

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MR. YONG NYUK LIN, AT THE BANQUET OF THE MALAYAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION HELD AT THE MANDARIN ROOM ON SAT., JUN. 13, AT 9.30 P.M.

It is with much pleasure that I rise, on behalf of the guests, to reply to the kind toast so ably proposed by your distinguished President.

Let me begin by warmly congratulating your Association for a most successful Pharmacy Week and the holding of an outstanding Pharmaceutical Exhibition at the Victoria Memorial Hall. Tonight's banquet is indeed a fitting grand finale to a hectic week and I am confident that members of your organising Committee must have boosted themselves with liberal doses of anti-acid tablets, pep pills and tranquillisers during the Week and especially for tonight.

I am given to understand that your Association has been in existence for almost 60 years, and that it is now a pan-Malayan organisation and with Malaysia it will soon grow into a Malaysian organisation as it should. Tonight, I will, however, confine my remarks to pharmacists in Singapore. Not because of a parochial outlook as alleged by certain people who do not nominally reside in Singapore but that pharmacists practising in Singapore happen to come under my Ministry and their activities and welfare are my concern.

I was interested to note that there are exactly 100 registered pharmacists in Singapore. Yes, you are amongst "the first hundred" and that implies heavy responsibility for maintaining good health and happiness of our 1.8 million people. Of these only 25 (or one-quarter) are in Government service and the remaining three quarters in private practice or institutions. I understand that members of your Association are not quite happy over the fact that some practising doctors are dispensing medicine with unqualified assistants. In my view, unless we can produce many more qualified pharmacists from our young but virile Pharmacy Department of our University, this state of affairs will have to be tolerated for some time to come.

The other comment I wish to make tonight is the need to cut down the cost of drugs so that more people can benefit from its use. I am not unaware that fantastic sums are being spent annually for research in countries like the United States and because of this certain new drugs are very costly because of patent-rights. But in certain countries like Italy and Poland who are not signatories to the Patent-Rights Convention, the cost of drugs are very much lower so that governments can do more for their people for the same amount of money. I make this plea because when I visited Woodbridge Hospital recently I was told that because of financial limitation, we were not able to use as liberally as we would like, certain effective drugs because of prohibitive costs as a result of patent-rights held by manufacturers which drugs could be used for much quicker recovery of our mental patients and we have no alternative but to resort to cheaper drugs which have much slower curative effect on our patients.

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It is a well-known fact that with the discovery and use of tranquillisers during the last 10 years, there has been a dramatic fall in the number of patients that have been admitted to mental hospitals all over the world. In the present day world it is certainly quite trying on our nerves when we pick up the daily newspaper to read the tensions that exist in every part of the world - civilised world at that! What would the world be without tranquillisers? Perhaps it could be a more rational world, today if tranquillisers had not been discovered at all. Who knows?

In conclusion, on behalf of the guests present, may I thank you for the great privilege extended to us to be with you and also partaking of such a sumptuous banquet, and to wish your members and Association every success in your efforts to improve the health and happiness of our people.

JUNE 13, 1964.

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