

HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

RESOURCE PACKAGE HEALTHCARE IN SINGAPORE

An educational resource for the refreshed Bowyer Museum Gallery
at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) marking 200 years of medicine
in Singapore





Historical Investigation Resource Package - Healthcare in Singapore

This resource kit allows students to explore the topic of healthcare and medicine under the strands of “Communities and Experiences” and “Science and Technology” as part of the Historical Investigation component of the Lower Secondary History Syllabus.

We would like to invite all educators to explore the Bowyer Museum Gallery with your students where possible and guide them in their historical investigation on the topic of healthcare. We have also included some suggested inquiry questions and sources to scaffold the learning experience for the students.

For self-guided school visits to Bowyer Museum Gallery, please contact museum@sgh.com.sg.

HI Strands and Possible Topics

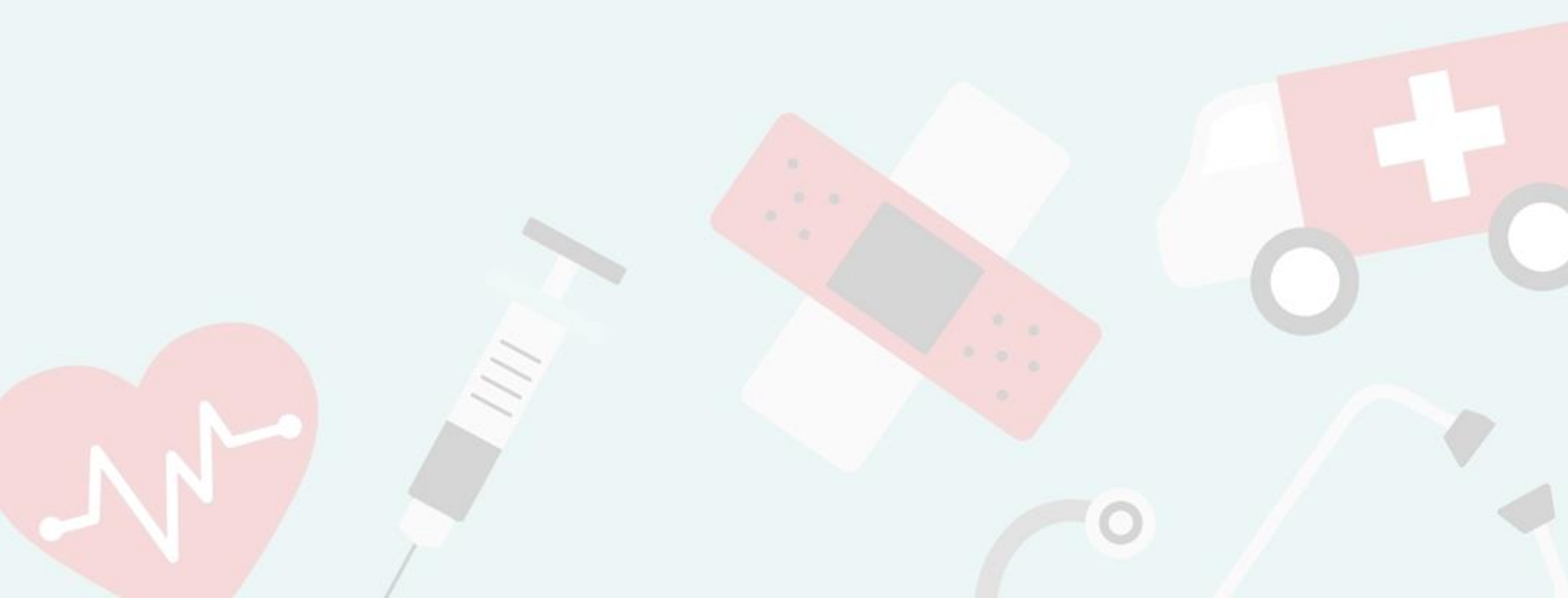
“Communities and Experiences” Strand

- Topic: *Contributions of migrants: Education and healthcare*

“Science and Technology” Strand

- Topic: *Post-war technological developments: Public health and medicine*

Suggested inquiry questions

- What was Singapore’s healthcare like during the colonial years (1819-1942)?
 - How has Singapore’s healthcare developed following the end of the Japanese Occupation?
 - How have historical events (i.e. national tragedies such as the Bukit Ho Swee Fire & epidemics like SARS) shaped Singapore’s preparedness in public healthcare?
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Suggested Sources

