Teaching docs to become CEOs

They may have years of medical experience under their belt. But doctors too need to upgrade, especially when they have to take on managerial roles.

Before Dr Daphne Khoo, 47, became head of endocrinology at the Singapore General Hospital in 2004, she had virtually zero management know-how.

Until she joined the Hospital Management Programme at the Singapore Management University (SMU), Dr Khoo said: "As doctors, we don’t go through any management training. "One day you are a clinician and the next day you are a manager expected to balance a budget and do performance appraisals."

Held once a year, the course covers topics such as leadership, strategy, finance, logistics and operations. It helped Dr Khoo think like a manager.

Every year, between 40 and 60 participants from all over Asia attend the five-day course. Dr Khoo said she found case studies shared by the lecturers very useful. But the most useful aspect of the course for her was networking and learning with doctors from all over Asia.

"The diversity in the group helped me to learn more about managing people from other cultures," she added.

"You may bring in a doctor from England who has a very different work ethic and expectations from local doctors. How do you manage the differing expectations?"

SMU’s dean of executive education, Professor Annie Koh, 53, said the course helped doctors engage in healthy debates over issues they face.

"It’s not dormant learning. You can have a very lively debate about who makes a better CEO — a clinician doctor or a non-clinician doctor," said Professor Koh who also conducts the finance portion of the course.

"We bring the management expertise, but the doctors themselves debate about the big issues facing them and how to solve them.”

The course costs $5,000. Local participants like Dr Khoo are fully funded by Johnson & Johnson and overseas participants are co-funded by their organisations and Johnson & Johnson.

Although she’s been in the job for two years, Dr Khoo said she is still learning.

"It’s tricky managing people. I’m still learning that you can’t use a one-size-fits-all policy.

"Different people are motivated by different things," she added.

Other private schools such as the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) and CSM Academy International offer longer courses in health management.

SIM’s part-time Master of Health Science in Management is open to those with a degree in health science and a minimum of three years’ experience.

It costs $25,200. CSM Academy International’s Masters in Health Science Management, which costs $22,700, is open to doctors, nurses and business managers who have a Bachelor’s degree in any discipline and a minimum of two years’ postgraduate experience.

Both courses are similar in course content and cover management topics such as accounting, strategic management and marketing.