

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460
Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

=====

SPRINTER 4.0, Singapore's Press Releases on the Internet, is located at:
<http://www.gov.sg/sprinter/>

=====

SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON
SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
FOR MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AT THE OPENING OF THE FORUM ON
THE INNER EXPERIENCE OF AGEING –
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRODUCTIVE AGEING AND ELDERCARE
HELD ON 7 SEP 99 AT 9 AM AT SUNTEC CITY

Good morning

Mr Chan Soo Sen, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, Mr Tan Guong Ching,
Chief Executive Officer, Housing and Development Board and Professor James Birren,
Associate Director of the UCLA Centre on Ageing and Adjunct Professor of Medicine
and Gerontology, UCLA,

National Archives of Singapore

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to welcome you to the inaugural forum of the MCD-Tsao
Foundation Experts' Series on Successful Ageing. This Experts' Series is a joint
partnership between MCD and the Tsao Foundation to invite distinguished scholars to
share with us their knowledge on ageing issues. It started as an initiative of the
Tsao Foundation which MCD has chosen to partner and promote.

2 The aim of the Experts' Series is to advance the level of policy thinking on

ageing issues and raise awareness of policy makers, eldercare professionals as well
as the public on these issues. We are indeed glad to invite Professor James Birren,

who is an eminent gerontologist and is a longtime champion of productive ageing, to be the inaugural speaker for this joint programme.

3 The population of Singapore is rapidly ageing and the needs of the elderly are also changing. Today, 1 in 14 Singaporeans are above 65 years old. However, in 2030, 1 in 5 Singaporeans are expected to be above 65 years old. The elderly of the future will also be better educated, live longer and more independent financially.

4 In response to the challenges posed by Singapore's ageing population, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Ageing Population was formed in late October 1998. It was tasked to identify the challenges posed by Singapore's rapidly ageing population, develop policy directions and lead a co-ordinated national response to address these challenges. These challenges lie in the areas of finance, employability, healthcare and social integration. We need to ensure that as a person grows older, he will continue to remain active, healthy, be well integrated with the community and live with his family for as long as possible.

5 With a longer life expectancy, older people are expected to live a good number of years after retirement. There is thus a need for them to plan how they could spend their time meaningfully, stay healthy both physically and mentally, after they have left formal employment.

6 To help them, we must change our perception of the whole process of ageing. When we think of the ageing, what comes to mind immediately is the dependency of the elderly on society, we can also think that they can be a contributor and asset to the family community and society. That is not necessarily the case. With better education, more financial security and a longer life span, the elderly can still be an active contributor to family and society. Those who are still healthy can in fact remain economically active. They, especially the young old, can continue to learn new skills and be employable as long as possible.

7 For those aged who are no longer employed, they can still be an asset to their families. About 85% of older people in Singapore live with their families. This reflects the fact that Singaporeans strongly adhere to traditional family value that the family should take care of the old. If we hark back to our past traditions, the old was very much respected for their experience and wisdom. Today too, we can tap on this experience and wisdom.

8 However, It is also important for the older people to understand that life today is not the same as life a generation ago. They need to understand the demands of life in a fast-paced society and all the stress associated with it. In addition to caring for their aged parents, a young working couple will have to face the demands of the workplace, the constant need to upgrade themselves through training and retraining as well as devote time to the well being of their children.

9 If the older people understand this, they can make adjustments, understand the younger generation and see how they could help out in the family. One possible way is to help run the household in the case of a dual career family or help to look

yfys19990907i

after the grandchildren. One of the IMC findings is that we cannot expect the family alone to create an enriching environment for the older person. Society must help too. Besides the many enrichment and developmental courses currently provided, relevant organisations such as the People's Association, the Community Development Councils and the NTUC could develop services and courses to help the older person to understand the changes in society. They can also inculcate the correct attitude towards living in the modern society, encourage the older people to acquire knowledge and skills to communicate with and get along with their family.

10 One of the IMC workgroups has suggested that eldercare service providers could work with grassroots leaders and the Community Development Councils to set up a one-stop multi-service centre for the elderly. Apart from co-locating services for the elderly, the multi-service centre could be integrated or at least co-located with services and programmes for other age groups such as childcare and student care. This will ensure better social integration and inter-generational understanding. The Centre is not only for community services, social and recreational activities, but also for volunteerism at the local level.

11 The elderly are usually misunderstood and viewed as being unreceptive and unwilling to adapt to changes in society and technology, difficult to get along with and resistant to new ideas. We should try to understand the aspirations, needs and fears experienced in old age. This will provide useful insights for eldercare policy planning and service delivery. Appropriate and effective policies and programmes will assist the elderly to continue to contribute to society and live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

12 For the older person to continue to be active and healthy, not only his physical needs but his emotional, psychological and spiritual needs must also be met. The most important aspect of this psychological and spiritual health is the sense that he is still useful to and wanted by society and family. Eldercare practitioners and policy makers need to understand this important but yet often overlooked aspect of ageing.

13 I am sure that this issue will surface when you deliberate on the inner experience of ageing at this Forum. I wish all participants a fruitful discussion.

National Archives of Singapore

Thank you.