"The first hospital (actually a shed) erected in Singapore was in the Cantonment for the troops, i.e., it was a military hospital, but was known as the General Hospital.

In 1822, the second General Hospital was built to replace the first one. In February 1827, the Residency Surgeon reported to the Resident that the General Hospital had "fallen down" on account of the decay of the temporary materials with which it was originally constructed."

The General Hospital (the third) built in 1827 was allowed to deteriorate, and by 1830 was so dilapidated that no one would seek admission except in dire need. The roof was full of holes and there was not a single section of the roof through which rain did not enter. The hospital charges were high (90 cents per day for a European) in spite of the poor facilities..."

< Source A

An extract from "The 1926 General Hospital, Singapore" by Y.K Lee. What do you think the term "hospitals" meant in the past based on the description in the source?

Source B >

An extract on early challenges of Singapore's healthcare from the exhibition, "200 Years of Medicine" at the SGH Bowyer Museum Gallery

"The hospital's early years presented endless medical challenges for the hospital. There was a dire shortage of doctors, nurses, as well as medical supplies and equipment. The earliest nurses were in fact, male convicts who also served as compounders, dressers and sweepers."



Chinese patients waiting outside Thong Chai Medical Institution, 1890s.
Image: National Archives of Singapore (NAS)

< Source C

In the 19th century, traditional medical practices and home remedies were the primary means of healthcare for non-European communities in Singapore. Only few charitable institutions such as the Thong Chai Medical Institution provided affordable treatment to the poor.

Source D

It is likely that the earliest medical facilities from 1819 were military based and would have been within the cantonment, adjacent to what is known as the Padang today. By 1821, there were more of such facilities which were loosely termed as hospitals in the Bras Basah area.



Image: From the exhibition, "200 Years of Medicine" at the SGH Bowyer Museum Gallery

Source E >

The modern history of SGH began on 29 March 1926, with the opening of 800 beds in the Bowyer, Stanley and Norris Blocks. It housed male, female and children's wards as well as operating theatres, a laboratory, an outpatient block and living quarters for nurses. Today, the Bowyer Block with its distinctive clock tower is designated a national monument as a recognition of its historical significance.



The Administration Block (Bowyer Block) of the General Hospital, early 20th century.

Image: National Museum of Singapore



Second-Class ward at SGH
Image: NAS/Lee Kip Lin

< Source F

This image shows a second-class ward of the SGH in 1926. Notice the use of mosquito nets? Back then, outbreaks of Malaria were common and mosquito nets were used in hospitals to keep mosquitoes away. Prior to the war, patients were scattered throughout the hospital, and the doctor and his staff had to search for them in the many wards. As the General Hospital was not like present-day hospitals in Singapore, which are “compact”, a “ward round” could cover long distances, and patients were often “missed”.

