

Coronavirus pandemic



President Halimah Yacob chatting with residents and care staff of the Singapore Christian Home via videoconferencing yesterday. Speaking to the media later, she noted that the care staff have put in tremendous effort for the residents, and sacrificed time with their own families by staying in alternative accommodation. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

President Halimah pays virtual visit to nursing home

Goh Yan Han

Since Monday, Ms Tijam Stephanie May Gonzales has had to stay in a hotel as a precautionary step.

The 31-year-old Filipina works as a staff nurse at the Singapore Christian Home, a facility in Sembawang Crescent which caters to mostly long-term residents of varying ages from low-income families.

The Government had announced earlier this month that staff in residential care homes for the elderly, who interact with residents, will need to stay in on-site facilities or move to hotels until the circuit breaker ends. All staff and residents have to be tested for Covid-19 as well.

Ms Stephanie said that besides

providing transport, the home pays for her three daily meals.

She told President Halimah Yacob, who paid the Singapore Christian Home a virtual visit yesterday, that she has been well taken care of.

Besides chatting with the care staff, Madam Halimah also interacted with the residents to understand how they are coping amid the outbreak.

They told her they have been in touch with their families through regular phone and video calls.

Mr Shariel Sheikh Mahmud, 51, said although he was "a bit bored" because his family members could not visit him physically, he understood the situation and need for stringent measures.

Residents and staff spoke to

Madam Halimah from several rooms set up for videoconferencing.

Speaking later to the media, which had observed the visit, Madam Halimah said the existing circuit breaker measures are necessary to protect the seniors.

"I also understand how our seniors feel. At that age, our seniors would really love to have their families around them, to talk to," she said. "I wanted to see how they are coping because the psychological part is also very important. It looks like they are doing well and in pretty high spirits."

She added that the care staff have put in tremendous effort for the residents, and sacrificed time with their own families by staying in alternative accommodation.

Affected staff at the Singapore Christian Home are mostly housed in either hotels or on-site accommodation. Its director of nursing Jane Long said all staff had been tested for Covid-19 on May 4 while residents were tested on May 12. All tests have returned negative.

Yesterday, Madam Halimah called for more people to donate to the President's Challenge, so that it can continue to support social service agencies here.

"During this difficult time, we call on Singaporeans to continue to support our social service agencies... They face challenges getting support for their work (during the Covid-19 period)," she said.

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