New medical tech class for postgrads

Elective for NUS, NTU students begins in Aug; part of effort to raise sector profile

By Feng Zengkun

A SPECIAL class will be launched this year for university students keen on creating medical devices.

The elective is open to postgraduates from the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, and will be taught by industry professionals and faculty staff.

The students’ resumes will be given to the Economic Development Board, so potential employers can contact them.

The class, to be offered from next month, is part of the Singapore-Stanford Biodesign programme, a wider effort to raise the profile of the medical technology industry here.

The programme helps students develop devices from concept to commercialisation. It includes initiatives such as the Thought Leader Series, a new annual talk by international med-tech experts for local companies and students.

The first talk was held on Wednesday and featured Dr Thomas Fogarty, an American considered the father of the med-tech industry, and Mr Lu Yoh Chie, chairman of home-grown company Biosensors International.

Dr Fogarty pioneered minimally invasive surgery, which involves only small cuts on the body. He also holds the patents to more than 100 surgical inventions and has founded more than 30 companies.

Biosensors International, founded in 1990, is the world’s fourth-largest company producing drug-coated stents, which are used to widen arteries.

Both experts said Singapore has an advantage in the global med-tech industry because of its high level of education and government support.

Dr Fogarty, 77, said: “Singapore will never be a big market for these devices, but it can be the brain that creates these devices for the world.”

He advised local companies to talk to a wide range of doctors and patients to get a more accurate sense of what medical devices are needed in the field.

Mr Lu, 59, added that Singapore should work with countries in the region to create a common regulatory mark, so products from one country can be certified for sale elsewhere.

He said: “Larger countries such as China may want to go it alone, but it’s not productive for smaller countries to each have its own, different regulation.”

The med-tech industry is worth US$33.6 billion ($41.5 billion) globally, and is expected to grow by about 10 per cent a year.

In Singapore, the manufacturing of medical devices is worth about $3 billion annually and provides nearly 11,000 jobs.

Ms Iris Tan, 27, a fellow of the Singapore-Stanford Biodesign programme, said the initiatives help Singaporeans learn more about the business side of the industry.

“Getting to meet experts and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs can only help Singaporeans make their mark in the field,” she said.

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