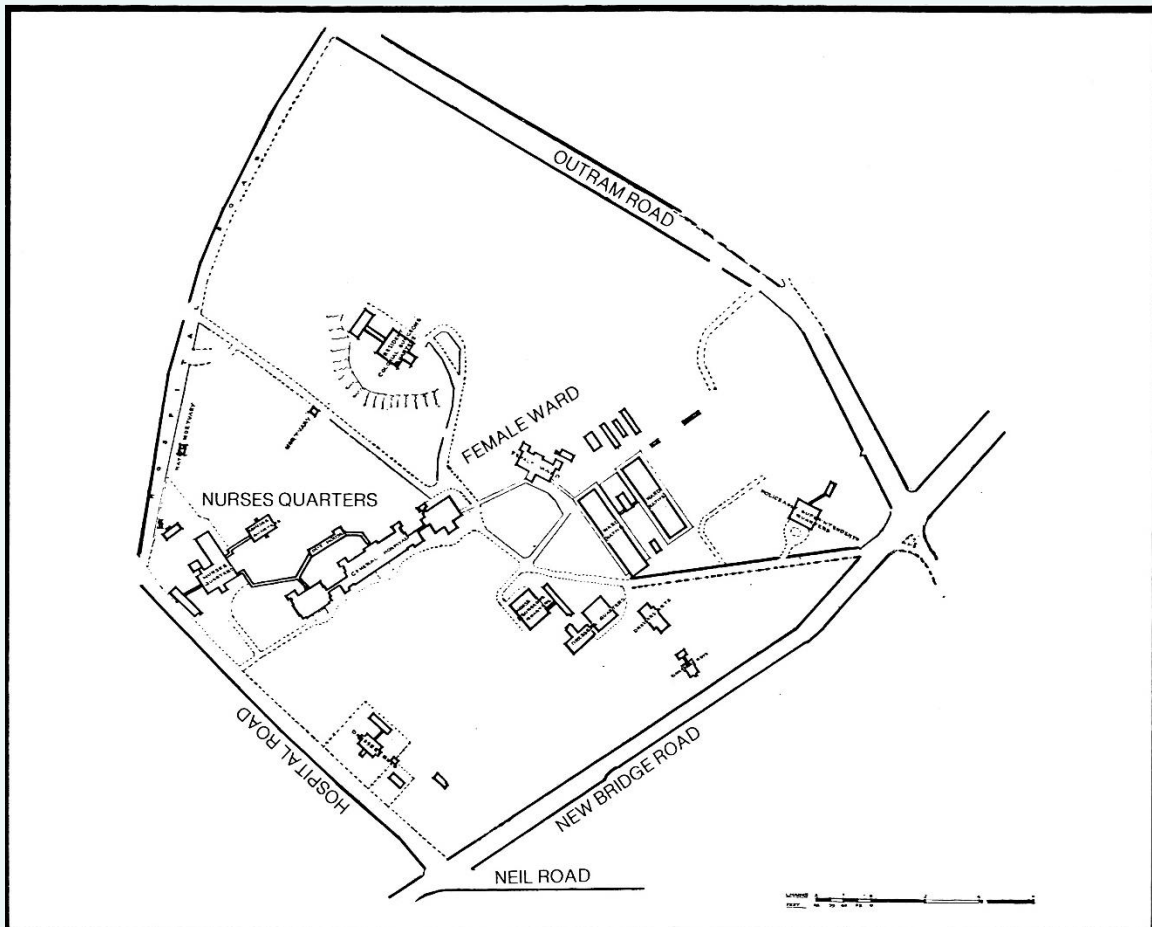
Source G >

Porcelain tea sets were used in the First-Class wards of the Singapore General Hospital (circa 1950). The wide range of Made-in-England crockery seems to indicate some level of sophistication. The breakfast set at First-Class wards included a serving of not one by two eggs!



Porcelain tea sets of the First-Class wards at SGH.
Image: Singapore General Hospital

