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**SPEECH BY B G (N S) GEORGE YEO,
MINISTER FOR HEALTH
AND MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND THE ARTS,
AT THE OPENING OF THE GAMMA KNIFE CENTRE
ON 5 MARCH 1996 AT 4.00 PM**

We are here today for the official opening of the Singapore Gamma Knife Centre. This marks a major milestone in our efforts to build up Neuroscience facilities in Singapore. In the coming years, we will put some emphasis on the development of such facilities. Exciting developments are taking place in Neuroscience research around the world. Many diseases affecting the brain and the nervous system, once considered untreatable or not easily treatable, can now be treated.

At the new Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), we are building a separate building for the Neurosciences which will house the main facilities for the Neuroscience Institute. At Singapore General Hospital (SGH) a Brain Centre has already been established. Some research is also being carried out in National University of Singapore (NUS) and Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology (IMCB). The Institute of Systems Science has a joint project with John Hopkins University to map the human brain digitally.

We must optimise our limited talent and resource base in Singapore. The Neurosciences in Singapore must be built up in a co-ordinated way. It does not make sense for us to duplicate facilities unnecessarily and exhaust ourselves fighting turf battles. Singaporeans will benefit much more from our work if we pool our resources and work towards common goals. While we should allow for friendly competition, this must not be at the expense of achieving high standards and optimal use of talent and resources.

This is why the Singapore Gamma Knife Centre is established as an independent Centre. It is a joint venture by the Health Corporation of Singapore and Singapore Technologies. This Centre will be open to accredited doctors from both the public and private sectors. While the majority of cases will come from TTSH and SGH, we must encourage the private sector to make full use of this facility as well. For the whole of Singapore, we can only justify the purchase of one Gamma Knife. In fact, our estimates are that Singaporean cases will only take up two-thirds of the capacity available. This means we have extra capacity to market to the region. This is the reason why we have brought in Singapore Technologies as a private investor.

Our public hospitals will buy services from the Centre. Subsidized patients from the public hospitals will still be subsidized by the Government for Gamma Knife treatment. Medisave can be used and Medishield will pay part of the treatment cost.

The Gamma Knife is an example of advanced medical technology put to good use. It is not true that advanced medical technology must always lead to higher health-care cost. In fact, advanced technology can reduce health-care cost while improving the quality of medical treatment. Take Gamma Knife surgery for example. It is painless and done on an outpatient basis. In comparison,

conventional brain surgery can be much more risky, will cause the patient to have to stay many days in hospital and may give poorer results. For such cases, conventional brain surgery including hospitalisation and rehabilitation costs more than Gamma Knife surgery. A few weeks ago, I asked to visit this facility to acquaint myself with the details before today's official opening. A female patient was undergoing gamma knife treatment while I was having a discussion with the staff. At the end of the discussion, I asked to meet the patient but was told that she had already gone home. The Gamma Knife is a wonderful addition to our medical facilities. It will save lives and reduce human suffering.

As we become a developed country, our medical facilities must develop in tandem. Everyone experiences medical problems in the course of his life. Our objective must be to pursue medical excellence in Singapore in a sensible way so that Singaporeans will enjoy the best medical facilities in the region at prices they can afford.
