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Parkway school to offer nursing diploma

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By Ho Ai Li

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ONE of Singapore's biggest health-care providers has unveiled plans for the country's first private diploma in nursing, which officials believe could help boost the supply of nurses here.

Parkway Holdings' new school, Parkway College, plans to offer the course, starting in September, to 120 students. It has submitted the programme to the authorities for approval.

Mrs Nellie Tang, chief executive officer of the college, said last week that it was hard to put a figure on the shortage of nurses here but that they were a scarce resource worldwide.

"We are doing so to cater to our needs, and also the country's," she added, describing why the school started the nursing programme.

Parkway, which now has three hospitals here, announced last month that it was setting up an upmarket private hospital in Novena, which will have 350 beds.

As of 2006, there were 20,927 nurses here. Mrs Tang said about 20 to 30 per cent of them hail from countries like China or the Philippines.

Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan, speaking at a nursing event last November, said there was growing student interest in nursing in the last few years. But he said Singapore would always be short of nurses.

Mrs Tang, who is also chairman of the Singapore Nursing Board, said the demand for nurses will grow when new hospitals such as Parkway's and the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital open by 2011.

Coupled with a turnover of about 10 to 15 per cent for nurses here, many of whom head overseas to countries short of nurses, she believes there is room for another nursing school.

Currently, Nanyang and Ngee Ann polytechnics are the only schools which offer their own diplomas in nursing, producing around 1,000 graduates a year. The Institute of Technical Education (ITE) runs a National ITE certificate course in nursing, while the National University of Singapore offers a degree in nursing.

Professor Low Teck Seng, principal of Republic Polytechnic who chairs Parkway College's academic advisory committee, said: "What we have set out to establish is an institution which has quality and integrity benchmarks equal to those of the polytechnics in Singapore."

To ensure standards are up to par, doctors from Parkway have been roped in to lend their expertise. Nursing students at the school will be able to go on attachments at Parkway's hospitals.

Run out of the former Housing Board headquarters in Bukit Merah, the school will have facilities such as lecture halls and nursing skills laboratories, officials said.

The school plans to charge \$12,000 a year for the nursing diploma, compared to subsidised fees of about \$2,200 per year at the polytechnics.

Besides nursing, the school also plans to offer diploma courses in areas like social work, psychology, health-care management and occupational therapy. On the cards are also certificate courses in areas such as infection control.

With an ageing population, there is also a rising need for health-care workers in these areas, said Prof Low.

"Worldwide, there's a shortage of health-care workers. The establishment of this college not only contributes to the training of professionals in the health-care sector but is also an opportunity for Parkway to establish a new business," he added.

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