships between community groups and government agencies.

We need to consider developing a cohort of caregiver coordinators or case managers who can string together the many proposed new initiatives.

Daniel Tan (Dr)
President
Caregiving Welfare Association