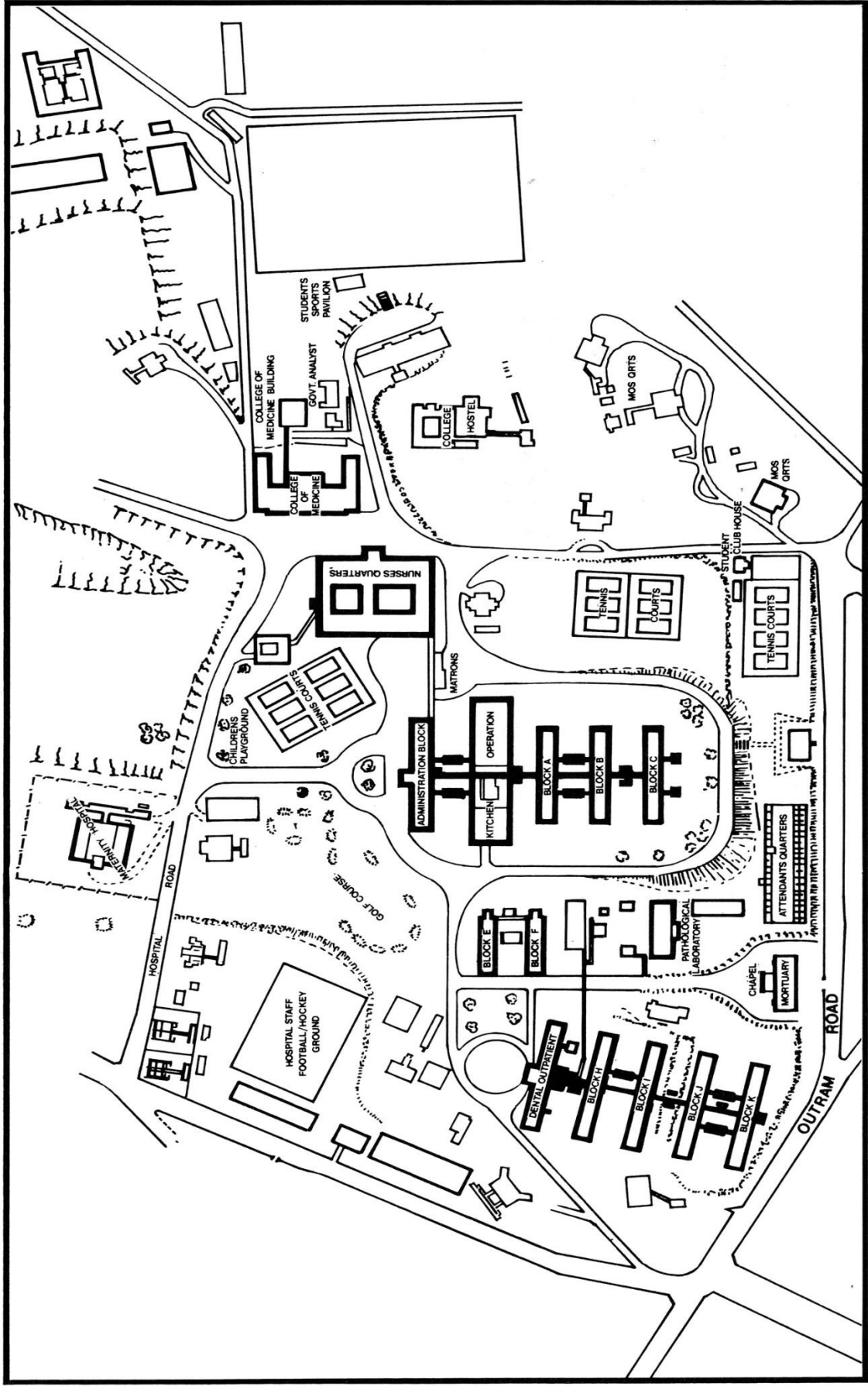
Source H



A site map of General Hospital and its surroundings in 1882.

Image: Singapore General Hospital: 50th Anniversary Publication 1926-1976. Ministry of Health.





A site map of Singapore General Hospital (in bold) in 1926 and its surroundings.
Image: Singapore General Hospital: 50th Anniversary Publication 1926-1976. Ministry of Health.

Source I Statistics on the number of patients admitted to and treated by government hospitals from 1920-1929. What does the difference in the number of 3rd-class patients over the years tell you about public healthcare in Singapore?

