

Emma the robot masseuse gets to work in Singapore (Update)

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The robot named Emma is the brainchild of local startup AiTreat and performs "tui na", a type of massage practised in traditional Chinese medicine

A robot masseuse named Emma is offering Singaporeans high-tech back rubs with a gigantic metal arm and warm silicone tips which its creators say perfectly mimic the human touch.

The robot, the brainchild of local startup AiTreat, began work at a clinic

in the city-state this week and performs "tui na", a type of massage practised in traditional Chinese medicine.

Emma, which stands for Expert Manipulative Massage Automation, consists of a white metal arm with heated silicone tips that mimic the human palm and thumb, with customers massaged while lying on a bed.

For Sg\$68 (US\$50), customers at the traditional Chinese medicine clinic get half an hour of robotic massage—on the back or other parts of the body that are aching—five minutes of massage by a human therapist and around 20 minutes of acupuncture.

Calista Lim, a Beijing-trained physician at the NovaHealth TCM clinic, said the robot eases her workload, allowing her to focus on seeing more patients.

"There are days that... humans feel a little tired or under the weather and they may be a little reluctant to do extra work," she told AFP.

"But for Emma, once I say go, then she goes to work."

She said the massage robot is also useful in plugging a labour shortage, as it can be difficult to find good therapists in Singapore.



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Zhang Yizhong, chief executive of AiTreat, which was nurtured by the city-state's Nanyang Technological University, said Emma uses sensors to detect stiffness in the human body and how well blood is flowing to more effectively massage patients.

Still, Lim conceded some patients were initially apprehensive about being massaged by a machine "because they watch a lot of horror movies".

But most warmed to the idea after trying it out.



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"It feels very warm, very comfortable," she said.

Traditional Chinese medicine, which uses herbal medicines and techniques such as acupuncture, is popular in Singapore where most of the population are ethnic Chinese.



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