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**SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT THE NURSES' MERIT AWARDS PRESENTATION AND GRADUATION
CEREMONY AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL
ON TUESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 1984, AT 11.00 AM**

This Graduation Ceremony is a specially significant event on two counts. Firstly, it is the second nurses graduation in one year. Secondly, on this occasion we have included the presentation of Merit Awards to a group of nurses who have done well in their work.

The policy of Government will continue to be to recruit and train as many nurses as our resources will permit. The very high turnover in the nursing service and the increasing demand for trained nurses due to the expansion of the health services in both the private and public sectors dictate that this policy must remain for many more years. In 1984 therefore we are delighted to be able to produce two batches of nurses instead of the normal one. This is due to a more vigorous recruitment drive. But credit must be given to the hard work of those officers who run the School of Nursing.

By using this Graduation Ceremony to present Merit Awards to those nurses who have distinguished themselves in their work and career, we intend to give the new nurses who graduate today some encouragement to the effect that good work and meritorious service will be recognized and rewarded.

We are passing through very interesting times. The knowledge explosion, the computer and communications revolution, and the office and factory automation will bring about tremendous changes. It is unavoidable that nursing must also be affected. Automation has not caught on in the nursing work because machines have no feelings. However the advances in medical science and technology, the increasing use of computers and electronic equipment will modernize the whole health care delivery system. The demand for nurses will not be reduced but will increase especially for the better educated and better trained ones who will fit into specialized teams. Such nurses will help out in the complicated procedures and in the use of sophisticated equipment associated with the latest clinical, surgical, therapeutic, and diagnostic techniques. Different branches of medical specialization and surgical operations like organ transplants, heart or brain surgery, or micro-surgery will demand highly skilled and experienced nurses to work as members of the team to deal with difficult tasks and to manage increasingly complex cases.

Over the years our training has mainly been in general nursing. This covers a wide range of duties in the hospitals and clinics. Some specialized training is given in particular fields like psychiatric nursing and dental nursing, but much of the nursing competence and higher skills are gained through practical experience on the job. Gradually depending on posting opportunities a small number of our nurses do become specialized.

In this age of high technology, with rapid developments in the field of surgical techniques and clinical medicine, many more specially trained and highly skilled nurses will be needed to assist and complement the doctors to play their part as supportive members of a modern health care team. These nurses will assist the doctors to make their contributions together with other team members

including medical scientists, technologists, and specialists in a wide range of different disciplines. Such team members in addition to their normal tertiary education background will also have absorbed postgraduate training in their particular area of specialization. The patients too, will generally be more affluent, better educated, and better informed. They will be more concerned over their health and more anxious about the kind of care and treatment they get.

The Ministry of Health, bearing in mind the changing circumstances, will ensure that while the normal recruitment of nurses will continue, there will also be necessary adjustments to the recruitment policy and to the existing schemes of service to attract better educated recruits into the nursing service. More serving officers will be given further training in higher professional skills to take on the more challenging and difficult responsibilities.

Eventually it may be necessary for the recruitment and training programmes to cater for two types of nurses: the normal and the highly specialized nurses. The more industrialized and advanced countries have university degree courses for entry into the nursing profession. Presumably these form the basis for the specialized nurses to assist the doctors in the more complex systems of clinical work and surgical operations. There is no reason why this form of recruitment and training should not also be available in Singapore. Avenues of advancement must however continue to be available for deserving nurses with ability and merit to gain promotion to the highest levels. Yet all the while the nature of the work will demand that there must be the complement of nurses to provide patient-oriented care in the clinics and hospitals. There must also be the nurses to work in the preventive, rehabilitative, health education, and maternity and child welfare fields. All of these will indicate that the prospects for advancement for nurses who have the training and the skills and who are prepared to work hard are much better than ever before.

Today the 520 graduands come from both the post basic and the basic nursing courses. We must extend our warmest congratulations to them for having successfully completed their training programmes. They will already be aware that the completion of this stage of training is but the first rung up the ladder of progress. They will have plenty more to learn and to experience as they get assigned to various posts and as they take on new duties.

Wherever they work they must at all times be good nurses:- humane, caring, and considerate. They must be concerned about the welfare of their patients, their needs, their fears, and their anxieties. There must be proper social interaction between the nurses and their patients to know more about their background, their strengths and weaknesses to assist the patients on the road to recovery. Nurses must take account of the fact that they now deal with better educated, better informed, more vocal and discerning patients and their relatives. Our nurses have a most promising future ahead of them, whether they are working in the clinics, in the hospitals, in preventive medicine and health education, in maternity and child health, in psychiatric or other specialized forms of nursing.

The nurses who are receiving the Merit Awards deserve every praise and recognition. They have brought special proficiency to their work and have attained standards of performance that can be said to be exemplary. Often they have rendered service beyond the call of duty in taking care of their patients. They are good examples of dedication to their calling and devotion to duty. The younger nurses can look to them for leadership, advice, and guidance. Together the young nurses and their more experienced seniors can create a better working and learning environment and build up a more cooperative, efficient, and close-knit nursing service.

The Merit Award nurses are indeed good examples for our nurses to emulate. The younger nurses can learn from them what total commitment, care and concern for the patients, and dedication to the ideals of their profession will entail. Working side by side with one instructing and guiding and the other assisting and learning on the job, they will help to maintain the highest standards of patient care and provide the quality of nursing service of which all of us can be proud.

I congratulate both the recipients of the Merit Awards and the new nurses who graduate today for their efforts and wish them every success.

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