

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MR. YONG NYUK LIN, AT INAUGURATION OF JAYCEE'S OPEN HEART SURGERY FUND PROJECT HELD AT HOTEL SINGAPURA ON SATURDAY, 26TH SEPTEMBER, 1964
AT 1400 HOURS.

I would like to begin by saying how very pleased I am to accept your kind invitation, Mr. President, to be with the Jaycees not only for luncheon but for the noble cause of inaugurating your latest project - "Jaycee's Open Heart Surgery Fund".

I consider it my good fortune to be able to say that I'm no stranger to the Jaycees - not that I was a former member of your distinguished organisation but that I have been closely associated with a number of your annual projects for a number of years, when I was in a different Ministry namely - your Oratorical contests for Leaders-of-Tomorrow, your Scholarship Fund Drive, and your Business Week for School-leavers. My high esteem and regard for you have grown with the years. I feel that with you, I can truly say that I am amongst friends, good friends, whose leadership in the service of the community deserve highest praise and recognition. You are a vigorous group of earnest and successful business and professional men, who refuse to be selfish, because you deliberately go out of your way to sacrifice a valuable part of your talents, energy and imagination to work for the common good, thus raising yourselves above the common herd of go-getters and thus assume the mantle of being responsible leaders of our community. The more we have of such fine men, the greater progress we shall achieve and the greater sum total of human happiness generated for Singapore.

I am very proud of the fact, that although I've moved on to a different Ministry, I have not lost your strong support, in that your projects have also moved on from Education to embrace Health. Not only are you about to launch a \$50,000 Fund drive for Open Heart Surgery within the next three months, but you are, I understand, also closely associating yourselves with yet another worth-while project, namely the Anti-Cancer Society that is expected to be formed soon.

As we are here for the express purpose of launching your Open Heart Surgery Project, let me confine myself to this subject hereon. I consider your project an excellent one indeed. It is not only timely but most worthy of support. Had you contemplated this project earlier, it would have been a little ahead of the times for Singapore but today, your timing can be said to be perfect, because we have already taken the decision to set up a Surgical Cardiovascular Unit at our General Hospital but to begin in a small way, i.e.,

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to undertake open heart surgery as and when cases are considered suitable and staff and facilities are lined up. The question of additional equipment necessary for open heart surgery and post-operation wards for the care of such patients is under study now and your Project therefore fits in very well with our line of thinking and our plans for the immediate future in this regard.

We are able to reach this decision, to make a start on Open Heart Surgery in Singapore, for a number of reasons:-

- (1) In April this year, thanks to the generous donation of US\$30,000 to the University of Singapore by the China Medical Board, we have set up a Cardiovascular Laboratory in the General Hospital.
- (2) A Senior Surgeon had been sent for specialised training for 15 months in U.S.A. and he returned more than a year ago.
- (3) A W.H.O. Cardiology Consultant has just completed a six-month assignment to help us set up the Cardiovascular Laboratory mentioned earlier and he has also trained a local team of six senior physicians in the techniques of cardiac measurement and interpretation.
- (4) Even the Government of Western Australia has come to know of our intentions and have extended the generous offer to look after 10 cases annually from Singapore, for open heart surgery, all expenses of hospitalisation and stay in Western Australia to be borne by them, but that we would provide cost of passages to and from Perth. As you are aware, I have already appointed a Selection Board to deal with this project.

A decade ago, it would not have been possible to contemplate the feasibility of undertaking Open Heart Surgery. When the heart stops beating, it meant death and the end of life. But medical science have made great advances during the past decade and Open Heart Surgery is accepted surgical procedure in any modern medical service. No one point in time and no one person can lay claim to have developed this special branch of surgery. It developed as a result of the concerted efforts of different persons, and advances on various fronts in medicine. The art of Anaesthesia had to be developed to a high degree of efficiency and safety; blood transfusion to make the operations safe and possible; the advances in knowledge of the functions of the heart and lungs; the development of accurate tools for the investigation of heart; the co-operation of the Biochemist and a host of other disciplines and sciences.

Mention must be made of certain techniques which have made such operations possible. First, is the sharpening of the tools for investigations of heart diseases in which radiology, electronics, dye methods, are used to investigate the exact defects and assess the functions of the heart, before and after operations. The second is development of heart-lung machines, i.e. an artificial heart pump to replace the heart during certain operations.

Thirdly, the development of hypothermia, where the body temperature is reduced, and almost an experimental procedure, the technique of operation in a pressure chamber. These techniques have vastly increased the scope and extent of the type of operations that can be performed in the heart. Finally, the development of specialised post-operative care of patients which is almost as important as the successful operations on the heart.

The number of "heart cripples" in Singapore are large but a great proportion of these are amenable to Open Heart Surgery. The return of such patients to a useful and productive life, unburdens society of a great weight of responsibility. Your valuable contribution towards the early setting up of our Surgical Cardiovascular Unit is gratefully acknowledged.

In conclusion, I now have great pleasure in launching your Open Heart Surgery Fund with a token donation of \$10/- and wish you every success. I further express the hope that your present target of \$50,000 will be exceeded long before New Year's Day 1965 arrives!

SEPTEMBER 26, 1964.

(Time issued: 1400 hours)