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**SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
MAYOR OF TANJONG PAGAR COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL DISTRICT FOR
THE LAUNCH OF GLAUCOMA SURVEY
IN TANJONG PAGAR GRC
AT COLLEGE OF MEDICINE BUILDING
ON SUNDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 1997**

It is my privilege to be amongst you today for the launch of the Tanjong Pagar Glaucoma Survey. When Tanjong Pagar Community Development Council (CDC) was first approached by the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) to be joint partners in this Glaucoma survey, CDC readily agreed because we were deeply concerned about the potential effect Glaucoma has on our population, and the need for greater public awareness of the condition.

Glaucoma is the major cause of irreversible blindness worldwide, with Asian Chinese making up the majority of those affected. Studies conducted have shown that Glaucoma is an age-related phenomenon with the elderly being more susceptible to the illness. Although Glaucoma is less common than cataract, it imposes a certain financial burden on society. In the United States alone, the direct health care cost for Glaucoma is estimated to be about US\$2 billion, with another US\$500 million in indirect costs. In Singapore, we have the highest recorded number of new cases per year in the world for the most severe form of

Glaucoma. We should therefore expect that Glaucoma will have a substantial social and economic impact on our society, especially with our rapidly aging population.

If detected early, Glaucoma can be treated either through conventional surgery or simple laser operation. To prevent Glaucoma from causing blindness, early treatment must be administered before it causes severe damage to the eye. It is in this aspect of preventive screening that Tanjong Pagar CDC is pleased to collaborate with the SNEC to conduct this Glaucoma survey. The survey, which covers 1600 residents living in Tanjong Pagar CDC District, aims to screen for Glaucoma. This is done through detailed eye examinations conducted by SNEC medical staff using state-of-the-art detection devices. To make the eye examinations more accessible and convenient to our residents, the SNEC staff will also be locating their examination stations at three of our community centres so as to bring the services closer to the people. The examinations will be conducted at Silat CC from December this year till January next year, and Leng Kee and Bukit Merah CCs in February and March next year respectively.

By participating in the survey, our residents will be able to benefit from the comprehensive screening and follow-up programme. There are three steps: First, If abnormalities are detected during the initial screening, the identified resident will be notified to go for a more detailed test. Second, if the case is suspected to be Glaucoma, the resident will be given a free examination at the SNEC for a definite confirmation. Third, if confirmed, he will be given the opportunity to undergo Glaucoma treatment, at the SNEC or any ophthalmologist of his choice.

To the community leaders and CDC volunteers amongst us today, I would like to thank you for the support you have shown. I am heartened to see

that many of you have come forth to offer your kind assistance to the residents in our community who have been identified to participate in this project. Your assistance will especially be needed to accompany our elderly down to the community centres, or to provide an assuring presence to alleviate their apprehension and fears about the eye examinations. With your help and support, I am confident that our residents will respond actively to the survey.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Singapore National Eye Centre and the Singapore Eye Research Institute for their commitment to undertake meaningful research and preventive programmes. This Glaucoma survey is a good example. May I wish the programme every success.

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