

AUTHORS' REPLY

Dear Sir,

I would like to respond to the two queries raised:

1) *Decline in patients living in 1- to 3-room HDB flats in the 2001 Survey versus the 1993 Survey*

It is relevant to highlight that the number and proportion of 1- to 3-room HDB flats in Singapore have been steadily declining as a result of the public housing building programme policy. The proportion of households of Singapore residents living in 1- to 3-room HDB flats from available official data sources are 43.5% in 1990⁽¹⁾, 39.7% in 1995⁽²⁾ and 30.7% in 2000⁽³⁾.

Hence, the decline in the proportion of patients living in 1- to 3-room HDB flats, noted in the 2001 Outpatient Survey, is a reflection of the change in the configuration of the HDB flats, where the smaller 1- to 3-room flats have declined nationally and been replaced by the 4- to 5-room HDB flats, probably in response to demand from the Singapore public.

2) *Average time spent per patient*

From the 2001 Survey, it has been observed that the average time spent per patient went up from 12 minutes in 1993 to 14.5 minutes in 2001. For comparison, the desired norm pegged to care provided by polyclinics' medical manpower currently is 6 minutes for acute cases and 10 minutes for chronic cases. Audits show satisfactory and improving outcomes to the care provided in polyclinics.

In the UK, NHS clinics are staffed to meet the ageing population (approximately 20% of elderly versus 8% in Singapore) with a high chronic patient load, with doctors being allocated 8 minutes for acute cases and 12.5 minutes for chronic cases. The mean time spent by doctors providing primary care in Singapore is, therefore, satisfactory by comparison.

Yours sincerely,

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