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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Dr John Chen, 8 Jan 98, 3.30pm

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR JOHN CHEN

MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR HONG KAH GRC

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF NTUC DENTICARE

CHUA CHU KANG CLINIC AT LOT 1 SHOPPING MALL

ON FRIDAY, 8 JANUARY 1999 AT 3.30 PM

I am pleased to be here to officiate at the opening of NTUC Denticare's  
sixth clinic. The opening of this clinic at Chua Chu Kang is an important milestone

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in the development of Denticare in that it is making its services more accessible to the public staying in the western part of Singapore. In particular, this clinic will serve the residents living in the housing estates in Chua Chu Kang, Bukit Panjang, Bukit Batok and Jurong.

2 Our government is always mindful of our citizen's dental health and has initiated promotional programmes to educate the public on dental healthcare. Ministry of Health promotes dental health through our school Dental Service and Community Health Service. In 1994, the government has mounted a successful campaign to increase the level of awareness towards dental care. Since then, the government has gone to various parts of Singapore to promote dental health as part of our long term dental care programme.

3 Singaporeans should not perceive dental treatment as a luxury or adopt an attitude of procrastination towards it. In fact they should view it as part and parcel of their total health programme. Poor oral hygiene could affect our health. That is why our government has done so much to provide dental services in our schools. In 1997, dental treatment was given to 265,956 pupils in 196 primary schools and 100,904 pupils in secondary schools.

4 Denticare's effort to generate public awareness on dental health is also commendable. Your participation in your own NTUC Lifestyle campaign by giving talks and providing free dental consultation are commendable effort in raising the public awareness of dental health. Such community projects complement the effort of the government to increase the awareness level of dental health.

5 I am glad to know that there has been an increasing attendance in Denticare. Attendance at your clinics has increased from 14,000 in 1990 to 63,000 in 1997 and 70,000 in 1998. The attendance at government clinics in our hospitals and community clinics has decreased from 1,109,043 in 1990 to 933,364 in 1997. This shows that through greater competition in the market, more Singaporeans are attending private dental clinics over the years. I have no doubt that private dental clinics with quality service like Denticare would provide a good alternative to government clinics. This trend is likely to continue as dental services further develop in Singapore. Furthermore, as Singaporeans become more affluent, they would not only look for good dental treatment but also clinics that have a shorter queue and clinics that are near their home. Therefore the opening of clinics near housing estates is timely and appropriate. I believe residents and employees of companies in the western part of Singapore will benefit from your presence here.

6 The opening of new clinics would also enable Denticare to take advantage of the economy of scale. This would enable Denticare to keep cost down and give customers good value for money. I would expect Denticare to provide quality dental service with reasonable cost not only to union members but also to the public. Denticare has, over the years, played the role of stabilising prices in dental treatment. As a co-operative, Denticare should continue to play that role to bring affordable private dental treatment to most Singaporeans. The recent announcement by Denticare to give a further discount of 3% was a demonstration of Denticare's commitment to play its part in assisting the community in this economic crisis. In addition, I am glad to note that Denticare is offering its services to senior citizens and residents from welfare homes at a lower rate as compared to the public. With such a concession given to the elderly and the less privileged, Denticare is helping to build a more compassionate society. Together with other NTUC Cooperatives

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which have offered price reductions and other assistance schemes, you have demonstrated that cooperatives in Singapore are operated on sound cooperative principles and that they will be there to assist the community in times of need. Such social objectives and actions will go a long way in helping to foster a socially cohesive nation.

7 I congratulate you on the opening of this clinic. I was told that Denticare will continue to expand to make its services more accessible to the public and to bring them nearer to the homes of Singaporeans. May I therefore, wish you every success in your future expansion.

8 On this note, it is my pleasure to declare open the Denticare clinic at Chua Chu Kang Lot 1 Shopping Mall.

Thank you.

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