

SPEECH DELIVERED ON 19 MAY 75 BY DR ANG KOK PENG, MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH OF SINGAPORE, AT THE 28TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY IN GENEVA

The provision of medical and health services has always been a costly affair. This is made worse by an unhealthy world economic situation where the general economic recession is exacerbated by a sharply rising cost of materials and services. The problem is further compounded by an increasing population making an ever more exacting demand on health and medical services.

My country is a small island republic with a land area of 584 square kilometers and a population of about 2.2 million people. This works out to a population density of 3726 persons per square kilometer making us to be about the most crowded country in the world. With no natural resources and a population growing at the rate of 14.2 per thousand, we have to place great emphasis on population growth control if we are to succeed in improving our standard of living and maintaining and promoting the good health of our people. We plan to achieve a zero population growth in about 50 years' time through a comprehensive national family planning and population programme including liberalisation of the laws on abortion and voluntary sterilisation. We are actively encouraging our population to limit the family size to not more than 2 children per married couple. Even with this family size limitation, because more than half of our people are below 21 years old, our population will have doubled its present size by the time zero population growth is achieved.

In Singapore the medical services are mainly provided by the Government through a chain of 14 hospitals with 8000 beds, 26 outpatient dispensaries, 46 maternal and child health

clinics and 100 dental clinics. These services are supplemented by private hospitals with approximately 900 beds and a string of general practitioners' clinics and dispensaries. A new 1400-bed hospital is being built at a cost of about US\$90 million and plans for two other hospitals with a total capacity of 1800 beds are being drawn.

Our outpatient services are being further expanded and improved to provide more comprehensive primary medical care so that more ambulant patients can be treated in the outpatient dispensaries thereby easing the strain on the hospital services and reducing the demand on the costly hospital beds which should be used for the care of non-ambulant patients.

In the field of dental care we have recently introduced a new category of dental personnel - the Dental Therapist who after undergoing a 3-year course of dental training works under the supervision of a dental surgeon and relieves him of the many simple routines so that his time and services could be better utilised. In this way the present shortage of dental personnel for our expanding dental services could be overcome.

As **prevention** is better than cure, we are exerting great efforts in preventive programmes. A school health service keeps a systematic record of each child's medical and dental health from the first day of schooling and through periodic checks sees to it that health defects are attended to promptly. Of late, heart diseases and cancers constitute the foremost killers in Singapore requiring new approaches for their control and treatment. Surveys have been taken and educational campaigns are being launched from time to time to educate the public on how to safeguard against these diseases. The recurrence of

cholera, malaria and typhoid fever has raised our vigilance against the spread of such infection. We have accordingly taken measures to prevent pollution of our environment and to promote personal hygiene and food hygiene especially among those who handle foods. At the same time the public is being made more conscious of the need to appreciate the nutritive aspect of food in the interest of good health.

In line with many other countries our laws relating to the pharmaceutical industry and the use of medicines are in the process of being revised to ensure that the medicines available and used in Singapore are safe, efficacious and of good quality. Unnecessary use or the use of ineffective and harmful drugs in place of timely medical treatment will be strongly discouraged. We hope to finalise this new Act on the control of medicines later this year.

Being a centre of trade and communications, and with over a million tourists coming to our shores yearly we are rather exposed to infectious diseases from external sources requiring our strictest surveillance. For example, we are particularly concerned about the growing incidence of venereal diseases among the young. A report on this has been submitted to WHO recently.

Advances in the field of communications have made our world seem so much smaller and the transmission of diseases from one part of the world to another so much faster. Close international cooperation in health matters is the only way to combat diseases and ensure a healthy place for all. The role of the World Health Organisation is therefore of even greater relevance to-day. Its recent achievements and expectations

are well recorded in the report of the Director-General. Its contribution to the control of infectious diseases and its efforts in regulating the licit use of psychotropic drugs are of particular significance and importance. Singapore fully appreciates the good work of the Organisation.