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Singapore to open new skin research center

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Singapore: The Skin Research Institute of Singapore has announced that the Agency for Science Technology and Research (A*Star), National Skin Centre (NSC) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), in Singapore, are jointly committing $79.74 million (S$100 million) to skin research in the country. The centre will harness the expertise of scientists, clinicians and engineers to foster and conduct high impact, inter-disciplinary skin research designed to translate into improved health outcomes and quality of life.

Key research areas for the institute will include eczema, allergy and inflammation, pigmentary disorders, wound healing, hair conditions and skin aging. One in three people worldwide suffers from a skin disorder, presenting unmet demands for new treatments in this field, A*Star said. There are also significant differences between how skin diseases present in Asian and Western populations, as well as in how these respond to treatment.

As part of the initiative to stimulate skin research here, the partnership will be launching a joint Thematic Skin Research Grant call later this year. This will serve to catalyze collaborations in skin research between different institutions in Singapore. A joint skin workshop will also be held to allow for matchmaking of participants' research interests. The clinical trials unit will be strengthened and will conduct clinical trials for skin conditions and to serve as the interface to develop and test new drugs, devices or diagnostic tools and technology in clinical proof-of-concept studies. This unit will also build up a database of different skin phenotypes as well as healthy skin of different Asian ethnic groups, which could be used for studies ranging from genetic and epidemiologic studies to consumer product testing.

Dr Benjamin Seet, executive director of the Biomedical Research Council at A*Star, said, "Singapore provides an ideal location for companies to undertake research and product development to meet the needs of Asia's diverse consumers. Besides working with pharmaceutical companies, our researchers are currently working with some of the world's largest personal care companies, a number which have expanded their research and development activities here."

Under the partnership, A*Star and NTU will introduce PhD programmes for skin biology. NSC and the National Healthcare Group will develop research tracks for doctors on the dermatology residency programmes. This will feed into the pipeline of post-doctorate graduates, dermatology specialists and clinician-scientists.

"This partnership builds on several years of research collaboration and underscores our common desire to accelerate skin research through the use of pioneering technology and innovation, to ultimately create better outcomes for our patients," said Professor Chee Yam Cheng, Group CEO, NHG.