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**ADDRESS BY MR YEO CHEOW TONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
AT THE OPENING OF ANG MO KIO COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
ON FRIDAY, 17 DECEMBER 1993 AT 10.30 AM**

I am very happy to see all of you here today at the opening of the Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital. This new hospital provides in-patient care to patients who are recuperating from major medical conditions, or who are suffering from less serious medical conditions and who need mainly short-term nursing care. Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital represents another step forward in the Government's efforts to ensure that Singaporeans enjoy a comprehensive range of affordable medical services.

Changing Demands on Health Care Delivery

Modern medicine can today achieve what would have been considered miracles no more than four to five decades ago. Unfortunately, miracles seldom come cheap. They are often performed in acute hospitals which are costly to build and operate, and involve a wide range of expensive medical equipment and well-trained medical and para-medical professionals.

It is therefore necessary to ensure that expensive hospital resources are appropriately utilised if we are to contain health care costs. One way is to minimise the length of stay in hospital for patients. By improving medical care, we have managed to reduce the average length of acute hospital stay from six days in 1980 to about five days in 1992.

In addition, our hospitals have been progressively moving towards ambulatory care. As a result, day surgeries today comprise one-third of all operations performed compared with 18 per cent five years ago.

Changes in our disease pattern also pose a challenge to our health care efforts. Today, we no longer encounter the infectious diseases of the '40s and '50s because of our improved standards of living, medical treatment and environmental health. Instead, chronic degenerative diseases such as cancer, diabetes, stroke, hypertension and heart disease are now common. Together, they are responsible for 60 per cent of deaths in Singapore.

With our ageing population, these conditions will become even more prevalent. Such patients require long-term care, often with an extended period of convalescence and rehabilitation in a hospital setting, so as to achieve maximum functional independence. Until very recently, such patients were hospitalised in acute general hospitals although they required mainly physical therapy with only simple medical and nursing care.

We also need to support the General Practitioners (GPs) and families of such patients with a wide range of community-based health care services. Otherwise they will have no alternative but to get admitted unnecessarily into hospitals, for extended hospital stays.

The Role of Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital

The Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital will provide the needed intermediate level of hospital care in a community setting. Patients who no longer need the more intensive medical services of an acute hospital can now be transferred to the community hospital whenever they require an extended period of convalescence and rehabilitation. Patients with uncomplicated medical conditions, the elderly sick and terminally ill will also benefit from this level of in-patient care. As a community hospital is less expensive than an acute hospital, patients will incur lower health care costs.

Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital is able to offer an

integrated service with its GP clinics as well as various community-based health services. These include a day rehabilitation centre for senior citizens, who can continue to receive the required care while convalescing in the familiar environment of their own home.

One unique feature of this pilot project is that GPs have access to all the health care facilities here. This will enable GPs to provide complete care to their patients. It allows them to better fulfil their roles as family physicians. The hospital will also be available to the College of Family Physicians should the College wish to use it for the training of family physicians.

Activities of the Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital

Let me now briefly review the activities of the Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital since it commenced operations five months ago. It has admitted about 250 patients so far. 74 per cent of the patients are 70 years old and above - in fact 11 patients were above 90 years of age, with the oldest patient being 98 years old!

One-third are stroke patients. Others have cancer, heart disease, obstructive lung disease, diabetes and dementia. Many others were recovering from operations. The patients required mainly nursing and rehabilitative care, which are well within the capabilities of the hospital.

The hospital is serving as an important link between acute hospital care, nursing homes and community-based health services provided by GPs and voluntary welfare organisations such as the Home Nursing Foundation. It can help to integrate care for patients, especially elderly patients who need more nursing and rehabilitative care, thus enabling speedy return to their own homes. Community hospitals therefore fill an important niche in the range of services needed by the elderly in Singapore.

National Health and Retirement Survey of the Elderly

The number of senior citizens in Singapore will increase rapidly in the coming years. We need to have a clearer picture of the medical and social services required by them. The Ministries of Health and Community Development and the Department of Statistics will next year conduct an extensive National Health and Retirement Survey of the Elderly in Singapore.

The survey will obtain data on the socio-economic profile, family and living arrangements, financial and care support systems of the elderly of today. It will study their physical, mental health and functional status, the type of problems they face, how they are coping and their care arrangements. The survey will enable us to better anticipate and meet the needs of the elderly in the years to come.

On this note it is now my pleasure to declare open the Ang Mo Kio Community Hospital.

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