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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY  
SECRETARY (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE & MINISTRY  
OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT), AT THE INTER-FACULTY  
SYMPOSIUM "EMERGING ISSUES IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM  
CHALLENGES FOR INTERVENTION" ON SATURDAY,  
27 FEB 99 AT 9.00 AM AT THE LECTURE THEATRE 8,  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

Good morning

My Parliamentary Colleague

Assoc Prof S Vasoo

Head, Department of Social Work and Psychology

Prof Kua Ee Heok

Head, Department of Psychological Medicine

Distinguished Guests

Ladies & Gentlemen

I am very happy to join you this morning at the Inter-Faculty Symposium – “Emerging Issues in the New Millennium - Challenges for Intervention”. It is often said that the only constant is change. Looking at our society in 1899 and today, we have to agree with this wise statement. Indeed the change has been tremendous. A person who lived in 1899 would not have foreseen the society in 1999. Also the pace of change accelerates as time progresses. Hence, I do not think anyone of us here can predict in 1999 what our society would be like in the year 2099.

2 So we have come to the obvious conclusion that our ability to predict the future is limited, and may become even more so in this ever faster changing world. Some of us may wonder why we should bother to plan when we know our plans will have to be changed when we come to implementing them. However, let's remember that the process of planning is in fact more important than the plan. The process disciplines us to constantly look at ourselves and our environment, think about likely development of the future, and conditions us to work with others. The result is better understanding, better networking, better skills, and better preparations. All these translate to greater confidence and ability to face the future, even though we have to modify our plans as we go along.

3 I would like to thank the Department of Social Work and Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, as well as the Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine for jointly organising this Symposium to look into the future. Even if we do not get all the right answers, or we may not even be sure that we have asked the right questions, we get the planning process going. With this spirit, allow me to share with you three trends which I feel would be important for professional intervention in the new millennium. Of course I do not claim to have even asked the right questions. However, I do hope I could “throw stones to attract jade”, help generate further exchanges so that at the end of it all, we feel we better understand and are better prepared for the new millennium.

4 The first trend is the development within the basic building block of our society – the family. The family has been under much pressure in the last 100 years, and the pressure will increase in the new millennium:

.. Generation gap will widen as the society develops ever faster. The older generation, though wiser, will not automatically be seen and accepted as more knowledgeable. Emphasis on traditional values will slacken from time to time. When children have problems, they do not always seek advice from the parents. When the children are in trouble, they may not feel that they can get security and support from their parents.

.. The parents, on the other hand, will be coping with pressure on their own. More families will be double-income. Both parents would have to cope with the reality of a knowledge-based economy. They have to always upgrade their skills, acquire new knowledge, and have less job security. More will be involved in globalisation and regionalisation. From time to time, the family may be living in different parts of the world. The balance between career and family will be more challenging and difficult.

.. The grandparents will be living longer and will have higher expectation on the standard of living and care. They will remain active to be assets to the society, and for self-fulfillment. Most will work till later stages of life. More would want to remain active even after retirement, on part-time jobs or as volunteers. More could help their over-stretched children by taking care of the grandchildren. This can be an excellent development for family cohesion as it brings back the extended family network, even if we do not have three generations living under one roof.

5 The second trend is a more active people sector where the people feel more empowered, and show greater willingness to participate in solving community issues:

.. The compulsory six-hour per year community service that our students need to go through today will help in this development. Through community service, our young students of today feel the pride and joy of helping others. As they become adults in the next millennium, more of them will find it meaningful and joyful to serve the community as volunteers.

.. That we have more older people within our population in the next millennium will also mean more opportunities for volunteer recruitment amongst retirees who are still fit, helpful and willing to put in the time. As younger persons today, many of the future retirees already feel that money is not everything, and helping others is the root of happiness. Such feeling will strengthen as they and the society grow more mature.

6 I am confident our volunteer participation rate will reach a level closer to that of developed countries today. If we can facilitate a higher degree of

neighbourliness amongst our residents, and promote community self-help, such neighbourhood community will have a feel of an extended family. This can help relieve pressure on our families. This will also strengthen social cohesion and facilitate professional intervention by social service professionals.

7 The third trend is the higher demand for your professions, both in terms of quantity and quality. As individuals feel greater pressure and more stress, and as awareness on your professions continues to rise, there will be less taboo for those who feel they have a problem to see a counsellor or a psychologist. Remember there was a much greater taboo in 1899 for consulting a doctor even when one is sick. However, in 1999, more and more of us consider it important to see a doctor for annual checkup even when we feel perfectly fit and well. However, just as we have much greater expectation on our doctors today, we will have much greater expectation on your professions in the next millennium. Other than professional skills and knowledge, we will also expect you to manage social service programmes well, and work well with community organisations and volunteers to reach out to more people in need. These are very tall orders indeed. It is therefore vital that your professions adopt a down-to-earth and people-centred approach in your work, and be ready to upgrade their skills and keep pace with changes in our society:

.. Agencies such as Ministry of Community Development, National Council of Social Service, People's Association, Voluntary and Grassroots organisations, as well as the Universities and Polytechnics will have to organise more upgrading courses for your professions.

.. There will be more need for your professions to network and co-ordinate with each other, both for sharing of knowledge and handling of cases.

.. There will be more calls for your professional practice to be regulated, and professional codes and ethics established and enforced.

8 These trends will require professionals in the social service sector, whether social workers, psychologists, educators, and law-enforcers to constantly work together to come out with a coordinated approach. Such coordination is already taking place, especially in the areas of youth delinquency and elderly care. There will be more fertile grounds of cooperation. The prize will be higher standards and better image for your professions through good service to your clients. I am confident you will stand up to the challenge.

9 I hope this Symposium provides an opportunity to further reinforce networking and facilitate cross-fertilisation of ideas. I hope you will leave this Symposium feeling enlightened, empowered, and more confident, that as we face major challenges in the new millennium, we also have many like-minded people with skills, knowledge and professionalism, ready to work together to face the challenges.

Thank you.

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