

SPEECH OF MR. CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT THE PRESENTATION OF PRIZES FOR THE TEACHERS'
CONTEST IN TOOTHBRUSHING DRILL IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS
AT THE SCHOOL OF NURSING, OUTRAM ROAD GENERAL
HOSPITAL, ON SATURDAY, 25TH JULY, 1970 AT 1000 HRS.

In early 1969 the Ministry of Health launched a Toothbrushing Campaign in the primary schools of our Republic. I am glad to say that this campaign has proved to be an unqualified success and that all the 439 primary schools with 367,735 children are now participating in the toothbrushing drill that follows "recess time". Some 2,680 primary school teachers have also been trained by the Dental Health Education Unit to supervise the toothbrushing drill and to teach children the correct toothbrushing technique. This is indeed a credit to those who have organised as well as those who have actively participated in the campaign.

As part of the Toothbrushing campaign a Teachers' Contest in Toothbrushing Drill was organised for teachers supervising toothbrushing in primary schools. Two hundred and eighty-nine teachers from 107 schools have participated in this contest. The criteria used in judging were (1) the organisation and management of the class by the teacher in toothbrushing drill, (2) the toothbrushing technique of the children, (3) the cleanliness and condition of the toothbrushes and mugs, and (4) the oral hygiene after toothbrushing. I understand that the results of the contest have been a very close one. May I congratulate not only the top prize winners but also those who have won consolation prizes for their enthusiasm and highly commendable efforts. A Challenge Shield will also be awarded to the school whose teacher has won the First Prize in recognition of its organisation of the Toothbrushing Drill in the most efficient manner.

Dental disease which is an enormous problem in many countries including Singapore can be solved if only known methods of prevention are practised. In this regard our schools have a responsibility in helping our children to develop proper habits and attitudes, and in providing the knowledge and understanding upon which desirable health practices are founded. Every person can achieve and maintain healthy teeth for life provided he is educated and motivated to practise simple preventive health habits from childhood. These include proper oral hygiene such as brushing teeth after meals and before going to bed, avoiding sweet and sticky foods between meals, and so on. Knowledge must, however, be followed by practice before it can be effective. It is towards this end that the teachers have a vital role to play in teaching the children to brush their teeth properly after every meal and in the constant drilling that is necessary to inculcate such a habit.

This effort to inculcate the habit of tooth brushing which has been mounted is, however, part of a larger programme to improve on the teeth of our youth. Dating from 1958 our drinking water in Singapore has been fluoridated. The result of this scheme has been very carefully followed up in surveys on the condition of teeth in our school children. After a decade of exposure to fluoridated water it has been found that the teeth of our children are in much better condition than they were before fluoridation of our water supply. In comparison with the children who do not have fluoridated water the reduction in the number of decayed, missing and filled teeth has been in the region of 35%.

Together with this tooth brushing drills in our primary schools, dental education has also been introduced in the curriculum in some of the schools. It is planned to

extend this programme of dental education to all schools.

I wish to refer here to a report by a W.H.O. Adviser, Dr. J.F. Fuller, who made a field study of our dental health promotion programme in the course of a tour of several countries in this region to report to W.H.O. on the progress of dental health programmes in those countries. In his report he has highly commended what he termed the very active and far-sighted programme which has been introduced to promote dental health in Singapore. He has singled out the fluoridation of our water supply, the school dental health clinics, and the dental health education programmes together with the innovation of toothbrushing drills in primary schools which he has termed as a breakthrough in dental health^{education} as models which other countries might emulate. This is indeed cause for gratification.

Turning to our dental health service, I wish to mention that there are now 58 school dental clinics and 2 large school dental centres which provide comprehensive dental treatment for more than 100,000 primary school children. The school dental centres also provide dental treatment for secondary school children. Another 20 government clinics provide dental treatment for priority groups such as expectant and nursing mothers, the indigent and hospital in-patients. A total of 83 dental officers and 107 dental nurses are at present employed to run this service. Dental health education leads to greater awareness and recognition of the benefits of good teeth and gums, and thereby increases the demand for dental treatment.

The Ministry of Health has therefore to plan for the setting up of more dental clinics to meet the expected demands. Plans are now afoot for additional dental chairs to be installed in the Pegu Road School Dental Clinic. A programme of

establishing dental clinics in existing Outpatient Services has been drawn up. The plans provide for the building of about 3 to 4 new dental clinics each year for the next 2 to 3 years. These will be in addition to the dental surgeries which will be established in the British Military Hospitals when they are taken over in 1971. All these new developments will employ more dental surgeons. This should absorb most of the graduates from our Dental School in the coming years. At the present time, the full establishment for dental surgeons has been filled but steps are being taken to find positions for a few new dental graduates who are still available for service.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Ministry of Education officials for their co-operation in the Toothbrushing Campaign, to the principals and teachers of the schools who have participated in the Teachers' Contest in Toothbrushing Drill, to the many commercial firms who have generously donated prizes for this contest and to the staff of the Dental Health Education Unit for organising this contest. They have indeed worked very hard to promote the dental health of our younger generation.
