

**Speech by Ms Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State  
Ministry of National Development and Ministry of  
Education for The Opening Ceremony of  
2<sup>nd</sup> “Educating For Health” (EFH) Conference at the  
Republic Polytechnic on Wed 18 Nov at 9.00 am.**

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry  
of Education and Ministry of Home Affairs

Her Excellency, Ms Janne Julsrud, Norwegian Ambassador to  
Singapore,

Ms Ho Peng, Director General of Education,

Distinguished Guests and Overseas Delegates

Principals, Vice Principals

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

1. It is my pleasure to be here at the Opening  
Ceremony of the 2nd Educating for Health (EFH)  
Conference 2009. I extend a warm welcome to our

overseas delegates. I am confident that the Singaporean hospitality and warmth will make your stay an enriching and memorable one.

### Conference Theme

2. In 2007, the 1<sup>st</sup> Educating for Health Conference (or EFH) was initiated by an inter-agency group known as the Healthy Youth Committee or HY Com. Championed by the Ministry of Education (MOE), HY Com seeks to align the health promoting efforts of various agencies which play a role in nurturing the health and well-being of our students. The 1<sup>st</sup> conference in 2007 set out to share ideas and insights into health promotion, locally and globally, and strategies for developing student leaders to take on the role of health ambassadors for their peers.

3. In organising this 2<sup>nd</sup> EFH Conference, the HY Com hopes to deepen the discussion and sharing, and expand networks for health promotion amongst different

stakeholders. The theme of this year's conference is aptly named, 'Connecting the HYway'. It reflects the importance of strengthening partnerships between the various public-private sector agencies, the community, parents and schools to enable our students to take up the 'Healthy Youth way' or 'HYway of life'. In this conference, we are pleased to have Professor Lawrence St Leger (Australia) as the keynote speaker. He has been commissioned by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to write teaching and learning materials on health and develop the guidelines for Health Promoting Schools in the Asia and the Pacific region. We also look forward to learning from our plenary speakers, Professor Louise Rowling (Australia), Professor Stuart Biddle (UK) and Professor Michael Meaney (Canada), who have made significant contributions in the field of Social, Mental and Physical Health.

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4. This year's conference will showcase not just the alignment of youth health promotion efforts across various agencies but also the synergistic collaboration among the agencies. At this juncture, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the ministries and agencies represented here for providing monumental and multi-faceted support to impart health literacy, cultivate positive attitudes towards health and nurture healthy lifestyle practices among our young in Singapore.

### The Cornerstone of Health

#### *Prevention and Health Promotion*

5. Research has shown that obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes will increase a person's risk of developing cardiovascular diseases. In 2008, WHO's Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Project reported that while cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in the world, at least 80% of such

premature deaths can be prevented with healthy diet, regular physical activity and an avoidance of tobacco and alcohol uses.

6. In Singapore, we have made some improvements in the state of our people's health. The Ministry of Health conducts a National Health Survey every six years. Results from the latest survey showed that among adults aged 18-69 years, the prevalence of diabetes fell from 9.0% in 1998 to 8.2% in 2004. The prevalence of hypertension among those aged 30-69 also declined from 27.3% to 24.9% in the same period. However, obesity among the adults saw a slight increase from 6% in 1998 to 6.9% in 2004. The next survey will be conducted in 2010.

We shall continue to track the health status of our people and work on areas for improvement. The 2004 data showed that we have to work on the rising obesity among the adults.

7. Statistics tell us that cardiovascular diseases can exert a significant impact on an individual's health care cost and quality of life, and on the nation's health and social costs. In this year's National Day Rally Speech, our Prime Minister has indicated that the Government is increasing its health budget to gear up our healthcare system to prepare for an ageing population. He also said that the best way to keep health care costs down is to maintain healthy lifestyles. Prevention and health promotion therefore play a pivotal role in mitigating the onset of obesity and chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

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8. Our young lend themselves as an excellent target group for such prevention and health promotion interventions. Positive lifestyle habits inculcated from young are likely to continue into adulthood. Schools need to seize the opportunities created through the various inter-

agency collaborations to extend and sustain health promotion programmes to their students.

## MOE's commitment to Health Promotion

### *Partners in Health*

9. In aligning the efforts for health promotion, the HY Com facilitates various collaborative projects across the agencies and ministries. Besides this conference, I would like to highlight two other collaborative projects:

- a. *The Schools Study Project.* This project identifies effective strategies in 8 participating schools for improving the health and well-being of our youth. The project seeks to understand the challenges and key success factors of these schools in helping their students achieve a healthy weight. Today, two of the participating schools, Fengshan Primary School and Hougang Secondary School, are among the schools which will be sharing their best practices in helping their students make healthy choices.

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b. *The Student Health Survey.* This survey was conducted with parents of children aged 7-17. It provided valuable insights on the food consumption patterns and physical activity levels of our youth and pointed us to areas where more attention and work ought to be placed. For example, the survey revealed that only 25% of the youth consume the recommended 2 servings of fruit and 2 servings of vegetables daily. Schools can work more closely with the canteen vendors to prepare the greens with creative cooking methods to encourage students to eat more vegetables in schools. With education, the healthy dietary habits will likely stay with them beyond school.

### *Efforts in Health Promotion*

10. In our education system, we place a strong emphasis on providing a holistic education which encompasses the physical, social and mental well-being of

our students. Our children will learn about the importance of health and wellness through various subjects such as PE, Health Education, Food and Nutrition, and Civics and Moral Education. It is important that our students acquire mental resilience, learning skills and self-management to ensure they continue to be physically and mentally healthy and robust beyond their school years into adulthood.

11. I am glad that many of our schools emphasize the importance of holistic health to our children. At Bukit View Primary School, a self-assessment framework is adopted to plan and evaluate processes in its health promotion programmes. The school has aligned its initiatives and worked with external agencies such as Health Promotion Board and Singapore Sports Council to achieve the desired outcomes for the pupils' Physical Activity Level, Personal, Social Health and Emotional Health. Some of the initiatives include Mass CCA, hygiene checklist and model

class award. The school has managed to maintain an overweight percentage of below 9% since 2006. In Zhenghua Secondary School, the PE Department has incorporated Character Development and Social Emotional Learning into their PE and Health programme to ensure that students learn to exercise self-discipline and self-management as they track their weight, physical fitness and health. The school has seen its severely overweight percentage drop from 4.88% in 2006 to 2.87% in 2008.

12. I am pleased to note that 85% of our schools have embraced a total school approach in their health promotion efforts by participating in the Championing Efforts Resulting in Improved School Health (CHERISH) Award. These schools have put in place relevant and effective structures and processes to promote holistic health development of their students and staff.

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## Conclusion

13. This conference has brought together over 900 practitioners of health promotion from Singapore and overseas. I am confident that each of you will have a fruitful exchange of knowledge, ideas and best practices. I wish all participants an enriching and insightful conference.

14. Thank you.

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