Patients Treated in Wards

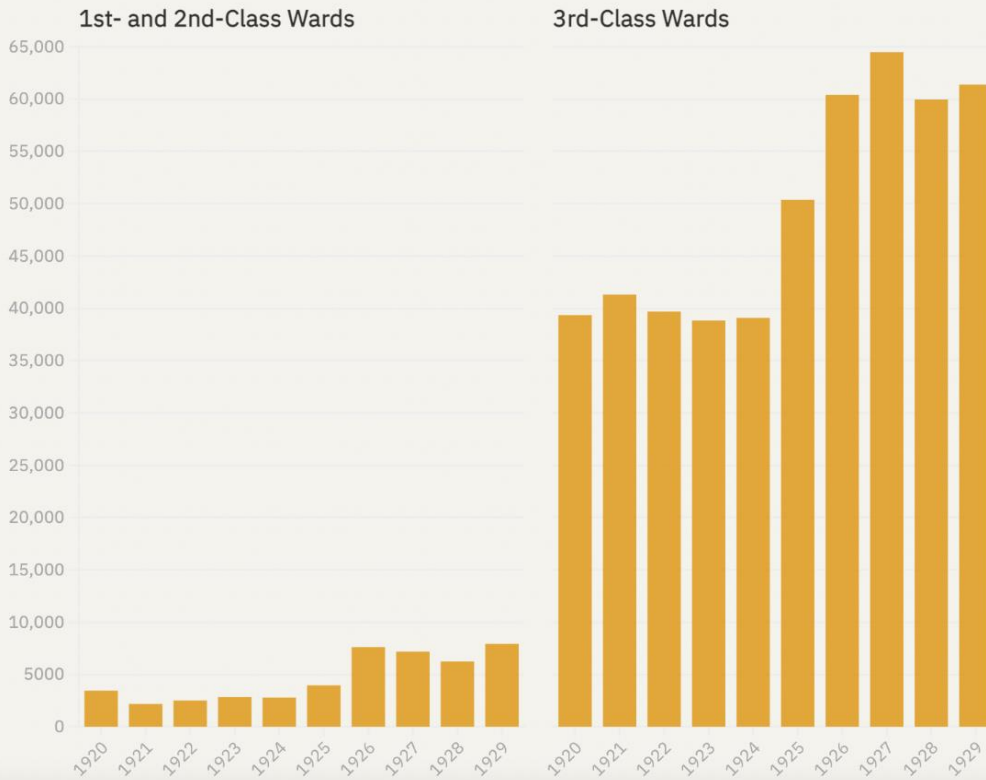


Image: Research and visualisations courtesy of www.kontinentalist.com, a Singaporean data-storytelling studio.

Source J >

As the demand for medical services grew, there was a need to train local men and women in medical education.

The College of Medicine Building was opened on 15 February 1926. Together with the Tan Teck Guan Building, they served as the main tertiary institution of medical education in Singapore for many decades. Both buildings are now used as the offices of the Ministry of Health and are preserved as National Monuments.



College of Medicine Building, 1930.
Image: NAS

Source K >

An extract on the intertwining histories of SGH & Singapore, from the exhibition, “200 Years of Medicine” at the SGH Bowyer Museum Gallery

Emergency medicine care started with managing issues of the aftermath of war and the road to independence that saw unrests. Some highlighted tragedies included the Maria Hertogh riots of 1950, with 18 dead and 173 injured – many of whom were sent to SGH...

In 1978, the Syros industrial accident tested the efficiency of SGH which handled 91 casualties in 2 hours and 15 mins. One positive outcome of this tragedy was the establishment of the Burns Centre. It now serves not just burns patients from Singapore but is highly regarded in the region for its capabilities.

