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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT SHEARES AT THE OPENING CEREMONY  
OF THE 6TH ASIA AND OCEANIA CONGRESS OF ENDOCRINOLOGY  
AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON SUNDAY, 22 JAN 78 AT 6.00 PM

The discipline of endocrinology pervades all aspects of the science and practice of medicine. It engages the attention not only of geneticists, physiologists, biochemists, and clinical scientists but also of veterinary surgeons, zoologists and botanists - in fact all those concerned with the study of biological systems invariably have to contend with the subject of endocrinology.

Those charmed by the intricacies of the subtle balance and possible control of hormones dedicate themselves to the study of the subject and become endocrinologists. Others have learnt to live with its frequent application to their work. However, all will agree on the increasing importance of the science and the application of endocrinology in clinical work. As testimony to this remark I observe this large gathering of delegates drawn from a very wide spectrum of professional interests.

From the clinical standpoint, there are clearly specific problems in endocrinology which are peculiar to certain geographical regions. This must indeed have been an important reason for the institution of regional congresses, such as this one, which provides a forum for discussion and an opportunity for sharing of knowledge and experience of endocrinologists from Asia and Oceania. This geographical region is of course enormous particularly if considered in terms of its population. And as population control is a pressing problem of immense magnitude and great importance it is natural that endocrine methods of fertility control should form an important component of the proceedings of the Congress and the workshops pertaining to the Congress.

Another area that calls for in-depth study at this Congress is diabetes mellitus which has many distinctly regional or ethnic characteristics, even right down at the level of immunogenetics. Distinct clinical and epidemiological features of this disease have been known for some time. The implications are of great practical importance since diabetes mellitus, undisputedly the commonest endocrine disorder, figures prominently not only in the work of the physician but also in the practice of surgery and obstetrics and gynaecology. Any advance in the early detection and in the management of diabetes mellitus stands to benefit a very significant proportion of patients and this Congress provides an ideal focal point for discussion, evaluation and dissemination of these advances. I shall not attempt to enumerate all the problems which will undoubtedly come under scrutiny by the experts in the next few days, but I should like to wish them success in directing their expertise to the solution of mundane but urgent problems.

Singapore with a population of 2.25 million will not have a need to develop separate departments of clinical endocrinology in our hospitals. Physicians, surgeons, obstetricians and gynaecologists will be encouraged, however, to pursue their interest in endocrinology relevant to their speciality. These specialists can, therefore, pursue their interest in endocrinology within the framework of existing departments of the hospitals. Disease conditions which merit support for research will be those of practical importance. Diabetes mellitus and thyroid disorders are two common endocrine afflictions seen in this country. The remaining types of endocrine disorders form a very small proportion of patients that need attention in our hospitals and out-patient clinics.

There is a need to continue encouraging a better understanding of the endocrinology of the female sex organs and its application, particularly in the use of oral contraceptives for family planning purposes. Multi-pronged approaches to population control in this country have been adopted. The use of the pill has been the pillar of the programme for many years. Continued research and understanding of various hormones which could contribute to the better care of women in the fertile age group who wish to practise family planning would help to consolidate further national policies in this direction.

It is a compliment to note that the organizers have not overlooked the drawbacks of too insular an approach and that endocrinologists from outside the region have been encouraged to participate, compare problems, pool expertise and to explore ways and means of inter-regional cooperation. In that respect, this Congress is extremely fortunate in having many competent endocrinologists of international repute among the participants from countries outside the Asia Oceania Region. Their contribution will no doubt complement the efforts of the experts of our region and add an extra dimension to the benefits and achievement of the Congress.

On the academic front, endocrinology has made great strides as a result of application of the techniques of basic sciences. Of all the clinical specialties, endocrinology is specially amenable to study by the methods of protein chemistry and immunology. The award of nobel prize in medicine to three endocrinologists last year testifies to the fundamental advances achieved in recent years. Of even more general interest is the discovery of neuro-transmitter substances in the brain that firmly establishes the vital link between the brain and the endocrine systems. Some of these substances affect the state of the mind and influence mood and may indeed prove ultimately to be the bridge between the mind and the body.

Singapore is happy and proud to host the sixth of this series of congresses which was inaugurated in 1959 in Japan and then nurtured at 4-yearly intervals in Australia, the Philippines, New Zealand, India and now in Singapore. I feel confident that the fine traditions and high standards of the Asia and Oceania Congress of Endocrinology will satisfy the expectations of delegates as the proceedings should prove to be fruitful, instructive and memorable. On this optimistic note I now declare the Sixth Asia and Oceania Congress of Endocrinology and Trade Exhibition open.

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