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MINISTRY OF HEALTH PRESS RELEASE

MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY

(PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE & MINISTRY OF HEALTH)

MEETS THE SINGAPORE TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE ORGANISATIONS COORDINATING COMMITTEE (STCMOCC)

The Singapore Traditional Chinese Medicine Organisations Coordinating Committee (STCMOCC) invited Mr Chan Soo Sen, Parliamentary Secretary (Prime Minister's Office & Ministry of Health) to address them on 14 August 99. Mr Chan Soo Sen delivered a speech in Mandarin (Please see Annex A). An English translation of the speech is attached at Annex B.

Following the speech, Mr Chan had a dialogue session with the STCMOCC council members. The session, which lasted for one and a half hours, was conducted in an atmosphere of openness and sincerity.

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In essence, STCMOCC expressed their support to the issues touched upon in the speech, in particular the move to eventually register all TCM practitioners, to assure their professional standard and image, as well as to safeguard the interest of the public and patients. They also appreciated the fact that Ministry of Health (MOH) had taken them into confidence in government's efforts to upgrade and register TCM practices, and for offering to seek their input while formulating policies related to TCM in Singapore. They accepted Mr Chan's point that the next 3-5 years would be crucial in establishing a solid and sound framework for the future development of TCM, and pledged to support MOH's effort to improve TCM practice in Singapore.

During the dialogue, Mr Chan also encouraged STCMOCC to aim towards establishing itself as the credible and authoritative body representing the mainstream TCM community in Singapore. He told the STCMOCC council members that MOH would like to have STCMOCC as the single point of contact when seeking input on TCM

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matters. The more credible and authoritative it becomes, the better STCMOCC can play the role of the catalyst to facilitate the development of TCM in Singapore. To achieve this, STCMOCC must earn the respect and support of its member organisations by establishing its own process of consultation and decision-making. The member organisations should give full support to decisions which are reached through this decision making process at STCMOCC. Disagreements over minor points should not slow down decision making on major issues, lest such indecisiveness should undermine the cohesion and credibility of STCMOCC.

Responding, STCMOCC agreed it would strive towards strengthening itself to undertake this challenge. STCMOCC would cooperate and work with MOH towards the regulation and registration of TCM practitioners, starting from acupuncturists. It would also work with MOH to upgrade the practices of TCM. STCMOCC should work towards good professional ethics and high standard of practice among the TCM practitioners, so as to safeguard public interest and confidence.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

16 AUGUST 1999

(Chinese speech not included)

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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY  
SECRETARY (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE & MINISTRY  
OF HEALTH), TO THE SINGAPORE TRADITIONAL CHINESE  
MEDICINE ORGANIZATIONS COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
(STCMOCC) ON SATURDAY, 14 AUG 1999 AT 10.00 AM AT  
CHUNG HWA FREE CLINIC, 640 LORONG 4 TOA PAYOH

(English Translation)

Since its inception in 1995, the Singapore Traditional Chinese Medicine Organisations Coordinating Committee (STCMOCC) has made significant contribution towards promoting communication and networking between TCM Organisations in Singapore. Over the past four years, the Coordinating Committee has achieved three concrete results:

- (a) Implemented a 6-year TCM course in 1996. This is a step forward in improving

the professional standard of TCM practice in Singapore;

(b) Compiled a list of acupuncturists and TCM practitioners in 1997. This will serve as useful reference for the eventual registration of acupuncturists and TCM practitioners;

(c) Drawn up a code of ethics and disciplinary procedures in 1997. This would contribute towards maintaining the good image of the TCM community.

2 Although Western medicine is, and will continue to be, the mainstream of healthcare in Singapore, TCM remains important to a large number of Singaporeans. In recent years, TCM has been attracting greater interest and attention in the West. TCM practices, such as acupuncture and therapeutic massage, have become increasingly popular. More Westerners, concerned about the side effects of Western drugs, are turning to traditional medicine. Such trends are good for the development of TCM. I believe that in years to come, TCM will also gain greater popularity in Singapore. Our TCM community here can therefore look forward to good opportunities.

