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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE &  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH), AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE CANCER HELPLINE ON TUESDAY, 28  
SEP 99 AT 10.00 AM AT THE

NATIONAL CANCER CENTRE, 11 HOSPITAL DRIVE

Good Morning

Prof Soo Khee Chee

Director

National Cancer Centre

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very happy to join you this morning to launch the Cancer Helpline. I  
would like to congratulate the National Cancer Centre for this innovative and caring

gesture. I hope that the Helpline could help our public understand cancer, help manage their fear, and help build their confidence.

2 Cancer is the number one killer in Singapore, accounting for 26% of all deaths. To a man-in-the-street, cancer is a horrifying disease. To be told that one has cancer is like to be told of a death sentence. So people do not want to talk about cancer. Sometimes this feeling of denial is carried to extreme. It is not easy to convince someone to go for cancer screening, because of the fear that a positive outcome will be hard to accept. We hear of patients who have lumps in the breast but who do not want to talk about it. We also know of close family members pleaded with the doctors not to tell their loved ones the diagnosis of cancer. They are fearful that the fact would be too depressing for the patient.

3 I visited a colleague who was diagnosed to be in the final stage of liver cancer, and would have only few months to live. His wife pleaded with me not to reveal his condition to him. Throughout the visit, he was happily telling me he was fine and would be leaving hospital in two days' time. He talked about his plans after retirement in six months' time. It was a very upsetting experience for me throughout the visit. I was even more upset when I attended his funeral four months later, recalling his jolly mood that afternoon during the visit.

4 Denial is no escape from reality. Denial leads to inaction. In the case of a disease like cancer, inaction leads to lost opportunity and deterioration. Ultimately it becomes a death sentence. I hope that through the setting up of the Cancer Helpline, more people can be encouraged to face up to the reality of cancer. Through the Helpline, they find out more about cancer, to be given advice and encouragement, and to take appropriate action. Our Cancer Helpline must build up a good reputation as being a personalised, anonymous, confidential and professional service.

5 While it is important to give information and advice, let's also remember a desirable outcome of the Helpline is also to encourage more callers to talk more. They will feel better about seeking help from the Helpline. If more are encouraged to talk, there will be less self-denial. They will feel more empowered and will seek the necessary help. The Helpline may end up being a Lifeline for some.

6 Other than benefiting the patients and their family members, the Helpline will also benefit National Cancer Centre staff professionally. They will learn about the human element and social aspects of cancer. They will feel more confident when interacting with their patients and family members in the Centre. The experience is mutually enriching for all parties.

7 Once again, I would like to congratulate the National Cancer Centre for providing Cancer Helpline. Through education, it would help in the prevention and early treatment of cancer. I am pleased to officially launch the Cancer Helpline.

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