

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR WAN HUSSIN ZOOHRI, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (HEALTH AND CULTURE) AT THE OPENING OF THE ARTIFICIAL LIMB CENTRE AT TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL ON SATURDAY, 19 DECEMBER '81 AT 10.30 AM

The concept of an Artificial Limb Centre is not new to Singapore. Indeed the first was established in 1952 at the Singapore General Hospital prompted mainly by the large numbers of poliomyelitis victims which required splints to be made at short notice.

Shortly after, it was decided that the centre should enlarge its functions further to that of fitting of artificial limbs. An appliance maker was then sent abroad for training to become a qualified prosthetist and orthotist. Concurrently, appliance makers were sent for training at the Singapore Polytechnic.

Over the years as disease patterns changed, poliomyelitis became non-existent. However, other problems related to artificial limb arose. These were amputations, especially of the lower limbs, due to complications of diabetes and degenerative diseases. Further, injuries to the hand and spine brought about mainly by industrial and other accidents began to increase. So did the demand for the services of the artificial limb centre increased.

This need to upgrade the unit was recognised and a review of the unit was undertaken in 1971 by a specially invited consultant from Australia. He was Dr Robert Klein, the Director of the Central Development Unit which was concerned especially with development and research of artificial limbs. Rightly he indicated that the premises of the unit was grossly inadequate as the unit was housed in a temporary structure built during the Japanese Occupation. He further reported that the outmoded equipment required upgrading and the staff, most of whom had learnt their skills through apprenticeship, required proper training. In addition,

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he felt that the unit should serve the needs of the whole of Singapore rather than serving only the patients at SGH.

With these recommendations in mind, it was proposed to re-site this centre at Tan Tock Seng Hospital for the following reasons:-

- (a) The Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, which is also the National Centre for spinal injuries, is located in TTSH. Besides patients with spinal injuries, this Centre also admits for rehabilitation patients with strokes, multiple injuries, amputations and head injuries. The majority of these patients require prostheses and orthoses of one kind or another and having the ALC in the same hospital is of great advantage.
- (b) As the numbers of lower limb amputees increase, it was realised that treatment of these patients does not end with the fitting of a prosthesis. Rehabilitation plays a very important role in educating the patient in the use of the prosthesis and in returning him to a useful life. Hence siting the ALC close to the Rehabilitation Centre helps to fulfil this requirement of total patient care.

The workload of the ALC has gradually increased over the years. In 1975, the number of jobs done by the centre was 3,089 while in 1980, it has increased to 3,703, a rise of 20 per cent. Despite this increase in the workload, the average waiting time for major prostheses and orthoses has been reduced due to improved efficiency and fabrication techniques. For example, the average waiting time for an above-knee prosthesis was six weeks in 1977 but only four weeks in 1980. Similarly, the average waiting time for a below-knee prosthesis was reduced from four weeks in 1977 to three weeks in 1980.

With the improved facilities and better machinery in the new ALC, it is hoped that the waiting time for prostheses and orthoses can be reduced further.

Despite the increase in the number of jobs done in the ALC, one suspects that the centre and its facilities are underutilized. As an illustration, the number of patients admitted to public hospitals for hand injuries in 1978 was 1,329 whereas in 1980, the number was 1,605 - that is, an increase of 21 per cent. Yet the number of hand orthoses issued by the ALC dropped from 116 in 1978 to 103 in 1980 - a decrease of 12 per cent. It is obvious that a number of patients who might have benefited from hand orthoses were not given the prescription by the attending doctor. The centre is therefore, in the process of compiling a handbook on the various types of prostheses and orthoses available and the principles of prescription. In this way, it is hoped that the facilities of the ALC will be maximally utilized.

In keeping with the concept of total patient care, the ALC has begun conducting Amputee Clinics. A team of specialists comprising an orthopaedic surgeon, a rehabilitation physician, a prosthetist, a physiotherapist or occupational therapist and a nurse, pool their resources in treating the amputee in an attempt to return him to as useful a life as possible within the shortest possible time. As far as is known, this team approach to the problems of the amputee is the only one of its kind in the Republic.

To ensure that our substantial investment in building and equipping this new ALC is fully exploited, we should seriously think about upgrading the staff of the centre. Suitably qualified candidates may be sent abroad to train in prosthetics and orthotics. Similarly, we should encourage some of our younger surgeons to seriously consider taking up prosthetics and orthotics as a subspeciality. To those who take up this challenge, I am sure a satisfying and rewarding career lies ahead of them.

With the better facilities available in the new ALC, we should also look into the possibility of making this a Regional Training Centre for technicians in prosthetics and orthotics. At present, there is none in the ASEAN Region and perhaps we can take the lead in this field. We can invite experts from Japan and other developed nations to come here to conduct the courses. In this way, our own staff can also be upgraded in their knowledge and skills. This is an area which could be further developed along the line of making Singapore a Regional Centre on Medical Excellence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it now gives me great pleasure to declare the Artificial Limb Centre open.

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