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ADDRESS BY MR YEO CHEOW TONG, ACTING MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT  
THE GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY OF THE NEW PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL  
ON 10 JUNE 1989 AT 10.00 AM

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## INTRODUCTION

Most Singaporeans know of Woodbridge Hospital. Unfortunately, to many, it conjures despondent images of psychotic patients locked away in prison-like environments for prolonged periods, sometimes for life. Much misunderstood, many jokes have been cracked and pranks played, using the name, "Woodbridge".

Woodbridge Hospital was built some 60 years ago in an era when custodial care was the accepted method for managing mentally ill patients. Then, and for many years after, people were just not prepared to seek medical attention for mental illnesses because of the stigma associated with mental illnesses. When they were in fact referred later for treatment, their conditions had usually deteriorated such that they required institutional care.

## CHANGES IN PERCEPTION

Being better educated and more aware of the causes and treatment of mental illnesses, Singaporeans today are becoming less inhibited about seeking medical attention for mental illnesses. They understand that mental illness is not restricted to psychosis in which the person is of unsound mind, often unkempt and appears to be talking to himself or herself.

There are milder forms of mental illness such as personality disorders and neurosis where the person may be of sound mind but has certain obsessions, anxieties or depressive conditions requiring psychiatric help. Most of these patients do not require hospitalisation. Hospitalisation, if required, will only be for short periods at a time.

#### COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the trend of psychiatric treatment has been to move away from institutional care and towards community and non-institutional care of patients. As far as possible, patients are being treated on an outpatient basis so that they will not be dislocated from the community and can continue to recover with support from family, friends and the community. This support is essential to ensure that the chances of relapse are minimised.

However, there will always be patients who will require hospitalisation for psychiatric treatment and rehabilitation. When they are hospitalised, the objective will be to stabilise their condition, after which they could return into the community with follow up for rehabilitation.

The Ministry has a formalised system of follow-up care to rehabilitate these patients in the community and to prevent relapses. The Specialist Outpatient Clinics at Woodbridge Hospital and five Psychiatric Clinics at Alexandra, Bedok, Toa Payoh, Jurong and Lim Ah Pin provide treatment of patients with mild mental illnesses and follow-up management of patients discharged from the hospitals. There are two Day Centres, Alexandra and Mandalay Day Centres, which seek to rehabilitate patients through work therapy and teach them social skills. In addition, there are facilities for the hospitalisation of

patients with milder forms of mental illness in Tan Tock Seng Hospital (24 beds), and National University Hospital (28 beds). When Toa Payoh Hospital is rebuilt, it will also include an acute psychiatric unit with 40 beds.

#### THE NEW HOSPITAL

Although we will continue to emphasise community-based care, there will be some patients who will require hospitalisation. There are two categories. One group comprises those with acute mental illnesses requiring hospitalisation for short periods at a time for assessment and diagnosis or for intensive rehabilitative and specialised treatment. The other group comprises patients with severe or chronic mental illnesses. In the interest of the individual patient and society, these patients will need institutional care.

The 2500-bed new psychiatric hospital being developed by the Ministry will provide modern facilities and a home-like environment for the treatment and rehabilitation of both these categories of psychiatric patients. It will also have facilities for a Day Hospital, provide treatment for alcohol dependency and for child and adolescent behavioural problems, and organise various programmes in stress reduction and anxiety management, family support in the aftercare of the mentally ill, crisis intervention, respite care and family psycho-education.

The new hospital will comprise eight ward blocks ranging from three to seven-storeys and a service spine of two-storeys. It will be computerised for its registration, billing, inventory control and appointment scheduling functions. Some modern automated systems such as telelifts will be introduced.

Within its new facilities, the hospital will be developed as the premier medical centre in Singapore for the treatment of psychiatric problems and for training and research in psychiatry. Modern treatment programmes such as psychotherapy, behaviour therapy, and activity and occupational therapy will be carried out.

#### **CHALLENGE AHEAD**

With the new hospital facilities and more enlightened approach towards the treatment and rehabilitation of mental patients, we hope to be able to break the stigma associated with mental illnesses and with Woodbridge Hospital as a mental asylum. The challenge will be met when our society can begin to regard psychiatric illness, like other illnesses, as an illness for which treatment should be sought early and actively contribute to the rehabilitation and reintegration of the patients into the community in order that they may again lead meaningful lives and contribute to society.

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