

ASEAN healthcare leaders call for shift from technology pilots to everyday care

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Opening-day discussions at Medical Fair Asia, Medical Manufacturing Asia and RehaCare Asia highlight the implementation gap behind the region's confidence in future readiness



Healthcare leaders across Southeast Asia are confident about the future, but turning promising technologies into routine care remains a persistent challenge, according to new findings and discussions at the opening of Medical Fair Asia, Medical Manufacturing Asia and the inaugural RehaCare Asia on 9 September.

The ASEAN Care Readiness Index 2026 found that 94% of healthcare and MedTech leaders believe their organisations are prepared for the next three to five years. Yet 54% identified technology implementation capability as a barrier to future readiness; a tension reflected in opening-day discussions on workforce capacity, fragmented pilots, affordability and adoption.

These discussions will remain in focus as Medical Fair Asia, Medical Manufacturing Asia and RehaCare Asia take place today and tomorrow (10 and 11 September) with highlights including:

- **AI, digital health innovation:** Future for Health explores AIoT, digital twins, wearable biofeedback and AI-driven health monitoring, while the Innovation Zone showcases emerging technologies and research from Singapore universities (NUS, NTU, SUTD) spanning rehabilitation, robotics and assistive care.
- **Healthy ageing and rehabilitation:** The Living Longer, Living Better seminar examines prevention, ageing in place, community care and rehabilitation access, alongside hands-on locomotor therapy workshops demonstrating personalised approaches to gait rehabilitation.
- **The future of MedTech in Asia:** The Medical Manufacturing Asia Forum examines AI-driven manufacturing, resilient supply chains, partnerships and regulation, alongside Taiwanese smart healthcare and age-friendly innovations and market-entry briefings across Southeast Asia.

- **Healthcare innovation in practice:** On 11 September, Paradigm Shifts in Healthcare spotlights real-world applications of AI, robotics and healthcare innovation, including AI-supported pre-surgery assessment, autonomous hospital logistics and 3D-printed solutions.

The three events opened on 9 September at Marina Bay Sands, bringing together professionals across healthcare, MedTech, rehabilitation and medical manufacturing. **Low Yen Ling, Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Culture, Community and Youth, officiated as Guest of Honour** before touring the exhibition floor.

Lars Wismer, Managing Director of Messe Düsseldorf Asia, said, “The confidence and willingness across Southeast Asia to embrace new ideas and technologies in healthcare is very encouraging. The opportunity now is to bring healthcare providers, researchers, technology companies and industry together to turn promising solutions into everyday practice, strengthen care beyond the hospital and ultimately deliver better outcomes for patients.”

Four themes from Day 1, 9 September

- **Capacity is about more than headcount.** Healthcare professionals need the time, space and support to learn, adapt and integrate new technologies, alongside engineering, digital and operational expertise.
- **The region risks accumulating ‘pilot debt’.** Repeated small-scale feasibility studies can delay the harder work of integrating proven technologies into routine care. Cost, technical support, maintenance and scalability need to be considered from the outset.
- **Adoption starts with people, not products.** Technology can reach a hospital without becoming part of care if clinicians lack confidence using it or stakeholders disagree on the value it should deliver.
- **Care must work beyond the clinic.** Rehabilitation outcomes depend on whether patients have the motivation, caregiver and community support, accessible technology and meaningful data needed to sustain progress at home.

Medical Fair Asia

From ‘pilot debt’ to routine care

At the launch of the ASEAN Care Readiness Index 2026, Lars Wismer joined Dr May-Anne Cheong of Singapore General Hospital and National Cancer Centre Singapore, and Dr Kamonlawan Chonchokun of KPMG, to examine what is preventing the region’s confidence in innovation from translating into implementation at scale.

- **Technology can be present without being used.** Dr Kamonlawan cited a hospital in Ho Chi Minh City where a piece of medical equipment was used fewer than five times a year because doctors lacked confidence using it and could continue with older technology. Low utilisation can then weaken the case for further investment.
- **Competing definitions of value can stall adoption.** Clinicians may prioritise patient outcomes, governments funding sustainability and wider health goals, and technology providers focus on adoption and access. These priorities need to be reconciled before an investment can move forward.
- **AI-informed patients are changing clinical conversations.** Patients are increasingly using tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude to understand their health before or between consultations. The panel welcomed greater patient ownership while emphasising the need for clinical and regulatory safeguards and support to interpret AI-generated information in context.
- **Southeast Asia’s openness to new technology presents a significant opportunity.** Lars shared that if the region can close its implementation gaps, it could demonstrate how new technologies deliver practical value for providers and patients.

Innovation moving beyond institutional settings

The Innovation Zone showcased Singapore-developed technologies designed to extend care into homes and communities. These included SUTD’s NeatSens sensor-integrated knee brace for remote rehabilitation assessment, its AMI voice-chatbot and cognitive-games platform for older adults, and lightweight wearable exoskeletons from the NUS Biorobotics Lab. Launch Pad and FTR4H also featured Nunaps’ Vividbrain, an at-home virtual-reality digital therapeutic for stroke survivors with visual field defects.

RehaCare Asia

Making rehabilitation technology work in everyday life

Making its Singapore debut, RehaCare Asia focused on what it takes for rehabilitation technology to deliver value in clinics, homes and communities, and how patients can sustain progress after leaving the consultation room.

- **Start with the patient's goals.** Speakers at the MotusAcademy × RehaCare Asia Leadership Forum argued that development should begin with real-world needs, with evidence showing whether patients regain meaningful function and sustain recovery outside the clinic.
- **Technology may also support workforce retention.** Adjunct Associate Professor Loh Yong Joo highlighted the physical demands placed on therapists. Robotics could reduce this burden, help clinicians remain in patient-facing practice and enable greater rehabilitation intensity.
- **Access needs new models and partnerships.** With affordability, servicing and maintenance limiting adoption, speakers discussed rental and technology-as-a-service models. St Luke's Hospital and Robotimize also signed an MoU to test, refine and integrate rehabilitation robotics in real-world care.

Medical Manufacturing Asia

Building the capabilities behind MedTech innovation

Medical Manufacturing Asia highlighted the upstream technologies and capabilities behind medical-device development and production. Solutions on display spanned precision engineering and components, advanced materials, micro- and nanotechnology, sensors, testing and quality control, and packaging.

The German Pavilion was among the key international showcases, bringing together German medical technology and manufacturing companies and highlighting the specialist expertise supporting the wider healthcare technology ecosystem.

The conversation continues on 10 September with the dedicated Medical Manufacturing Asia Forum, bringing manufacturers, innovators and industry leaders together to explore issues including AI-driven manufacturing, strategic partnerships, regulation and the future of MedTech production.