Singapore’s life expectancy among highest in the world: Public sector report

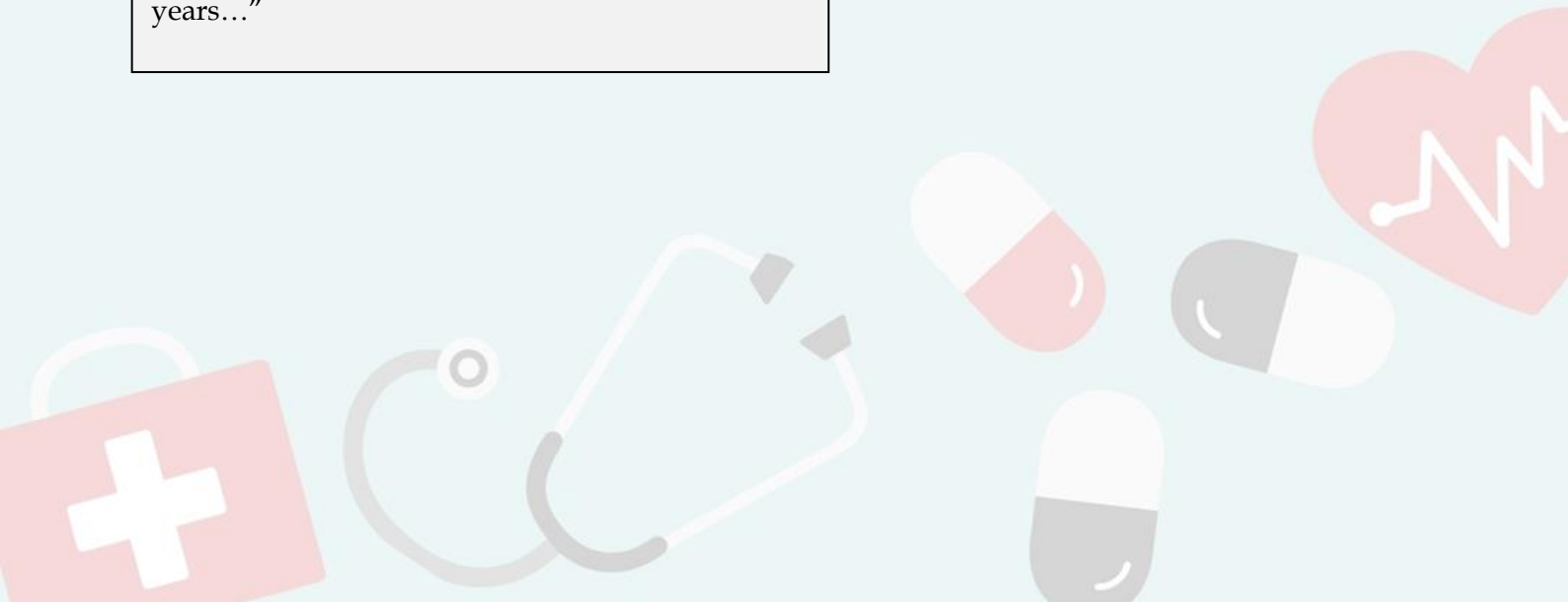
“The life expectancy of Singaporeans is among the highest in the world at 81.4 and 85.7 for men and women respectively in 2019...

According to the report, the health adjusted life expectancy at birth for Singaporeans is also one of the highest in the world. Measuring the number of years a person is expected to live in good health, the expectancy is 72.6 for men and 75.8 for women in 2017.

Mortality rates in Singapore due to cancer, stroke and heart diseases have also reduced over the years...”

< Source L

An extract from a Channel News Asia article on Singapore’s life expectancy, 26 Nov 2020.





Actors Ada Choi and Max Zhan...
Jan 13, 2021



38 CCs to resume Trace Together...
Jan 17, 2021



Cheese Lover? Here's A...
Domino's ...

