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Alexandra Health scheme wins UN public-service award

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Patients waiting for a bed on 10 January 2014 at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital's emergency department, which has 18 cubicles. The Alexandra Health System on Thursday became Singapore's first healthcare system to win a United Nations Public Service Award - for a scheme to keep people out of its hospital. -- ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

BY GRACE CHUA

SINGAPORE - The Alexandra Health System on Thursday became Singapore's first healthcare system to win a United Nations Public Service Award - for a scheme to keep people out of its hospital.

Its Ageing-in-Place or AIP programme was the Asia-Pacific winner in the 'Improving the Delivery of Public Services' category, one of four groups.

The United Nations did not say how many nominations there were in each category for each region, but 704 nominations from 80 member states were submitted in total for the annual awards.

The Alexandra Health programme aims to understand why repeat hospital visitors to Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, or 'frequent flyers', keep having to be re-admitted.

The programme, which started in 2011, identified 400 patients with three or more hospital admissions within six months. Staff visited them at home to review their unmet needs, and customised care plans with them to better manage their conditions.

During home visits, for example, community nurses might work out why a patient was not taking his medicine, or evaluate the safety of his home to prevent falls.

"Just focusing on addressing medical needs, which constitute 10 per cent of patients' health determinants, is inadequate to keep them well in their homes and community. Sixty per cent of one's health is determined by social, behavioural and environmental factors and the AIP Programme pays attention to these holistically," said Dr Wong Sweet Fun, senior consultant in KTPH's geriatric-medicine department, and programme co-director.

The programme helped free up more than half the hospital beds these patients would originally have occupied, and cut re-admissions.

After going through it, 47 per cent of patients did not need to go back to the hospital.