

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH OF THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MR. YONG NYUK LIN,  
AT THE OPENING OF THE ANTI-TUBERCULOSIS WEEK EXHIBITION  
AT VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL ON 7TH APRIL, AT 1000 HOURS.

Today is World Health Day and all over the world 120 national governments (more than even the United Nations) have pledged themselves to declare unceasing war against Tuberculosis. That is the theme for World Health Day this year which is "No Truce for Tuberculosis."

It is true that there has been a spectacular decline in T.B. deaths throughout the world but, unfortunately, the number of sufferers have not decreased as rapidly as the number of deaths. T.B. is still a serious problem facing the world today. At least 15 million people are suffering from infectious T.B. and it is estimated that between two - three million new cases still occur each year. Sad to say T.B. continues to claim more than three million lives annually.

In Singapore itself, T.B. was No. 1 Killer as late as 1948 or 16 years ago. Thanks to the discovery and effectiveness of B.C.G. vaccination and anti-T.B. drugs like Streptomycin, P.A.S. and I.N.H., T.B. has now been reduced to death Killer No. 6 in Singapore. We must not, however, be complacent about this because the pool of infection remains high. We must get down to the root cause of disease, ferret out the sources of infection through Mass X-rays and ceaseless follow-up of cases till cured. Once we can discover cases, sustained adequate use of modern anti-T.B. drugs can cure at least 75% of cases. It was not possible before.

It may interest you to know about my own tragic family history where T.B. is concerned. In all, five immediate members of my family have been struck by T.B. Four were unfortunate to have contacted T.B. before the discovery of effective anti-T.B. drugs and only my father is lucky enough to be surviving today. Those who perished were my mother (at the tender age of 35), my younger sister and brother in their teens and twenties. Another younger brother of mine however contacted T.B. after the advent of anti-T.B. drugs and he is living a normal life today thanks to effective anti-T.B. drug treatment. So you can see the striking difference in mortality in the example of my family, the difference of

80% mortality on the one hand and nothing when anti-T.B. drugs were available. I am afraid there must be many more sad case histories in Singapore. Perhaps even worse than what I had endured.

That is the sad past, fortunately for us we now have two very efficient weapons to fight T.B. today:-

- (i) B.C.G. vaccination for infants and children and
- (ii) Chemotherapy, i.e. use of effective anti-T.B. drugs for those infected.

The first weapon is B.C.G. vaccination which is given to infants soon after birth so that our younger generation can be rendered more resistant to T.B. infection and therefore less and less will succumb to disease.

The other weapon is by Mass X-rays so that on discovering T.B. sufferers we can use chemotherapy to cure them. At present, we have on record more than 28,000 confirmed cases of T.B. under treatment. There must be many more who are spreading infection without knowing it. They must come forward to be X-rayed. There is nothing to be ashamed of being a T.B. case. It is just one's bad luck to be so infected. Let us cure it for you and live!

We believe that if we are determined enough and at the same time receive the whole-hearted support of everyone to participate in our Mass X-ray campaigns so that the whole population can be X-rayed in time, we can bring T.B. under effective control within 7-10 years. Let us therefore work together to wipe out T.B. in our midst!

This Exhibition is the combined efforts of our Ministry of Health and S.S.T.A. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all the voluntary workers, doctors, nurses, technicians and staff for their hard work and dedication in the ceaseless fight against T.B. and for organising this anti-T.B. Week and I now have great pleasure in declaring the Exhibition open.

APRIL 9, 1964.

(Time issued: 1100 hours)