

# Award for Alexandra Hospital, SingHealth

They win international award for efforts to retain older workers

■ BY ZAKIR HUSSAIN

HEALTH-CARE providers SingHealth and Alexandra Hospital have become the first in Asia to win a new award for employers which tap on older workers' talents.

They were among 10 winners of the first International Innovative Employer Award by United States-based non-profit group AARP.

Formerly known as the American Association for Retired Persons, AARP advocates independence and choice for its 40 million members aged 50 and above.

The award aims to encourage work environments that value the young and the old alike, and is a fillip for Singapore's efforts to nudge employers to retain older workers as the population ages.

Of the 10 international winners, two are from Singapore, four from Britain, three from Germany and one from Denmark.

Active ageing advocate Council for Third Age (C3A) identified 14 companies here that provide opportunities for older workers.

It nominated five and AARP selected SingHealth and Alexandra Hospital as winners, pipping nominations from countries like Japan.

Said C3A chairman Gerard Ee: "This shows that while some other countries may appear to be more advanced in re-hiring older workers, there are progressive employers here."

Close to one in five of SingHealth's 14,800 employees are aged 50 and above.

It said 80 per cent of its retired staff continued to work with it.

It has set up a Silver Connection unit to guide older workers on switching careers and upgrading skills.

AARP also noted how SingHealth had invested in machines that help to alleviate job-related physical demands, so as to make work more suitable for older employees.

Alexandra Hospital did the same. It also launched programmes to promote life-long learning and wellness among older workers.

Of its 1,721 employees, 14 per cent are 50 and above.

Alexandra Hospital's chief executive officer Liak Teng Lit said the hospital's patients, most of whom are elderly, benefit from having older workers who are "gentler, more patient and accommodating".

SingHealth's group human resources director Geraldine Lee noted many mature workers' passion for their jobs, which "cannot be bought and trained".

One such older worker is retired nursing officer Leela Yap, 70.

Two years ago, she attended a refresher course in neonatal care which equipped her for a new career as a post-natal home service nurse.

She now guides new mothers on how to breastfeed and take care of their newborns.

She is one of 50 retired nurses and midwives in the scheme run by SingHealth.

Madam Yap said: "Nobody is too old to learn something new. It activates your mind, keeps you alert, you make new friends and meet new people."

Both Alexandra Hospital and SingHealth will be honoured at an AARP dinner in Chicago on Oct 7.

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SingHealth taps on the talent of workers like retired nurse Leela Yap, 70, who now works as a post-natal home service nurse.

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