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**SPEECH BY GEORGE YEO, MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND THE ARTS,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF REN CI HOSPITAL
ON SATURDAY, 24 JUNE 1995 AT 3.00 PM**

We are here today for the official opening of Ren Ci Hospital. It is a happy occasion. Foo Hai Ch'an Monastery is able to provide services, including emotional support of chronic sick patients and their families, which Woodbridge Hospital by itself could never hope to. On behalf of all Singaporeans and the Health Ministry, I thank the monks, leaders, benefactors and members of Foo Hai Ch'an Monastery for their good work and kind act.

The Foo Hai Ch'an Monastery of the Singapore Buddhist Federation took up the Ministry's offer in 1993 to lease the premises of the Chronic Sick Unit. The Chronic Sick Unit at that time comprised four wards. It was set up in 1961 to help look after the more severely impaired chronic sick.

The Monastery renamed the unit the Ren Ci Hospital with a total capacity of 200 beds. Patients of the Hospital can now use Medisave for payment of hospital bills up to a limit of \$3,000 a year. Ren Ci Hospital also receives significant financial assistance from the Government. The Ministry of Health has seconded staff from the former Chronic Sick Unit to Ren Ci Hospital for six months to give the Hospital more time to recruit its own staff.

Ren Ci Hospital is one of a number of Buddhist Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) in Singapore. Buddhists make up the largest group in Singapore. I hope that in the coming years,

other temples and monasteries will follow the good example of Foo Hai Ch'an Monastery and also promote and set up VWOs.

Singapore's population is ageing very rapidly. As more and more Singaporeans grow old, all kinds of VWOs providing different kinds of healthcare services will be needed - day-care centres, home-help services, nursing homes for different illness and hospices for the terminally ill. We already have a good network of such VWOs today but we need many more in the future. Today only one in 15 Singaporeans are over 65 years of age. In 2010, it will be one in 11 and, in 2030, one in five.

The human problem of old age and death cannot be solved by government. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Community Development can provide some services, like financial and specialist support, but much more is required. However good our doctors and hospitals are, we cannot stop people from getting old and dying. We can help people live healthier lives and for longer periods but we must all still grow old and die.

The basic problem is not medical. It is cultural, psychological and spiritual. It cannot be solved by the state. It can only be solved by individuals themselves, their loved ones and family members, and their religious brothers and sisters. For this reason, VWOs play a role which no government agency can play. Money can buy nursing care, but not human love or human compassion.

All the religions in Singapore have a great role to play in alleviating the pains and sorrows of the human condition. Indeed they are part of life itself which no amount of economic development can overcome. Singapore may become a developed country but the problems of old age and death remain.

In reality, the solution is not external but internal. In the final analysis, what matters is that which is inside each and everyone of us, how we live our lives and the way we treat

our fellow man with love and compassion. If our values are good, our whole society will be good and the problems of old age and death will be set in the proper perspective. We must have the right values if we are not to become corrupted by materialism in Singapore. It is thus very meaningful that this hospital should be called 'Ren Ci'.

I applaud Foo Hai Ch'an Monastery for taking on the responsibility of running Ren Ci Hospital. May your good work inspire all Singaporeans to re-examine their lives and do their part for society.

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