

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH BY PROF. WONG LIU KEE, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS, AT PRESENTATION OF AWARDS TO BLOOD DONORS AT CULTURAL CENTRE ON TUESDAY, 22ND JUNE 1971, AT 5P.M.

Since its inception in 1946, the Singapore Blood Transfusion Service has repeatedly appealed through the mass media and its publicity campaigns for more regular blood donors. After 25 years of service, the same appeal still has to be made. The number of regular blood donors has risen only very gradually over the past years, whereas the demand for blood has increased tremendously, and will continue to increase. As medical science finds new ways of making use of blood for the care of patients, more and more demands will be made on the Blood Bank. As long as Man has the ingenuity to devise new ways of combating disease, new demands for blood will be created.

Although the Blood Bank has a panel of over 23,000 donors, only about 7,000 of them make regular donations twice a year. The remainder come up only once a year or even less often. So the public will continue to hear appeals until more people decide to contribute their services to the community by donating blood regularly.

Shortage of blood is not peculiar only to Singapore. In some countries like the United States, Europe and Japan, blood has to be bought from donors, and sold to patients. We can be justly proud of the voluntary system of blood donation we have in Singapore. Its success has been due largely to people like you, who have willingly given blood without thought of personal gain. A viable Blood Bank, able to provide enough blood for all the hospital requirements will stand as a symbol of civic-mindedness of the people in the community, and of their awareness of the vital role of the Blood Bank.

In Singapore today, you can see signs of tremendous economic and social progress everywhere. One of the important factors of economic and social progress is the maintenance of our high level of health services and patient care. In this the Singapore Blood Transfusion Service plays an essential role. It has to provide blood to all our hospitals — for major surgical operations, for women bleeding in childbirth, for the victims of major road and industrial

accidents, and for patients with various disorders, whose lives can now be saved because of blood transfusions. Not many people realize that by donating blood they are not only helping to save lives, but are also playing a part in the economic and social development of the Republic. With blood readily available, patients can be treated without delay, and return more quickly to their homes and to their place of work. To the families, this means less loss of family income, if the patient is the breadwinner. To trade and industry, this means less man hours lost, due to sickness and accidents.

Fear of pain and the needle, ignorance about the non-effects of blood donation on future health, and superstitions about giving away something so vital to life, are the main factors inhibiting people from donating blood. The Blood Transfusion Service has done everything possible to allay such false beliefs through regular publicity programmes and recruitment campaigns. Yet, it is still true to say that there is reluctance to come forward to donate blood. This is because such beliefs are deeply ingrained in the people. What then is the answer? Whilst publicity campaigns should continue to be aired at the adult population, the long term solution lies in educating the young. Almost half our population are still too young to give blood. But if we are to inculcate the idea that donating blood is a social responsibility of every healthy adult citizen, we would be moving towards a better solution of the problem. We should teach our schoolchildren the importance, value and uses of blood and the humanness of blood donation, so that when they are later called upon to volunteer their share of responsibility, the inhibitory factors would have been removed.

One very important source of blood donations is the Singapore Armed Forces, many of whom are National Servicemen. Last year, they contributed about one-third of the total blood collection. They have set a magnificent example for the rest of our young people, and I would urge them to continue with their worthy contribution when they return to civilian life.

I would like to thank all the donors present, today, for the unselfish support they have given to the Blood Bank for many years. The Blood Transfusion Service is relying on people like you to provide a regular supply of blood, needed for the various specialised medical and surgical units now in operation and also those shortly to be set up. New blood donors are needed every day. Be civic-minded and save life.