

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

MC.AU.4/64 (HEALTH)

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
MR. YONG NYUK LIN, AT THE INAUGURATION OF
THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CANCER OF
NASOPHARYNX, ORGANISED BY THE INTERNATIONAL
UNION AGAINST CANCER, HELD AT THE PATHOLOGY
DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE, GENERAL
HOSPITAL, ON MONDAY, AUGUST 3, AT 9 A.M.

Our Prime Minister was to have inaugurated this International Symposium on Cancer of the Nasopharynx but owing to the recent unfortunate disturbances which occurred in the State a fortnight ago and the aftermath of which still requires our Prime Minister's close attention, this honour has fallen on me instead.

If we recall the tragic events of the first few days of the disturbances against the auspicious occasion of today, we can arrive at the peculiar responsibilities of Government. On one hand, our first concern is in the mundane and sometimes exciting affairs of State and on the other hand, to see that other important activities in the field of sciences and the arts are encouraged and supported. In the final analysis, however, good government and the advancement of learning and even of culture - is for the ultimate good of the many and it is, for this reason, that I warmly welcome you, on behalf of the Government and people of Singapore.

Ten years ago, a Symposium on the subject of "Nasopharyngeal Cancers" might have been considered an esoteric one. The pressing problems at that time were the control of tuberculosis and many other tropical infectious diseases which were then exacting a heavy toll on the lives of people in Singapore. Today, in 1964, your subject is not only timely but of concern to everyone who lives in this part of the world. Infectious diseases have since moved down the list as the commonest causes of deaths in Singapore. The number one death killer in Singapore today are the malignancies - or Cancers, of all types. In this group, the Nasopharyngeal tumours are the commonest occurring in the male population in Singapore. The other peculiar fact is that this tumour is notoriously common amongst the Chinese, next comes the Malays and very rarely the Indians. The epidemiological factors will, without doubt, be described in greater detail in this Symposium. This interesting phenomenon was in fact the specific reason why Singapore has been chosen as the venue for your Symposium.

It is gratifying to note that this Symposium is being held in Singapore when it does not have as yet an Association affiliated to your International Union Against Cancer which has 70 nations represented on it, although founded 31 years ago. I am glad to state, however, that the stimulus generated by the holding of this Symposium has already caused stirrings amongst our people to start a Cancer Association in Singapore, in order to stimulate and support research into this problem now being undertaken by a small band of dedicated medical men both in our Government Medical Service and the University of Singapore. In fact, the Lions Club of Singapore did start a Cancer project on a small scale two years ago (1962) but it did not appear, unfortunately, to get much public support. Surely the time has come for everyone to gird themselves together to fight Cancer in Singapore as and when the sponsors of the Cancer Association of Singapore announce their intention in the near future. I can assure the Cancer Association every help and assistance within my power and ability to help.

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It is said that a break-through in the knowledge of Cancer, its nature, its treatment and its prevention could be achieved if all the effort and money now used for war preparations could be diverted to such research. Whether the solution of the problem will come from some high-powered research institutes or from the casual or chance observation of yet another Alexander Fleming is problematical. The papers that will be presented at your Symposium will be quite beyond my depth. This is as it should be as it means that your probings into this problem have gone deeper and who knows, some significant advance will have already been made in this direction? Let us remind ourselves that every little additional information adds to the sum total of human knowledge and thus mankind continues to advance.

It is on this note that I extend my best wishes to you all, hoping that your Symposium will be both fruitful and successful. Many of you have come from places far away. Some of you are our immediate friends and neighbours namely Australia, Hongkong, India, Japan and Thailand. Others are friends further afield such as Denmark, Hawaii, Kenya, United Kingdom and the United States. May your contacts and friendships formed in Singapore strengthen the ties which bind us together in this great task of successfully waging war against Cancer throughout the world!

AUGUST 3, 1964.

(Time issued: 0900 hours)
