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**SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,  
AT THE NURSES GRADUATION CEREMONY AT THE SINGAPORE  
CONFERENCE HALL ON WEDNESDAY, 16 MAY 1984 AT 11.00 AM**

This Graduation Ceremony is scheduled to take place during "Nurses Week" which is an annual series of activities organized by the nursing community to remind themselves of their commitment to "Service before Self" and to upgrade the quality of the nursing care and nursing services they provide to the community. It is fitting therefore that I use this opportunity to say something about nursing as a career, the problems of nurses training, the work that trained nurses have to do, and their usefulness in our society.

Nursing is no ordinary job. Not everyone is attracted to nursing as a career. The work is hard. The nurses' energy and patience are often strained to the limit by long hours and night shifts and by having to deal with difficult patients and demanding relatives. Anyone wishing to find satisfaction and fulfilment in a nursing career must enjoy helping others and be prepared to go through endless trouble and hardship to see that a job is done well. Without kindness, sympathy, and understanding one cannot be a good nurse.

For the last few years we have had practically no unemployment. Anyone who is not too choosy can find reasonably well paid employment. This has not always been so. Not too long ago unemployment was a major problem. How things have changed? The success of our efforts to improve our material well-being can however have adverse consequences. It can, for example, make people fastidious

about what work they should do. It can harden people's feelings towards others. It can deprive some members of the younger generation of such ideals as humanity and charity, or dampen their attitude towards social service and personal sacrifice for the welfare of others.

We are indeed fortunate that in spite of its difficulties and hardships the popularity of nursing has not declined to such an extent that we need to depend on foreigners to be nurses. The Ministry of Health continues to attract many applicants to be trained as nurses although over the last two or three years there were not as many as it would like. It is also true that many who complete their training do not remain long in the service to make nursing a full career. This is in the nature of our dynamic society. We cannot prevent people from moving to what they deem to be better prospects. For as long as the trained nurses after leaving the service continue to make use of their skills and experience in the community, be it full-time or part-time, all is not lost. Let us hope that more young people will come forward to be trained as nurses.

Trained nurses will always be an asset in our society. They are very much better prepared to look after the sick. They bring relief to pain and suffering. They provide better care for the very young and the aged sick. They are well qualified to give advice on how to maintain good health, to adopt wholesome habits, and to ensure physical fitness and general well-being. As our population begins to age, there will be more need for nursing skills to assist the increasing numbers of older people in our midst.

The Ministry of Health aims to encourage people to be more self-reliant and to extend its training and health education programmes to a wider section of the population. It is necessary that our citizens make more personal efforts to maintain good health.

Many of the major killer diseases in our society have no cure. But with proper precautions and early adoption of a proper lifestyle they may be prevented. People should be taught to accept that where sickness is concerned, prevention is better than cure. All these objectives will be better achieved with more trained nurses in our community or when more people are given health education and proper advice on health care by trained nurses.

The Ministry of Health has for many years been training as many nurses as its resources permit. The heavy costs incurred by the State in training nurses will not be wasted even if trained nurses do not continue in service for very long. The returns will come in the form of a healthier and more robust population; better care and nutrition for the very young; improved physical fitness, a more healthy lifestyle for increasing numbers of people; a more advantageous headstart for the next generation; and adequate care for the dependent elderly and the aged sick within the community.

We must therefore be grateful to the many young men and women, like those who graduate today, who still have the courage of their convictions to want to help others. We appreciate their spirit of care and concern for others when they choose to train to be nurses to render service to the society. My advice to the 307 new nurses is that the completion of their nursing training is but the attainment of the first rung in their achievement ladder. There is much more to learn in the form of skills and practical experience.

The Ministry will have prepared various career development programmes and made available many opportunities for their further training and advancement. Selected nurses can go on overseas scholarships or to further training in specialized fields in other countries. Eventually for

those who receive advanced training or who have gained specialized experience, the prospects of promotion will be excellent.

For those who wish to branch off into non-hospital work, there will be a wide range of choice available either in primary health care in the clinics, in maternity and child welfare work, in specialized forms of nursing, in health education, school health service or in home nursing foundation work, and many others. Wherever our nurses are posted they will be faced with problems and challenges. They must respond with diligence and initiative to surmount whatever difficulties that come their way.

In whatever field they decide to make their career, our nurses will have to deal with human beings and human problems. Routine and repetition should not be the main preoccupation of the nurses' duties. The modern marvels of electronics, automation or computers can reduce routine but the work of nurses will not be mechanical or stereotyped. When dealing with human sufferings and human ailments, the human touch that the nurses bring will remain indispensable. Nurses must always remember that their patients have sensitivities and feelings even when they are sick. Therefore in attending to the sick and in helping to relieve suffering and pain, be more sympathetic and understanding.

For as long as human pain and suffering, fear and anxiety, stress and depression, sadness and misery, and a whole range of other emotions are experienced by people, we will need nurses and doctors to deal with them. With human beings and human relations being so varied and so unpredictable, there will not be any dull moment in the working life of our nurses. How do we expect our nurses to cope with all these problems? Skills and experience are essential, patience and tolerance are necessary, courtesy and a sense of humour plus a personal concern for the welfare of others will help to prepare nurses to deal with every situation.

Recently a very wise and learned professor of medicine advised our doctors and nurses to put themselves in the place of their patients, i.e. to adopt the technique of role-reversal. With the roles of the nurse and patient being reversed, the nurse will understand with sympathy the feelings, emotions, anxieties, and fears of the patient. The chances are that the patient will thus receive better attention at the hands of a kinder nurse.

Your many predecessors in the past and your present seniors in service have by their diligence and devotion established high standards and an excellent record of service. The vast majority of our population have by and large learned to respect our nurses and to hold their work in high esteem. As you join the ranks of this well respected group, you will no doubt strive to uphold the traditions of this noble calling. We wish you every success and satisfaction in your work.

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