

SPEECH OF MR. CHOR YEOK ENG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, AT THE OPENING OF THE
DENTAL HEALTH EXHIBITION AT THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL
HALL ON WONDAY 4TH MAY 1970 AT 10 A.M.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here to open this Dental Health Exhibition today. This is the second Exhibition in two years. We hope it will attract interest in dental health, and also create an awareness of the importance of taking proper care of their teeth.

This Exhibition marks the beginning of our Dental Health Week for this year. During the Week there will be a Dental Health Poster Competition for primary and secondary schoolchildren, and an interesting Dental Health Contest for young adults of both sexes who possess sound beautiful teeth. The Judging of Finalists for this Mr. and Miss Dental Health Contest will be held on Sunday, 10th May at the Victoria Theatre and this will mark the end of Dental Health Week.

All these activities are to stress the importance of looking after our teeth and how not to lose them through neglect. In this Exhibition the process of dental decay is shown, as well as various kinds of dental treatment which dentists can do to preserve teeth. However the important point is what the individual can do for himself. He should clean his teeth properly and see that he eats well-balanced meals at regular hours. Finally he should visit his dentist regularly.

There are now 79 government dental clinics throughout the island. They provide dental care to the following groups of our population:-

- 1) Children up to school leaving age;
- 2) Expectant and nursing mothers and infants;
- 3) The sick in hospitals;
- 4) The poorer section of the public;
- 5) Prisoners and detainees; and
- 6) Members of our disciplined forces such as the Rank and File of the Police Force.

The Government Dental Service have a staff of over 400 officers, including 83 dental surgeons, 95 school dental nurses and 25 dental technicians. Last year the total number of patient-attendances for all clinics was 579,000, showing an increase of over ten per cent over the previous year. Dental work done included 345,000 dental fillings, 249,000 dental extractions and 7,400 artificial dentures. A considerable amount of specialist treatment had also been provided to patients.

The dental services provided to schoolchildren are regarded as the most important in promoting better teeth for the new generation. The Ministry has established 60 dental clinics for schoolchildren. There are 2 large school dental centres, one at Pegu Road and the other at the Institute of Health, and smaller clinics are situated in primary schools. Last year the total number of patient-attendances in school clinics was 385,000. The number of permanent dental fillings done for schoolchildren totalled just over 203,000. Over 123,000 milk teeth and 23,000 permanent teeth were extracted. With more dental care, the number of permanent teeth lost through dental decay is decreasing. During 1970 six more school dental clinics will be established.

The Ministry is also giving more attention to preventive dentistry. An excellent start was made last year in this direction with the launching of a toothbrushing campaign in all primary schools in Singapore. As schoolchildren are required to brush their teeth after their lunch break, the habit of toothbrushing can be acquired by every school child. Good oral hygiene such as regular brushing will certainly help to reduce tooth decay. This campaign was successfully carried out in all primary schools during 1969. Starting in February of that year, daily toothbrushing was introduced to more and more schools until by December the total number of schools involved came to 439. The number of school-children who had been taught the proper technique of toothbrushing and were required to brush their teeth everyday reached a total of 367,000. This toothbrushing campaign will be sustained over the

next few years. It is estimated that during 1969 and 1970 about 1½ million toothbrushes will have been supplied to schoolchildren at a cheap price through the schools.

Another aspect of preventive dentistry in Singapore is the fluoridation of the water supply for the control of dental decay. The public water supply has been completely fluoridated since the beginning of 1958. This scheme has been carefully maintained year after year. However this public health measure only helps to reduce dental decay among young children and it is still necessary, therefore, to sustain a dental health campaign to propagate useful dental health knowledge.

I wish to express my appreciation for the work done by all those responsible for putting up this Dental Health Exhibition. The commercial firms who are taking part in this Exhibition and have made generous donations towards the cost can be praised for their enterprise. We are particularly thankful to Messrs. Colgate-Palmolive (Singapore) Private Limited for giving about 400,000 dental health kits comprising a toothbrush and toothpaste for distribution to all primary schoolchildren in Singapore during Dental Health Week. I have the pleasure now to officially declare open this Exhibition.