

Title: MoU signing between HCSA Community Services and Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) to support Hepatitis C elimination initiative for former drug abusers in Singapore

SINGAPORE, 25 July 2024 - HCSA Community Services and Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalise support for Phase 2 of the Educate, Test, Treat! (ETT) initiative, which has been supported by biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences since its launch in 2022. The initiative encourages former drug offenders and those in recovery from addiction to take up Hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing and treatment and work towards the World Health Organization's goal of eliminating HCV by 2030. The MoU exchange was witnessed by Mdm Rahayu Mahzam, Minister of State, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Digital Development and Information.

To date, over 270 individuals have received HCV testing through the ETT initiative from participating halfway houses — HCSA Highpoint, Pertapis Halfway House, Selarang Halfway House, The Helping Hand and Teen Challenge Singapore. Of those who tested HCV-positive, 41% were successfully linked to care and 43% of diagnosed patients have received treatment. This was complemented by the ETT befriender initiative, an integrated support system for HCV-positive patients that ensures they receive guidance throughout their treatment journey, which also encourages adherence and completion of treatment.

The support from Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) thus far has enabled HCV-positive cases under the ETT initiative to receive treatment. Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) is further pledging SGD83,000 this year to support HCV treatment for diagnosed individuals of the ETT initiative. Former drug offenders represent a group at increased risk of HCV infection because the virus is transmitted primarily through infective blood and bodily fluids, such as through the sharing of contaminated needles. A 12-week course of oral medication is highly effective in treating HCV in patients. HCV infections are typically asymptomatic until decades later when symptoms develop. Left untreated, chronic HCV may lead to serious health problems, including liver damage, liver failure, and liver cancer.

“Collaborations with partners have been instrumental in the success of the ETT initiative. This initiative offers former drug abusers a second chance at a healthy life free of HCV as they reintegrate back into society. With Phase I, we focused on establishing a linkage to care network with Tan Tock Seng Hospital and halfway houses. As we expand on these successes, we now look towards how we can further support access to affordable treatment for diagnosed patients, and ways to improve on the journey for better health and medical management,” said Mrs Kim Lang Khalil, Chief Executive Officer, HCSA Community Services.

“We have been championing befriending and financial assistance programmes for socially stigmatised groups such as ex-offenders since 1998,” said Mr Khoo Jyh Hao, Head of Charity Development Department, Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore). “Our experience supports our belief that any marginalised individual can lead a fulfilling life and contribute to their family and society if given adequate opportunities and guidance.”

“Gilead Sciences is proud to work with community partners to help address the needs of the most vulnerable and disproportionately impacted communities. Hepatitis C is a disease that is treatable – through collaboration, we can screen, diagnose and cure it. Public-private partnerships like these show that incredible progress can be achieved towards eliminating HCV as a public health threat in Singapore,” said Stanley Li, General Manager, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, Gilead Sciences.

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About HCSA Community Services

HCSA Community Services is a charitable organisation with Institution of a Public Character (IPC) status and a member of the National Council of Social Service. The organisation was launched in 1996 as a halfway house for recovering drug addicts and ex-offenders under its HCSA Highpoint programme. Today, their work has expanded to include teenage girls who have suffered complex trauma from abuse, single-parent families with limited support and other at-risk groups in the community. HCSA operates with a team of dedicated staff, volunteer teams, corporate and community partners, as they continue to serve the vulnerable in society, to give them a future and a hope. HCSA's mission is to empower these vulnerable populations through their signature programmes. Find out more at www.hcsa.org.sg.

About Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore)

The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) is a local non-profit humanitarian organisation found in 1993. The organisation's work started with the Mission of Charity and the goal of relieving poverty, before gradually expanding into the Missions of Medicine, Education, Humanistic Culture, and Environmental Protection over the years. The heart of Tzu Chi is embedded in its name: in Chinese, "tzu" means compassion and "chi," relief. The organisation currently has 16 establishments and 36 eco-points islandwide. For more information, visit www.tzuchi.org.sg/en

About Gilead Sciences

Gilead Sciences, Inc. is a biopharmaceutical company that has pursued and achieved breakthroughs in medicine for more than three decades, with the goal of creating a healthier world for all people. The company is committed to advancing innovative medicines to prevent and treat life-threatening diseases, including HIV, viral hepatitis, COVID-19, cancer and inflammation. Gilead operates in more than 35 countries worldwide, with headquarters in Foster City, California.

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