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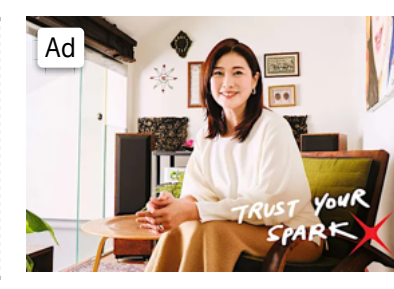
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Singapore Health Quality Service Awards honour staff who go extra mile



Adjunct Associate Professor Tan Heng Hao (left) and physiotherapist Yap Thian Yong won the Superstar Award, the highest accolade under the Singapore Health Quality Service Awards. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LIUAN



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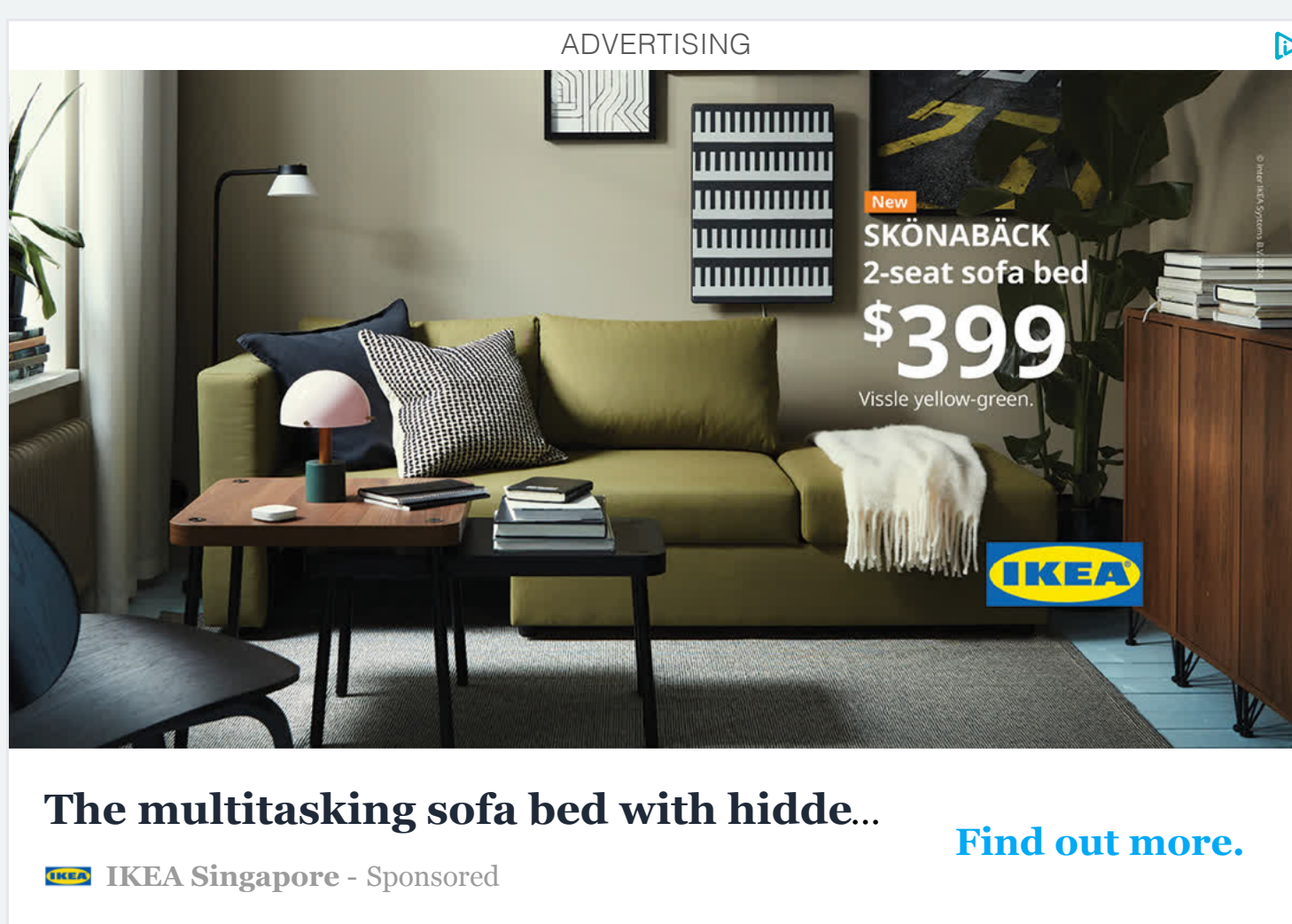
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SINGAPORE - When Adjunct Associate Professor Tan Heng Hao decided to specialise in reproductive medicine in 2008, it was because he was fascinated by embryology and wanted to balance both surgical and medical work.

But treating patients has often required him to play another role - as a listening ear and a friend.

Prof Tan, who is in his 40s, is a senior consultant and head of the Department of Reproductive Medicine at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, as well as the director of the KKIVF Centre.



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When asked, many of the couples who visit him say they experience social stigma associated with being childless. For some, this can lead to anxiety, depression and even the breakdown of their marriage.

Prof Tan said: "I often describe it as a journey that we go on with the patient. That means being more than just a doctor addressing their medical needs."

On Tuesday (Jan 15), Prof Tan was one of nine healthcare professionals presented with the Superstar Award, the highest accolade under the Singapore Health Quality Service Awards.

He said that being a good fertility doctor requires patience, empathy and a non-judgmental attitude: "The social pressure to have more children or to carry on the family name can be quite tremendous. So this is often not just a medical issue but a psychological and emotional one."



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He added that for some patients, the "fertility journeys" can take years with several rounds of in-vitro fertilisation.

"Even then, you can't get everyone pregnant," he said.

President Halimah Yacob, guest of honour at the ceremony held in the University Cultural Centre at the National University of Singapore, presented a total of 3,462 awards to healthcare workers from 34 public and private institutions, community hospitals and organisations in the intermediate and long-term care (ILTC) sector such as Peacehaven Nursing Home.

Madam Halimah said in her speech: "The award recipients have set themselves apart by going the extra mile and raising the bar to deliver quality care and a positive experience to patients and their caregivers."

Another Superstar Award recipient was Mr Yap Thian Yong, 28, a physiotherapist at St Luke's Hospital.

He works mostly with elderly patients undergoing rehabilitation.

Many worry that they are too old to exercise, but Mr Yap said: "To build up their confidence, I sometimes pair up patients who have just come in with those with similar conditions who have regained some good function through rehabilitation.

"The next time new patients come in, they can act as role models to share their experiences and show what can be achieved."

Mr Yap is also involved in care innovation at St Luke's Hospital, where he conducted trials of a ceiling-mounted track harness for supporting patients doing walking and balancing exercises and helped incorporate it to the hospital's rehabilitation programme.

He is also currently working to introduce a new exoskeleton device to the programme.

Besides his work in the hospital, he once granted a terminally ill patient's dying wish to go on an outing to Gardens by the Bay with her family.

"I feel blessed to receive this award as a recognition of what my peers and I have achieved," he said. "I want to be more than just a therapist who helps people to walk again."

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