

Sort out pay and compensation issues for long-term care workers

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Reuters file photo

A retired woman is helped by a nurse.

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Pay, compensation, and an over-reliance on foreign workers appear to be the biggest challenges that Singapore has to overcome should it wish to "almost double its pool of long-term care workers by 2020" to look after its ageing population ("**45 per cent more long-term care workers needed by 2020: Study**"; July 26).

However, the solutions mooted by the Ministry of Health (MOH) seem to skirt around these issues, especially when they are juxtaposed against the recommendations proposed by the Lien Foundation in its new study, such as a skills- and productivity-based wage progression pathway as well as increased public spending.



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The latest study by the Lien Foundation paints a less-than-rosy picture for long-term care workers, including nursing aides and therapists, who work in physically and psychologically demanding environments. Their burdens are often only shared by caregivers within the patients' households, even though research and statistics generally remain scant.

In addition to the poor pay, compensation, and benefits received by these workers, little is known about their tenure or average length of service in the industry, the turnover rates within organisations and the sector — when benchmarked against recruitment endeavours, and the career trajectories or advancement opportunities.

This is important not only for the Government's design of social policies, but also for workers to make more informed decisions.

In the broader context of eldercare in Singapore, these concerns about the welfare of long-term care workers relate to more fundamental questions about how we would like to care for older Singaporeans, whether our structures are adequate in the first place, and the extent to which the country is prepared for an increasingly ageing population.

Put otherwise: These workers usually provide care and emotional support for those who are limited in their daily activities, who have disabilities or severe illnesses, or who live alone, and the aforementioned challenges of pay, compensation, and an over-reliance on foreign labour are likely to apply to other workers who labour with and for other elders with varying needs across different ages.

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