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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by DPM Lee Hsien Loong, 1 Apr 2000, 5.30pm.

# *Singapore Government*

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **SPEECH BY DPM LEE HSIEN LOONG AT THE OPENING OF TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL SATURDAY, 1 APRIL 2000 AT 5.30 P.M..**

#### Introduction

I am very happy to be here with you today for the opening of Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital has a long and illustrious history. It was founded in 1844 by Mr Tan Tock Seng, a philanthropic Hokkien merchant, to help fellow immigrants who had fallen ill. At that time, the pressing health concerns were basic health care for a growing poor and uneducated immigrant population, and contagious diseases arising from overcrowding, poor hygiene and malnutrition.

Both the hospital and Singapore have come a long way since those humble beginnings. Rapid social and economic development, especially in the last few decades, has brought widespread affluence, and caused

pronounced changes in the average Singaporean's lifestyle. Our health concerns have also changed. Infectious diseases like polio and smallpox, that used to be major public health problems, have been eradicated. Today, the top killers in Singapore are related to "lifestyle diseases" such as cancer, heart disease and hypertension.

### Importance of Health Promotion and Education

In the face of these changes, we must keep our national strategies for health care up to date. Only then can our health care services be effective, sustainable and affordable. We can acquire the latest high-tech medical equipment and the latest drugs, and provide patients with state-of-the-art treatment. But on their own, equipment and drugs will not guarantee the overall good health for our population. In the long run, such an approach is neither cost-effective nor sustainable.

To keep our population in good health, and good basic health care affordable, we cannot only focus on what to do when patients fall ill. The strategy must strike at the root of health problems by preventing as many as possible from falling ill in the first place. This is why health education, health promotion and disease prevention initiatives to change people's lifestyles and behaviour patterns are important. Vigorously and effectively pursued, they will minimise downstream health problems and avoid costly treatment.

## National Archives of Singapore

Over the years, the Ministry of Health has put in place many health promotion, health education and disease prevention measures. For example, we launched the National Healthy Lifestyle Programme in 1992, to make people aware of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle, and to teach them how to go about it. Another familiar example is the National Smoking Control Programme, a comprehensive long-term programme for smoking control, initiated in 1986. Health education programmes centred on specific diseases such as mental health, diabetes, women's cancers and AIDS, have also been actively promoted.

But more can and should be done. It is not difficult to launch campaigns and programmes broadcasting public messages on how to keep healthy. The tricky part is to do so in fresh and innovative ways, so that people are receptive to the message, and are motivated to take responsibility for keeping healthy, and if necessary modify their diet and daily habits.

### Establishment of Health Promotion Board

To further strengthen our health promotion, education and disease prevention programmes, the Ministry of Health will establish the Health Promotion Board (HPB) next year. This new statutory board will bring together the existing National Health Education Department, Department of Nutrition, School Health Service and School Dental Service. The Health Promotion Board will spearhead national health education, promotion and disease prevention efforts. It will develop and promote programmes and environments that support healthy lifestyles, as well as early detection and management of health problems in children, adults and the elderly.

But the HPB cannot function alone, and be the sole champion of health promotion, education, and disease prevention. This job needs many helping hands. For a message to be properly digested, and for a programme to achieve lasting changes in attitudes and behaviour, we must reach out to people in a variety of settings – the schools, the workplace and the community, to reinforce the messages in many different ways.

A key element of the HPB's strategy, therefore, will be building close partnerships with other agencies and organisations to develop and sustain a national effort in health promotion and disease prevention. These partners will be voluntary and community organisations, including the Community Development Councils, professional organisations, schools and corporations.

## Role of Hospitals

Health care providers such as hospitals, too, will be important partners of the HPB. The primary role of a hospital is to provide acute treatment and care. But hospitals are also uniquely placed to support disease prevention and health promotion efforts. When patients are admitted to hospital, questions about their own health are naturally uppermost in their minds. For visiting family members and friends, a hospitalisation episode is also a sobering reminder of the importance of keeping healthy. They therefore become more receptive than usual to health information and health education.

Hospitals should use their unique position to impart health information and education to patients, family members and friends. With more than 250,000 admissions to our public hospitals every year, there is great potential for HPB to work closely with the hospitals to contribute to health promotion efforts by reaching out to patients, and their family and friends.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital has already made a strong start in this direction. It has put in place health promotion efforts and initiatives to complement its main focus in patient care and treatment. It has developed partnerships with other health and community organisations to promote health in the community and in the workplace. It has an active community outreach programme, giving health talks, organising health exhibitions, and providing health screening and X-rays at community centres and companies. Early this year, the Hospital also launched a programme with companies to promote health among their employees through activities such as consultations, talks, workshops and worksite ergonomics assessment.

Tan Tock Seng will build on these initiatives. Geriatric care, in which the Hospital has enjoyed a tradition of excellence, offers much scope for development. Already, hospital staff regularly provide care-givers of the elderly with home care training, and make home visits to advise on the elderly's living environment. These efforts will be systematically and progressively stepped up.

In addition, at the Hospital level, plans are underway to introduce a Health Enhancement Centre, for those who share common “health risk factors” – such as being overweight, having high cholesterol levels, smoking, leading sedentary lifestyles, and eating unhealthily. Once identified, these individuals will be encouraged to attend programmes to help them better understand and manage their health risk factors, and lead healthier lifestyles before diseases develop. The Hospital will also set up Health Intervention Clinics offering programmes in weight management, exercise prescription and heart health, to help “at-risk” individuals make crucial lifestyle changes.

### Conclusion

Our rapidly ageing population is causing a rise in associated chronic diseases. Health education, health promotion and disease prevention will become an increasingly important part of our national strategy to keep Singaporeans healthy.

Getting people to break out of unhealthy habits and manage their own health proactively is a never-ending task. However, it is a task well worth the effort, as the result will be a healthier population, less afflicted by illnesses and disabilities. We can achieved this, if health care providers, community organisations, employers, schools, volunteer groups and government agencies work hand in hand to maximise outreach.

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It gives me great pleasure now to declare the Tan Tock Seng Hospital open.

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