

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR HEALTH, DR. TOH CHIN CHYE AT THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF SINGAPORE SOGETSU ASSOCIATION'S
ANNUAL FLOWER EXHIBITION ON TUESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER '77
AT 5.30 P.M. AT JURONG ROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL

24 SEP 1977

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The Ministry of Health recently interviewed 11,285 persons to ascertain their state of health. It is true that the sample is not large enough to give a true picture for the whole population but the data obtained were nonetheless indicative as the persons interviewed did not include those who were already in hospitals and represented a cross-section of the population with different socio-economic backgrounds. Among young children aged 0-14 years 9.4% were ill at the time of interview or had been sick during the last two weeks. On the other hand among persons aged 60 years and above the rate of illness was 33.1%.

This appears to be stating the obvious that the young should be healthier than the old. It is not so, however, in some developing countries where infant mortality rates are high. I attribute this low morbidity rate among infants and children to preventive health measures, increased awareness among mothers of their children's health problems because of the accessibility of maternity and child health clinics, greater concern for children because of acceptance of the two-child family, and a vastly improved environment due to better sanitation, availability of piped drinking water and removal of squatter slums. It is not surprising therefore that the number of children treated as in-patients at the St. Andrew's Mission Hospital has declined in 1976 by 20% over 1975 and for outpatients by 13.6%. Equally dramatic is the 25% decrease in the number of children requiring surgery.

This is indeed a happy trend and I hope with intensified health education and greater emphasis on primary health care the morbidity rate will decline further.

However, age /PIO,

However, age is becoming a major factor in determining population equilibrium for urban Singapore which has accepted family planning. As infant mortality declines the numbers who will reach their expected span of life will increase. This is already happening. This is why we are beginning to see more sickness or increased morbidity rates among the over 60's. Looking after the aged sick is a far more difficult problem as in most likelihood many of the over 60's will have ceased to be economically active. If they do not have savings or other means of support falling ill is a personal misfortune and they present the community with a real social problem. Lying in hospitals for long periods and occupying beds which are needed by the acutely ill is not the solution as doctors can do very little for them. The alternative to hospital care which is expensive is home nursing. The Home Nursing Foundation was established for this purpose. The services rendered by visiting nurses include

- (a) changing of surgical dressings
- (b) injections
- (c) changing of urethral catheters
- (d) bathing patients
- (e) teaching partially paralysed persons to learn to help themselves
- (f) ensuring that psychiatric patients who have been discharged are receiving their medicaments
- (g) teaching relatives of patients how to help their own kind.

Most of the patients on the books of the Home Nursing Foundation are discharged patients from hospitals and referred to by doctors but the Foundation is now getting requests for nursing services from members of the public. Such home visits by nurses have increased from 1,160 in January to 2,866 in August this year. The actual number of patients attended to increased by 215%.

Community participation in social services whether they be because of concern for the young or the old should be encouraged. This spirit of volunteerism puts soul into an otherwise materialistic urban society. Flowers bloom and fade. So it is most appropriate indeed that the Singapore Sogetsu Association should be organising this flower show to collect money for the children in the St. Andrew's Mission Hospital and for the aged who have already seen the best years of their life.

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