



## **Rainbow Centre**

*Leading in Special Education,  
Making a Difference*

**Honorary Patron**  
Professor Tommy Koh  
Ambassador-At-Large Singapore

## Joint News Release

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **FIRST LARGE-SCALE EVENT TO CREATE AWARENESS OF AUTISM**

The United Nations has designated April 2 as World Autism Day, an event that is marked all around the world. Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School students are leading a multi-centre effort with Rainbow Centre, Singapore, to organise this significant event, for the first time ever in Singapore. The Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, is the keynote speaker and Guest-of-Honour at the event to be held today at Rainbow Centre - Yishun Park School.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to others around them. There is currently no cure for autism. However, research shows early intervention and treatment services can greatly improve a child's development.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) occurs in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups, but is four times more likely to occur in boys than in girls. It is estimated that an average of 1 in 110 children in the United States have ASD. More people than ever before are being diagnosed with ASD, a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioural challenges. It is unclear exactly how much is due to the broader definition of ASD and better efforts in diagnosis. Singapore is not spared from this trend. Although there are programmes in place in Singapore to support children with autism, significant gaps exist. For example, upon graduating from schools, these children have few

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established avenues to help integrate them into working society and adulthood.

World Autism Day (WAD) aims to raise public awareness about autism and the struggles that the children and families face so that the community can begin to address these issues. It also expresses deep concern at the prevalence and high rate of autism amongst children in Singapore and the consequent developmental challenges.

WAD activities help to show the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention. Additionally, WAD celebrates the unique talents and skills of persons with autism and is a day when individuals with autism are warmly welcomed, acknowledged and accepted.

In bringing together organisations in Singapore, Duke-NUS students hope to give a voice to the individuals who are undiagnosed, misunderstood or looking for help. This project has the support of Rainbow Centre, Singapore, Autism Resource Centre, Autism Association (Singapore) and St. Andrews Autism Centre. The event is sponsored by SingHealth and other donors.

Speakers representing key agencies who work with ASD individuals include: Dr Sung Min (IMH), Dr Kenneth Poon (NIE), Dr S Mariam Aljunied (MOE) and Mdm Kah Ying Choo (Parent & Writer). They will speak on topics in support of a continuum of care, comprising services dedicated to diagnosis, early intervention, and treatment, inclusion in mainstream schools and education and training for children as well as older people with ASD.



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About 400 guests from the various Government agencies, professionals, Duke-NUS, autism partners, donors and volunteers are expected to attend this event. The programme also showcases the talents and potential of children with ASD from Rainbow Centre, Singapore and St Andrews Autism Centre, and a child with ASD from a mainstream school who will perform at the event. In addition, a carnival has been specially organised for the children.

**- END -**

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## Quote Sheet

### **Rainbow Centre, Singapore**

"We hope that through this joint collaboration with the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School students, we will create greater awareness and support among Government agencies, caregivers, professionals and the community for the continuum of care for persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It is really heartwarming to see the commitment and interest of the Duke-NUS Sheares College team working tirelessly hand in hand with Rainbow Centre, Singapore. As future doctors, this is an excellent platform for them to gain a better understanding of the needs, issues and challenges faced by persons with autism and their families. I hope that this will be an annual event in Singapore to celebrate the unique qualities and talents of persons with ASD."

**- Mrs June Tham, Executive Director, Rainbow Centre, Singapore, on the outcomes of World Autism Day 2011.**

### **Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore**

"The World Autism Day project by the Benjamin Sheares College of Duke-NUS is grounded by three values that direct the College's activities: Service, Leadership and Scholarship. At the beginning of the academic year, members of the college collectively felt a need to give back to society and we started exploring medically-related needs in Singapore that it can play a small role in. After extensive background research, College members decided to adopt the autism cause. By co-organizing this event with Rainbow Centre, Singapore, we hope to create a forum on autism needs and care."

**- Joshua Yaozhang CHUA, Benjamin Sheares College Representative & Vice President (Welfare) 4<sup>th</sup> Student Council, Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, explaining why the Duke-NUS students are organizing World Autism Day project with Rainbow Centre, Singapore.**

"Through our medical students' leadership efforts, the first Singapore multi-centre project in support of autism has highlighted that greater access to services is needed to successfully integrate young autistic individuals into our society. As our medical students progress with their unique training in medicine and research, they will leverage on their education to uncover ways to better care for patients. As a pediatrician myself, I am especially proud of this effort our Duke-NUS students are making to improve healthcare, especially for autistic children, in Singapore."

**- Dr Robert Kamei, Vice Dean for Education, Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore, in support of the Duke-NUS medical students' effort in spearheading World Autism Day 2011.**



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### **About Rainbow Centre, Singapore**

Established in 1992, Rainbow Centre, Singapore, is a registered charity with the Registry of Societies and granted the Institute of Public Character (IPC) status under the Charities Act. It runs two special education schools and two early intervention centres at Rainbow Centre - Margaret Drive School campus and Rainbow Centre - Yishun Park School campus, and provides therapy services, professional training and consultation to enhance the quality of life of children with special needs and their families.

For more information on our programmes and services, please visit [www.rainbowcentre.org.sg](http://www.rainbowcentre.org.sg).

### **About Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore**

The Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore (Duke-NUS) was established in 2005 as a strategic collaboration between the Duke University School of Medicine, located in N. Carolina, USA and the National University of Singapore (NUS). Duke-NUS offers a graduate entry, 4-year medical training programme based on the unique Duke model of education, with one year dedicated to independent study and research projects of a basic science or clinical nature. The first batch of students will graduate in 2011. Duke-NUS also offers M.D/PhD and PhD programmes. As a player in Singapore's biomedical community, Duke-NUS has identified five Signature Research Programmes: Cancer & Stem Cell Biology, Neuroscience and Behavioral Disorders, Emerging Infectious Diseases, Cardiovascular & Metabolic Disorders, and Health Services and Systems Research.

For more information, please visit [www.duke-nus.edu.sg](http://www.duke-nus.edu.sg).