

Senior citizens deserve better healthcare

KUALA LUMPUR (July 19): Ageing is an inevitable part of life. As our parents grow older, they become sick, weak and frail.

While elderly care can be difficult with its many demands, it is still important to provide them what they deserve for their own health, safety, and well-being.

“There is no denying that caregiving for the elderly can be a demanding task, and often I find myself caught between my own needs and the elderly that I care for,” a primary school teacher in Cheras, Abdul Hadi Zulkifli said.

Abdul Hadi, 30, who is currently juggling working and caring for his parents, in their 50s, is part of the sandwich generation – a generation of people, typically in their thirties or forties, responsible both for bringing up their own children and for the care of their ageing parents.

Both he and his other siblings carry a burden of busy lives with careers and responsibilities, and ensuring that their ageing parents are financially and physically cared for.

Abdul Hadi visits his parents, who live alone in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan almost every weekend. They previously owned a cake shop, which was set up in 2004, but had to cease operation in 2015 and manage from home, with business generated from regular and loyal customers.

SENIOR CARE AT ITS BEST

The **Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM)** has projected the population of Malaysians aged 60 years and above to double to 5.8 million by 2030 from 2.3 million in 2020, making Malaysia an ageing society.

In the light of this trend, care for the elderly has huge potential, according to experts and industry players.

Given the increasing demand for elderly care centres, Komune Living & Wellness (KLW), the largest co-living and wellness hub in Southeast Asia was officially launched on May 12.

Managed by UOA Group’s hospitality arm, the development, located alongside a serene 99-acre park in Cheras, is the first integrated facility in Asia that combines senior co-living spaces with a dedicated wellness hub. The project offers professional senior care services, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and pampering options for both residents and guests.

KLW General Manager Mark Chen said the hub aims to create a safe and engaging community for seniors, where they can age actively with all the facilities and support they need to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing.

“We understand some stigma or guilt associated with the idea of putting parents into care, due to old stereotypes of what senior care is. That is why we create a new concept of senior care based on world-class facilities that enable seniors to have fun in a location which is accessible and enjoyable for their families to visit and even stay,” he said.

“Recent research has shown the bonds of community and social engagement are key factors in sustaining health and longevity and this philosophy has driven the development of K LW.

“We believe our senior co-living model, supported by high quality communal facilities and activities, as well as top-notch on-site medical facilities and care, offers a unique solution,” Chen added.

VARIETY OF AMENITIES

K LW provides residents and guests with over 20 different amenities and facilities across 40,000 sq ft of space dedicated to wellness and community activities. These indoor facilities include a heated swimming pool, movie theatre and specially equipped gymnasium.

The lower levels of the development are accessible to the public and feature a number of other amenities that guests, residents and visiting friends and family can enjoy such as a mini-mart, pharmacy, hair and beauty salon, and even a childcare centre.

Others include a number of medical practices, such as a general medicine practice, dental practice, ambulatory day-care screening services, medical aesthetics clinic and anti-ageing clinic providing services such as stem cell treatments. Also, UOA partners with wellness specialist Tong Xin Tang to offer TCM services, such as acupuncture, massage and cupping. These services include over 50 private consultation and treatment rooms.

A collaboration between UOA and senior living specialist Care Concierge also sees K LW offer Komune Care - a facility with 260-resort like assisted living suites for senior day-care services. It is the largest senior day-care facility in the country at 6,600 sq ft, supported by nurses and experienced senior caregivers.

This allows seniors to receive essential care as they participate in a life-enriching community, cognitive and physical wellness activities. These activities are specifically tailored by occupational therapists to best suit their care needs and includes an exclusive award-winning music therapy programme.

“Senior co-living residents will have access to either independent or assisted living accommodation options within the development.

“The Independent Living Studios are suitable for independent and active retirees, but can be customised to include special services such as full or part-time care packages, an emergency response system, medical escort services and healthy meal plans. The Assisted Living Studios are designed for seniors who require the assistance of caregivers round-the-clock,” he added.

Chen said its partner Komune Care operates the Assisted Living Units (ALU), providing care services for senior citizens with an average occupancy of 15 per cent out of the 55 rooms it is currently operating.

As for co-living hotel rooms, he said, a total of 212 rooms are in operation, with an average occupancy of 30 per cent to date. Out of a total of 792 rooms, 204 are ALU (rooms) catering to senior citizens who needed assisted care services.

He said the 173 sq ft studio queen room is priced from RM180+ per night compared to the two-bedroom studio. The price of the 347 sq ft two-bedroom studio ranges from RM410+ per night.

As for its one-bedroom suites, Chen said it will be ready in end of August, and room sizes range from 346 to 515 sq and priced from RM460 + per night.

“Prices for the Independent Living Studios for active seniors will start from RM2,100 per month. As for the Assisted Living Studios for seniors who need more dedicated, round-the-clock personalised care, prices will start from RM6,800 per month,” he added.

BOOSTING MEDICAL TOURISM SECTOR

Meanwhile, senior lecturer at the Department of Recreation and Ecotourism, Faculty of Forestry and Environment, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Assoc Prof Dr Siti Suriawati Isa said proper management of senior care facilities is needed for activities and programmes for their residents.

She said senior care facilities like K LW are much needed due to the changing patterns in the Malaysian household as most family members are working, with the cost of hiring a domestic helper becoming extremely expensive.

“We have to be prepared as Malaysia is predicted to reach its ageing nation status as it is estimated that 15 per cent of Malaysia’s population will be over 60 years old in 2030.

“Currently, the government is introducing many financial aid and programmes for senior citizens in Malaysia but many other areas still need to be improved particularly in healthcare, financial services, city planning and social services,” she said.

She added, healthcare improvements for senior citizens would augur well for Malaysia’s medical tourism sector, noting that medical tourism has been contributing significantly to the national income for over a decade.

“Since 2015, our country is ranked as among the top 10 medical tourism destinations in the world. In 2019, we received 1.3 million medical tourists and if we can improve our senior care facilities, we will attract more medical tourists to come. Plus, four private medical institutions in Malaysia received awards at the prestigious Medical Travel Awards 2020 in London.

“With the reopening of world borders to tourists due to the COVID-19 endemic transition phase, the number of international tourists to Malaysia will increase substantially including medical tourists. Over time, the domestic market for this sector will keep on growing positively because many Malaysians are still not willing to travel abroad.

“But for elderly people, it is best for them not to travel far from home because the pandemic situation is not entirely over. Private healthcare is always the best option for Malaysians to get quick medical attention compared to government healthcare services,” she added.

To this, Siti Suriawati urged industry players to strengthen their domestic presence and improve their services as well as tap the enormous opportunities available in the international markets.

At the same time, the government should provide bigger allocations to the public healthcare sector to allow them to revamp their facilities and services for the betterment of everyone, she added.

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