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Covid-19 vaccination centre managers hail from diverse backgrounds



Ms Joey Yap taps her experience in managing staff and handling administrative duties to oversee operations at the Potong Pasir Community Club vaccination centre. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN



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SINGAPORE - Before Covid-19 struck, Ms Joey Yap ran fine-dining establishments where she managed staff, handled administrative duties and personally served dignitaries.

Now, she applies that experience as she oversees operations at the Potong Pasir Community Club vaccination centre.

For the past eight months, the vaccination centre manager with Thomson Medical has been handling the flow of patients and dealing with various issues that crop up.

Ms Yap, 44, plays a critical role in Singapore's fight against the coronavirus. "We are tasked with the important role of vaccinating Singaporeans for a better tomorrow," she said.

There are at least 80 vaccination centre managers in Singapore, a check by The Straits Times has found. They are in charge of the overall operations at these facilities.

ST understands that most of these managers earn at least \$3,500 a month, depending on their experience. They are on a one-year contract but some have secured other permanent roles with the same healthcare providers after their stints.

Many centre managers have prior work experience outside the healthcare sector. They include former events and project managers, retail and transport supervisors, pilots and flight attendants.

Ms Yap was working in Vietnam as a manager at a fine-dining restaurant before she returned to Singapore last year when Covid-19 hit. She later did a stint supporting serology testing efforts at migrant worker dormitories.

When the opportunity to work as a vaccination centre manager popped up, she gamely took up the challenge. "With no formal training or experience in healthcare, the role seemed daunting at first," she said.

Thomson Medical - which has six centre managers across its three vaccination centres - put her through two weeks of training covering different aspects.

Through that, Ms Yap and her fellow managers, who are in their mid-30s to late 40s, learnt about clinical protocols like vaccine administration and patient flow, as well as safety procedures on infection control and emergencies.

They also have to be familiar with the information technology systems used for patient registration and retrieving records.

The managers are briefed on the centre's layout and the various staff roles. They work closely with ushers, doctors, nurses and administrative staff.

The vaccination centre managers get help from on-site agents deployed by the Health Ministry to keep operations running smoothly.

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Ms Chan Wei Ling, chief executive of specialist centres at Thomson Medical, said running a vaccination centre requires staff with strong operational and people management skills.

"Having experience in front-line service is definitely valuable for the centre manager role, as they have to manage not only patients but also the staff at the vaccination centre," she said.

"They also have to be able to think quickly on their feet to troubleshoot and manage situations."

A vaccination centre can serve thousands of patients a day.

At the 10 vaccination centres run by Fullerton Health, its 30 managers pay attention to every detail.

"Aside from (taking care of) the logistics of supplies from vaccines to drinking water, centre managers have to make sure there is sufficient manpower to manage all the various points," said the company. "They also have to manage staff welfare, oversee crowd control and keep service standards up."

To prepare its managers, who are in their late 20s to mid-60s, for the role, Fullerton Health puts them through a three-day training stint to understand protocols as well as the logistics and people involved.

Its vaccination centre managers have varied backgrounds. They include events management executives, pilots and flight attendants.

The company said: "Their experiences bring fresh perspective and energy to what is essentially a medical facility."

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Sata CommHealth, which runs a vaccination centre at the National Service Resort and Country Club in Kranji, sent its three operations managers for similar week-long training. This included running through the operating procedures, from vaccine management to fire safety.

Ms Yap, whose service and people skills have come in handy in her new role, hopes to remain in the healthcare scene.

"Although I've enjoyed my work in F&B, I've since developed an interest in healthcare operations," she said.

Thomson Medical's Ms Chan said: "As we ramp up our operations, the role in managing increased patient throughput and continuing to maintain high levels of clinical and safety standards have become more important."

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