

SHABANA BEGUM & YEO SHU HUI

Since the roll-out of the national vaccination programme, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) physician Ren Xiao Ling has been dispensing free advice on Covid-19 safe management measures and vaccinations.

Most of the patients at the Xi Jing TCM Clinic in Bedok North Avenue 2 are seniors, said Ms Ren, who estimated that about 50 per cent of them are not fully vaccinated.

She said: "Some children are concerned that if their elderly parents take the vaccine and have serious side effects, then who is going to be responsible?"

RESISTANT

"As a result, the seniors become resistant to the idea of being vaccinated because they have the mentality that if they have any side effects, then they are going to become a burden to their children and give them more stress."

A survey by Singapore Management University's Centre for Research on Successful Ageing found that the most common reason offered by seniors not wanting to get vaccinated was fear of negative side effects from the vaccine.

This was followed by not believing in any form of vaccination at all.

The study, released in July,

Residents, docs reach out to educate unvaccinated seniors

Survey shows fear of negative side effects is a major deterrent; experts say relatives play key role



Some seniors fear the negative side effects of vaccination and do not want to become a burden to their children. PHOTO: REUTERS

also found that those who did not wish to get vaccinated were the least trusting of all sources of information on Covid-19. However, they were more likely to trust family members over the Government or media sources.

Unvaccinated seniors – who

make up about 1.5 per cent of the total population – accounted for close to 70 per cent of virus deaths and intensive care unit cases in the past month.

Around 237,000 people aged between 12 and 59 remain unvaccinated, while the figure for those 60 and older is about

68,000.

Over the past three weeks, The Straits Times visited different housing estates to explore how residents in each estate reach out to unvaccinated seniors.

For example, in Bedok, a volunteer group that distributes basic necessities has taken on Covid-19 education as part of its mandate.

Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore, said family members who are actively advising their elderly relatives against vaccination – especially for those seniors who are not frail or ill – are doing harm to their loved ones.

"As the world moves towards treating Covid-19 as an endemic disease... it is almost certain that everyone will be infected in the coming few years," he said.

"By continuing to discourage their elders from getting vaccinated, they may inadvertently be jeopardising the lives of these seniors, which I am sure is not (their) intent."

Edgedale Medical Clinic director Yan Shi Yuan said: "Most unvaccinated elderly are concerned with the unknown effects of the mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) vaccines. They hear stories from WhatsApp messages or friends that many people have died suddenly after vaccination."

Dr Tan Teck Jack, chief executive of Northeast Medical Group, said: "I would persuade my patients by first sharing my genuine concern for their health, then allowing them to vent their frustrations and finally, gently debunking myths without appearing dismissive."

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