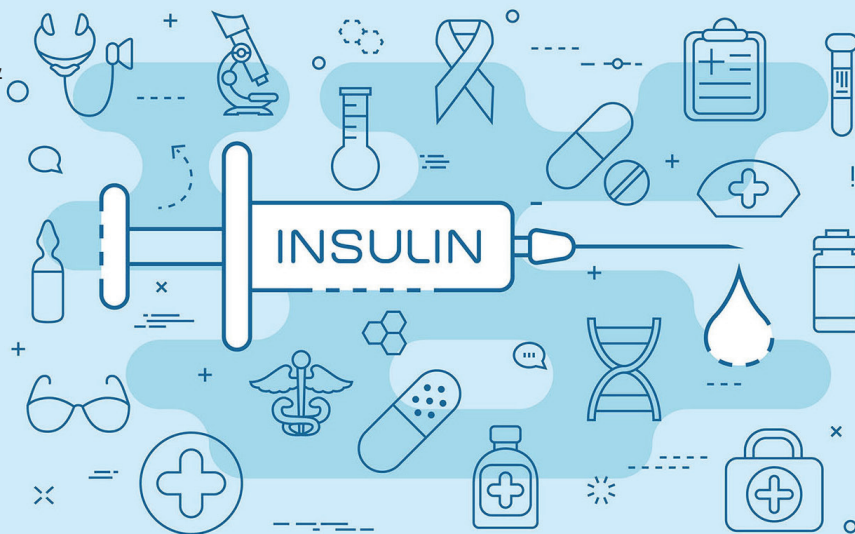


# Mitigating the 'tsunami of chronic disease'

By Dawn Sit



Non-communicable diseases (NCD) account for 80% of the health burden in Singapore in 2016, but a third of it could be prevented, said Health Promotion Board's director of workplace health and outreach Sim Ber. The mantra for Singa



Mr Sim Beng Khoon

But aside from resources and information, experts noted that insurers and employers also need to drive behavioural change among employees. Oliver Wyman health and life



Ms Rosaline Koo

He said the challenge of healthcare today is to surround an individual with all the care needed to integrate mental and emotional health, to democratise access to care so that it is convenient and confidential – and to personalise and customise such care through big data to find a local fit. Because while professional support and structured programmes are more likely to result in people achieving their health goals, they are often out of reach of those who need them most.



Dr Manav Saxena



Dr Jeremy Ting

# INSURANCE – LIFE & HEALTH

And this is where Naluri can play a role. Leveraging digital technology, AI and machine learning, it enables a pool of psychologists to service multiple users simultaneously, while boosting the capabilities of each psychologist with the collective experience of everyone. Dr Ting said this benefits both user, in reducing his access cost to psychotherapy by 80%, and psychologist, whose productivity is increased by up to 10 times compared to traditional one-to-one interaction. Naluri can also influence behaviour further by providing personalised ‘nudges’ to individuals based on their daily activity history, recognising their personal food and nutrition needs and tailoring its chat style and cadence to engage users better.

“The conversation is not ‘don’t go to a market store’. The conversation is ‘if you go there, rather than having roti canai, should you have dosai instead,’” he said. “Little changes in your life make a difference. You don’t need perfection.”

## Cognitive health

One interesting – and perhaps novel – topic discussed during the conference was the importance of cognitive health, which Savonix founder and CEO Dr Mylea Charvat said employers should monitor. While doctors and employers have been attempting to improve their employees’ physical health, the discussion of mental health is a recent one. Debunking the frequent distinction between mental and physical health, she said, “There is just health. Your brain is a physical part of your body. Things like depression and anxiety are disorders of the brain and they have a physical effect.”



Dr Mylea Charvat

The World Health Organization lists depression as the leading cause of ill-health and loss of work function in the world. “What we need to do, as employers, is to monitor and improve brain health, which in turn reduces safety risks and improves productivity,” she said.

With advancements in medicine helping people live longer, the aim is to help people live healthier for longer as well. This requires helping employees achieve good health not only in the workplace, but in their home lives as well, which feeds into a positive feedback loop of health and productivity.

## HR and insurance providers should be aligned

How companies’ human resource functions and insurance companies can align their interests was covered in a panel discussion led by CXA Group chief commercial officer Gary Tok, and comprising Great Eastern Life Assurance medical director and head of group insurance Dr Leow Yung Khee, Aviva head of group employee benefits (life and health) Manu Tandon, AIA Singapore chief corporate solutions officer Alvin Fu, Seagate International executive director Molly Ang, DBS Bank group head of benefits Eudora Choo, and Manulife total rewards director Jessie Cheing.

## No change in fundamental employee benefit needs

Although demographics and expectations have shifted in the last few decades, speakers noted that employees’ needs – healthcare, retirement and leave – across geographies and generations remain ‘quite the same’. In the past, employee benefits were considered ‘bread and butter’ to a job. This notion has since evolved to more of an incentive to ‘create employee stickiness’ as a means of talent

retention.

One issue that the HR practitioners noted is the lack of variety in insurance products being offered, although the question also arose as to whether employees were informed enough to make the appropriate choice amid an expanded offering of products. While the insurers agreed with them to an extent, they said ‘products have not really changed because the fundamental need [for risk protection] hasn’t changed.’ This being said, insurance companies recognise the evolution is in ‘helping employees to live healthier longer’.

With millennials in the workforce, panellists also noted that insurance companies have invested substantially over the last few years – not only to engage with digitally-savvy employees, but on the health side to help employers and employees in health and disease management and potentially helping to lower costs.

## Rethink benefit programmes to reshape staff mentality

On cost management, speakers noted that the concept of ‘shared responsibility’ in employee benefits is relatively ‘weak in Asia’ and that HR tends to end up taking the ‘entitlement option’. “Why must the company always be the party who pays, as opposed to a co-payment scheme?” the panel asked.

To achieve effective change in cost management, speakers noted that HR managers need to think differently in developing employee benefit programmes so as to drive a shift in employee mentality, where staff are more discerning in utilising their benefits.

The 1st Asia Employee Benefits & Insurance Conference was organised by *Asia Insurance Review* with CXA Group and Singapore Human Resources Institute as co-organisers. It drew some 160 participants. **A**



L-R: Dr Leow Yung Khee, Messrs Manu Tandon, Alvin Fu, Gary Tok and Ms Jessie Cheing, Eudora Choo and Molly Ang.