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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT SHEARES AT THE OPENING OF
THE 12TH SINGAPORE-MALAYSIA CONGRESS OF MEDICINE
ON THURSDAY, 28TH JULY 1977 AT 5.00 P.M. AT THE
REGIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE

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As patron of The Academy of Medicine, Singapore, I am pleased to officiate at this opening ceremony of the 12th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine and to welcome you to its proceedings.

The Academy of Medicine has been active in the promotion of postgraduate medical education and is represented in the School of Postgraduate Medical Studies of the University of Singapore. From the late 1960s it has assisted in the conduct of courses in internal medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics and more recently, in anaesthesia.

Since 1973, 72 postgraduate fellowships have been awarded and of these, 57 scholars were from the ASEAN countries. To date a total of 144 doctors have obtained the Master of Medicine Degree in the discipline of their choice after having completed the prescribed course and passed the examination.

The Academy also awards four fellowships a year enabling trainees from developing countries to work in Orthopaedic Departments of the Ministry of Health and the University of Singapore. In 1975, the Academy sponsored the Second International Symposium on Orthopaedic Training in Developing Countries. This led to the formation of an organisation called the "World Orthopaedic Concern" which has its headquarters in Singapore.

Another of its activities is the holding of professional meetings. The First Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine was held in 1963. This lasted one day and 29 scientific papers were

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read. Since then, a Congress has been held annually and for the present Congress proceedings a total of 116 scientific papers have been submitted.

I have observed with considerable interest and pride the expansion both in scope and content of succeeding congresses. Indeed as a founder member of the Academy and an obstetrician, I was present at its birth and have watched it grow from infancy and finally attain adulthood.

I am pleased by the theme for this Congress, namely, "New Directions in Medicine". Questions on the role of medicine and the new directions it should take have come to the fore because present day medical care with its high technology which is invariably hospital-centred, costs enormous sums of money and requires a large array of professional staff. It is also recognised that medical care in such a system is for an episode - a segment - of a disease process. Medical care concentrates on treating the patient in an acute phase of illness. Often the working environment and the family background are not taken into account. The high cost of modern medicine and its narrowness of curative effect are so often quoted that they need not be elaborated or catalogued further. The solution, it is generally agreed, will require a change in direction. This means there is a need for reassignment of priorities and changes in allocation of funds for development and manpower.

If prevention of disease and the promotion of health are to be given higher priority, funds will have to be channelled towards the field of preventive medicine, especially for studies in epidemiology. A concerted effort to prevent some of our modern epidemics such as mental diseases, heart diseases and cancers would require the mobilisation of funds and a host of experts - in medicine, education, sociology - to take positive measures to prevent the diseases despite incomplete knowledge in them.

Changes in the pattern of health care are already apparent. Primary Health Centres have been organised and are developing from the existing network of Outpatient, Maternal and Child Health Clinics. Concern over the aged sick, the

house-bound or bed-ridden patients at home, the organisation for their care through voluntary and semi-voluntary organisations such as the recently formed Home Nursing Foundation, reflect this change in the need to treat persons within the context of their families and community.

There is a need to re-think and re-assess medical knowledge and plot the paths that new trends and discoveries may take us. Members of the Singapore Academy are privileged this year to have experts from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Hong Kong and Malaysia to assist them in this task.

Your main topics on infection and antibiotics are especially relevant. Not only do these topics cut across the main disciplines of general medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, but infections continue to be a major problem both in hospital and private practice. In a 2-year study by the Ministry of Health, Singapore, infection of all forms ranks third of 18 major disease groups necessitating in-hospital treatment. This problem is further compounded by the rapid increase in the cost of drugs in the last few years. In a big hospital in the United States, as much as 30% of the entire hospital pharmacy drug cost is accounted for by antibiotics. In Singapore the figure is close to 20%. Yet serious infections rank as a major cause of death in urologic patients, in critically ill patients admitted to intensive care units and in the immune-compromised subjects. This leaves much food for thought.

Congresses of this nature facilitate the gathering of minds of people to discuss, assimilate and share each other's experiences and I am impressed by the large number of young doctors who have participated in recent congresses of this nature. For various reasons, it may not be possible for these young individuals to attend conferences overseas although such exposure should be actively encouraged. Therefore the aims of your Congress as an educational forum, a training ground for young doctors and maximise liaison with medical circles in other countries are laudable. The concept of a world family of doctors is still apparently distant, yet the crucible of world

events dictates the need for regional co-operation in this interdependent world. I therefore welcome all our colleagues from outside Singapore. Our relationship, especially with our Malaysian counterparts, has been close and I am confident that meetings of this nature will enhance the ties that already bind us.

I have no doubt that the variety of papers to be presented will stimulate lively discussion and the many man-hours spent in planning and execution will prove to have been very worthwhile. I am also confident that the many friendships that have been formed and the new ones that will be cultivated during the next four days will stand you in good stead in the coming years.

I also take this opportunity to offer my personal congratulations to Professor Sir Gordon Ransome, Professor Emeritus, University of Singapore and Mr Yeoh Ghim Seng, ex-Professor of Surgery and since 1970 Speaker of the Republic of Singapore Parliament. I wish to state that they richly deserve the honour the Academy is bestowing on them this evening. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted once more to be among you and have much pleasure in declaring open the 12th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine.

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