

'Link SGH and schools to help hearing-impaired'

By Braema Mathi

THE Singapore General Hospital (SGH) and schools for the hearing-impaired, such as the Canossian School for the Hearing Impaired, should link up to provide medical and rehabilitative services to benefit children with such disabilities, suggested Dr Ong Chit Chung, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Education.

This could become a regional enterprise where others could seek treatment and rehabilitation, he said after visiting the special school in Jalan Merbok near Jalan Jurong Kechil.

The GPC and its resource panel have been visiting educational institutions since August last year. It is part of the GPC's job to scrutinize legislation and make policy suggestions.

Canossian principal Anne Tan said that 10 of her 157 students could benefit from a \$40,000 cochlear implant operation, which SGH hopes to offer soon.

Such implants can help people who are very deaf. They work best in the very young and in people who went deaf after they learned to speak.

Said Sister Anne: "We will do all the rehabilitation if these operations can be done. Right now, the children's progress is slow and they need a lot of attention. They can improve so much with these implants."

Three severely-handicapped children had to go to Australia to be operated on, she said, adding that their families have since emigrated.

SGH's medical board chairman, Dr Charles Ng, who is a GPC member, said that SGH would like to start such a programme, and already had a specialist to carry out such implants.

The financial details are being worked out, he said.

For this programme to succeed, a link-up with special education schools is vital because the children will need rehabilitation later.

Patients in the region would come to Singapore if they knew about such a programme, he said.

Dr Ong said he would ask the Education Ministry to consider giving special education schools the 95 per cent funding help that government-aided schools now receive.



The mission-run Canossian School is staffed by 20 teachers trained in special education. They run the nursery, kindergarten, special and regular primary classes for 157 pupils.

The school is so short of space that it has been holding some classes in containers for the past five years.

It is one of 15 special schools funded by both the ministry and the National Council of Social Service.

All are run by voluntary welfare organizations.

A new \$3-million school at Sallim Road off Aljunied Road is scheduled for completion in 1998.

The Canossa Convent Primary, a mainstream school, will share the site.

Dr Ong praised the Canossian School for teaching hearing-impaired children to speak rather than use sign language to communicate.

Employers should hire them, he said, because they could work as well as any other workers.