3 To benefit from the opportunities, our TCM community must always raise its professionalism and image, so as to assure the confidence of the customers and patients. And with more people using TCM, the Government must ensure that public interests are safeguarded. Hence the TCM community and the Government share the common goal of further improving the standard and ethics of TCM practice in Singapore, and to deal with and punish the black sheep whose misconduct undermines the image of the TCM community and patients' interests. I hope the STCMOCC and MOH strengthen our cooperation and communication towards achieving our common goal.

4 An important step towards ensuring high standard is the professional registration of TCM practitioners. The registration of acupuncturists is expected to commence in the middle of year 2000. Registration of other TCM practitioners will follow in stages. Preparation for such registration will gather momentum in the next 12 months. The more immediate measures to be taken include:

- (a) Drawing up a set of criteria and procedures for registration;
- (b) Implementing a pre-registration examination for acupuncturists;
- (c) Introducing pre-examination training courses for acupuncturists;
- (d) Introducing TCM pre-examination courses to prepare registrants  
for TCM practitioners' registration examination in due course.

5 These important tasks will have to be completed within the next 12 months. MOH has signed an MOU with the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (SATCM) of the People's Republic of China. A Sino-Singapore Committee on Cooperation in TCM has also been formed. Singapore will, through such cooperation, tap on China's experience and expertise in managing and regulating TCM practice, and come

out with our own regulations to safeguard public interests and safety. We will also establish criteria for registration, and formulate a system of examination and training plans. At the same time, MOH would also like to seek constructive views from the STCMOCC so that we can together put in place regulations which suit Singapore's conditions, can safeguard public interests, and are accepted and supported by our TCM community.

6 This is no easy task. But I hope and believe that STCMOCC will be able and willing to take up this challenge and work with MOH. Together we can set up a regulatory environment favourable to TCM's future development. MOH plans to send a mission to visit TCM organizations in China and Hong Kong in late October 1999 to learn more about their practical work experience. I would like to invite members of the STCMOCC to join, in a self-paying basis, the mission to learn from their experience in TCM management and strengthen mutual contact and understanding.

7 Before the departure of the mission, MOH will forward the main points of the draft regulations for the registration of acupuncturists to STCMOCC for your consideration. If members of the STCMOCC are prepared to take part in the mission to China, we can even exchange views during the trip. MOH plans to finalise the registration procedures of acupuncturists in November 1999. Work on preparation of pre-registration examination and pre-examination training programmes can then start in early 2000. This scheduling will help ensure a smooth registration exercise.

8 I hope STCMOCC members seize the opportunity, see the big picture, put aside minor differences, and cooperate with MOH. To meet the challenges of TCM in the 21st century, let us raise the professional standard of TCM in Singapore. Let us first concentrate on the tasks of training, appraising and registering acupuncturists. This will lay a solid foundation for the registration of other TCM practitioners.

9 If we cooperate well in the acupuncturist registration exercise, this good experience can serve as a model for the registration of other TCM practitioners later.

10 More importantly, the process of STCMOCC and MOH working together to formulate registration procedures will help strengthen our communications. It would also lead to greater understanding, cohesion, and cooperation among STCMOCC members. This would give us greater confidence towards enhancing the standard of TCM practice. Members of the public who choose TCM will receive better services, and feel more confident and secure.

11 We need to set our sights further afield. If STCMOCC can take advantage of the window in the next twelve months to:

- Strengthen cooperation and networking,
- Positively promote TCM's professionalism plus image,
- Safeguard public interests,

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- Encourage positive competition,
- Build up an international network,
- Step up research,
- Open up new markets,

then the 21st century will be a new and bright era for TCM in Singapore. Our TCM community will have an opportunity to scale greater heights.

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