

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH BY MR. YONG NYUK LIN, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE 1964 NURSING BOARD
HELD AT THE MINISTRY'S CONFERENCE ROOM ON TUESDAY,
25RD JUNE, 1964 AT 1430 HOURS.

I am very pleased to welcome you as the first distinguished members of the newly constituted Nursing Board and I think it appropriate to let you know of my hopes and expectations of what I hope your Board will be able to achieve within the next three years.

At the outset, I wish to say that I had no intention of creating a 16 member Board such as this. I consider it much too large and unwieldy a body for action. This was, however, the recommendation of the former Nursing Board and as much thought must have been given to it, I decided not to make any changes but to give the recommendation a trial.

It has been possible, however, for a broad spectrum of opinion to be represented amongst 11 unofficial members of the Board as I want this new Nursing Board to be a high-powered one in order to introduce radical changes and to formulate and project a new outlook for our Nursing profession. Let me assure you that I am genuinely anxious to seek your valuable opinion and assistance to bring about a much needed improvement to the tone and morale of our over-worked staff in our hospitals. In international labour parlance our medical service is considered a "continuous process establishment" or a 24 hour service every day of the year with all its attendant problems for its administration and organisation.

It is most unfortunate that a year ago our Nurses have had to resort to a strike for one week. This must have caused dismay and a great deal of unhappiness for all concerned. Human relationships have been strained and it will take a long time indeed to repair the damage that has been caused; lingering suspicions to be allayed and misunderstandings of long standing yet to be cleared. We must, however, be of good heart. With patience, sympathy and tact we must gradually resolve these differences and bring about much happier relationships and a better esprit-de-corps throughout our medical service in order that we may heal the sick and wounded more effectively. Let us, therefore, not dwell too much on what took place in recent past, rather to look forward with confidence and optimism into the future. Let us also not forget about events of great moment - that with the failure of the Tokyo Summit talks, Indonesian confrontation against Malaysia will be intensified and we must all be more united and purposeful in our thinking or we shall all perish!

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One of the first tasks which I would like your Board to tackle is the Revision of the Nurses Registration Ordinance, 1950, and its Regulations. I understand this has been done by the previous Board but it can do with a fresh review again. Great advances have been made in medical science within the last two decades, so it is time to bring ourselves up-to-date. I would like your Board therefore to consider streamlining the training syllabus for our Nurses. It is possible that there may be lots of "dead wood" around accumulated over the years. There is urgent need for centralisation and co-ordination of our three Schools of Nursing, namely, the School of Nursing at the General Hospital, the School of Nursing for Assistant Nurses at Thomson Road Hospital and the School for Psychiatric Nurses at Woodbridge Hospital. It is with this in mind that I have specially nominated representatives from each of these three schools to serve on this Board. (I am leaving out the School of Midwifery for the time being, but it is my intention that this School should also be brought within centralised control, ultimately.) We have at present only 24 Sister Tutors who have received overseas training and another eight are away on study leave. We have fortunately been assisted by four I.H.O. experts for some years but they are not likely to be with us for long, as it should be, where external help is concerned. How can we maximise the use of our Sister Tutors for all three Schools? Are we fully utilising experienced Matrons and Sisters, who may not have undergone formal training as Sister Tutors overseas to be Tutors none the less for our Nurse-Trainees? We are able to boast of a Medical School which has been recognised by the U.K. Medical Council for many years and which will be celebrating its Diamond Jubilee next year. Are we not in the position to run institutions for middle grade medical personnel i.e. Schools of Nursing, all on our own? I quote an interesting article from the German Bulletin dated 21st April, 1964 on "Shortage of Nursing Personnel in West Germany." The title reads as follows - "Nurses Still Hard; but know more, live better."

"As in many other countries of the world the shortage of nursing personnel has posed a problem in the Federal Republic of Germany for a long time. It still does. Nursing education has naturally also had to adjust to new requirements. There are 400 schools for nurses in the Federal Republic - each of them attached to a hospital. Thus theoretical and practical training can go hand in hand.

Two kinds of nursing education are provided. One is that of Nurse Helper. For this there are no special requirements of previous general education, and training is completed after one year of practical and theoretical instruction.

Eligibility for the other branch of training includes a minimum age of 18, and several years' attendance at a secondary school. In most cases, in addition, a three or five month period of probation is considered desirable in view of the high standard of professional requirements.

The training course itself lasts two years. It ends with a state examination in subjects that include anatomy, physiology, hygiene, dietetics, baby-care and often also typing and gymnastics. Of those who pass the examination, another year of practical work is required before they can embark on the career of becoming head nurses, to whom is entrusted a large part of the practical training of the students."

I am sure you will agree with me that German medical science and their standards are highly regarded and not to be scoffed at, so I hope the above extract would give us food for thought whether or not we have something to learn from the German system of Nurse education and training which may perhaps be adaptable to serve local needs.

The 2nd problem which I would like to touch upon is how to encourage our Nurses to improve themselves not only to pursue post-basic Nursing Courses but also to become doctors, in time, if they have the academic ability and the determination to succeed. I am happy to have serving on this Board two distinguished examples in Dr. Hanam and Dr. Oon. I do hope that their presence on this Board will spur and inspire Nurses now in service to follow in their footsteps. As we have a distinguished representative of the University on our Board in Dr. Khoo, may I quote another relevant extract from the latest issue of W.H.O. Chronicle, May 1964, page 168, on "Undergraduate Medical Education in the USSR" which is the result of a travelling seminar on under-graduate medical education organised by W.H.O. in co-operation with the Ministry of Health of the U.S.S.R. in April, 1962, in which professors and teachers of medicine from 22 countries took part:-

"Middle Grade Medical Personnel, i.e. feldshers, nurses, midwives, etc.

Special provision is made to help middle-grade medical personnel take advanced training. Members of this group are given priority in admission to medical institutes, and some of these institutes have special evening faculties which permit them to follow courses for the first three years without interrupting their work. Special tutoring is offered them and laboratories are open to them during holiday periods. In the last three years they join the usual day courses. As many as 20% of all students in some of the medical institutes come from the middle grades and their records are generally good. Members of this group are not limited to studying at evening courses; they may also apply at the outset for the regular day courses."

It is no wonder that with such encouragement women form a large proportion of doctors in Soviet Russia. So I earnestly hope that our Medical Faculty will be able to take a decisive step in this direction when it celebrates its Diamond Jubilee next year.

The 3rd problem is how to overcome the shortage of Trained Nurses for our Hospitals? Out of 2,270 registered Nurses on the 1963 Register, only 1,600 are in Government service. How can we appeal to the hundreds to return to the fold to look after our sick and wounded for which they have been trained to do? Some will no doubt want to look after their young husbands and still younger children but there must be a fair number who may be persuaded to answer our call, if rightly put. Your suggestions for a new and more successful campaign will be keenly awaited.

I think the three problems which I have posed for your consideration will give you ample scope for long arguments, discussions and important decisions. It is only the beginning of, I hope, an interesting term of office for you, and I promise you many more knotty problems still to be unravelled and to be solved. You can be assured of a busy time. May I conclude now by wishing you all success in your deliberations and express the hope that we can together dedicate our energies to serving our people and giving them the best possible medical service which human ingenuity can devise for Singapore.

JUNE 23, 1964.

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