Recommended by

SGH ranks 8th in survey of world's best hospitals



SGH is the only Asian hospital in the top 10 of Newsweek's ranking of the world's best hospitals. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY



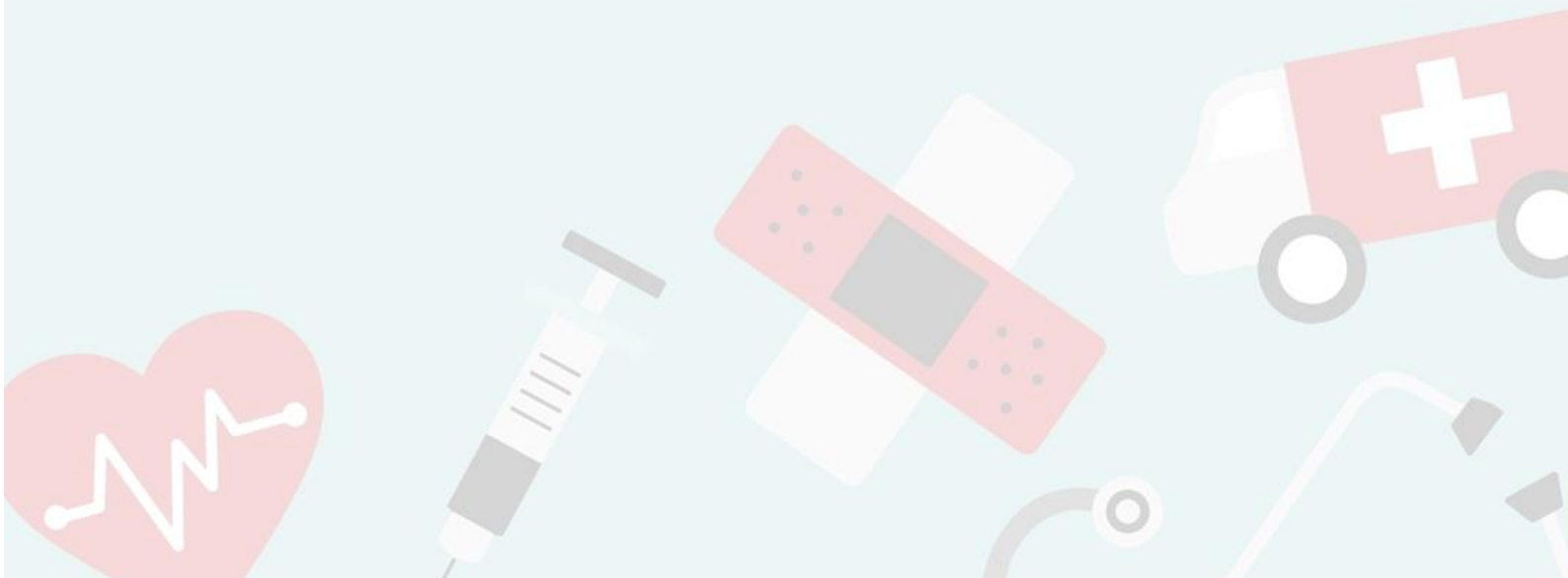
Salma Khalik
Senior Health Correspondent

PUBLISHED JUN 16, 2020, 5:00 AM SGT

< Source M

A news article from the Straits Times dated 16 June 2020. In the article, it was stated that SGH ranked 8th in a survey of 1600 hospitals in 21 countries and the countries were selected based on a standard of life expectancy, population size, and number of hospitals and data availability.

Image: Screen grab from the Straits Times online



My Historical Investigation

As you conduct your own research, select sources (including those you have found on your own) which have provided you with the most relevant information for your chosen inquiry question on the topic of healthcare. Fill in the spaces below to guide you in your inference of the sources.

My historical investigation question:

Provenance of source <i>e.g. An article on "Cholera in 19th-century Singapore"</i>	What can you infer from the source about healthcare in Singapore? <i>e.g I can infer that public health measures were inadequate in 1841, resulting in outbreaks of diseases like cholera then.</i>	What evidence supports your inference? <i>e.g. The articles states that "Singapore had its first cholera outbreak in 1841 and at that time, Singapore was ill-equipped to handle the outbreak due to insufficient medical facilities..."</i>

