

Rewards keep seniors active to prevent dementia

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An incentive programme that rewards seniors with redeemable points for keeping active led to a marked improvement in their mental alertness and social interaction after six months.

"There was also a 20 per cent increase in attendance," said Mr Keith Lee, director of Awwa Health and Senior Care.

A voluntary welfare group, Awwa was formerly known as the Asian

Women's Welfare Association.

"Keeping our seniors physically and mentally active is key to maintaining their physical and mental functions so that our seniors can continue to live in the community," he added.

He was referring to a pilot programme, funded by OCBC Bank, that aims to tackle the scourge of dementia among the elderly by trying to motivate those vulnerable to take part in activities that would improve their motor and cognitive skills. Eighty seniors at the demen-

tia day care centre at Awwa participated in the pilot project which began at the beginning of this year.

Those who join in for gardening in the morning and reminiscence therapy in the afternoon get 10 points for each activity, for instance. Doing taiji or watching a movie earns five points each.

The total number of points is tabulated at the end of each month and OCBC volunteers, who make monthly visits to the centre, will distribute the rewards that the seniors selected earlier.

The most popular reward so far is a massage session provided in-house by members of the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped.

A manicure and haircut are also offered as rewards. Alternatively, the elderly can opt for shopping vouchers.

The concept of incentivising exercise among the elderly is not new.

Peacehaven Nursing Home started implementing it in 2016, after the management of the home made several study trips to Japan.

OCBC hopes to scale up the programme with other charities such as Care Corner and Thye Hua Kwan to benefit close to 2,000 seniors over the next two years.

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