Hospital aims to cut patients’ waiting time

BY LEE HUI CHIEN

SINGAPORE’S newest hospital, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital in Yishun, is developing new ways to shorten the wait for patients to be discharged and their waiting times for treatment at specialist outpatient clinics.

Yesterday, the hospital run by public health group Alexandra Health inked an agreement with the Singapore Management University (SMU) to develop new computer programs to make this happen, under a three-year programme called T-Lab.

One project will be to create a system to track patients at specialist outpatient clinics who may need to have X-rays and blood tests, among others, done before seeing a doctor.

The system helps administrators and nurses spread out the patients getting these tests to avoid any bottlenecks.

Mr Lau Wing Chew, Alexandra Health’s chief transformation officer — whose job is to make the hospital experience hassle-free for patients — likened this to “providing air traffic control”.

The system will also alert administrators to check on patients who have been waiting for a long time, to see what is causing the delay.

A second project will look at speeding up the process of discharging patients.

Instead of entering information in physical forms, various health professionals involved in the discharge, such as physiotherapists, dieticians and pharmacists, will fill out electronic forms instead.

As part of the project, the hospital will also look at how to schedule a patient’s consultations with the various health professionals so he does not have to wait too long to see them.

These moves are being taken to prevent long waiting times in future as the six-month old hospital takes on more patients.

About 200 patients are now treated each day at its emergency department and almost 800 at its specialist outpatient clinics.

It is on track to meeting its target of having 70 per cent of its emergency and outpatient clinic patients treated and out of hospital within an hour, said Alexandra Health’s chief executive officer, Mr Liak Teng Lit.

A third T-Lab project will enable the hospital to carry out health promotion programmes in the community targeted at specific groups.

Yishun residents will be polled on their lifestyle habits through an electronic kiosk, which is part of an information management system that will also analyse the results. For example, they could be asked if they smoke or exercise regularly, and to give their postal codes.

If a precinct is found to have a large number of smokers, the hospital could work with grassroots leaders there to hold anti-smoking workshops, Mr Lau said. He hopes to start rolling out the projects next year.

The three projects involve 17 undergraduates from SMU’s School of Information Systems and more than 20 hospital staff members.

One of the students, Miss Lim Shih Yuin, 21, said: “We want to give back to society. The project helps the hospital and will have an impact on people.”