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SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR HEALTH, DR TOH CHIN CHYE AT
THE ROTARY CLUB WEST INSTALLATION DINNER AT
SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON 29 JUNE 1978 AT 8.00 P.M.

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Looking after the chronic sick is a problem of the family in particular and of the community in general. There is always a waiting list of patients seeking admission into chronic hospitals but the size of the problem is such that it is not possible to admit all of them. There are a total of about 560 beds for the chronic sick in government hospitals and private institutions and vacant beds occur only when patients die. As chronic patients are long stay patients priority use for hospital beds must therefore be for the treatment of acutely ill patients who can be restored to health and returned to normal life.

Social Welfare Department files showed that as at February 1978 there were 353 chronic patients waiting for admission. A recheck showed that 73 patients had already died leaving 280 cases on the official waiting list. An analysis of these 280 cases revealed that chronic patients in the age group 20-39 constituted 9.3%, 40-59 years 11.8% while those 60 years and above formed 78.9%. The size of the population aged 60 and above is 59,300. As chronic illness is more prevalent among the elderly the actual number of chronically ill patients can be quite large. Sickness and infirmity due to age are also blurred.

Doctors can do little for chronic patients. What chronic patients require is nursing care. The alternative to admitting them into expensive hospitals is to provide home nursing care.

The Home Nursing Foundation was therefore inaugurated in December 1976 to cater for the aged and chronic sick. Its objectives are to provide nursing care in the patients' own homes, to encourage public consciousness of service to the chronic sick and the aged,

to co-operate with charitable organisations in running a full scale home nursing service throughout Singapore.

In 1977 60 full-time nurses provided nursing care for 1361 patients making a total of 32,090 home visits. Their salaries are paid by the government and not from donations to the Home Nursing Foundation. The only full-time employee paid out of the Foundation's funds is the driver of the Foundation's van. Costs of medicines, surgical materials and other equipment required by patients, food distributed to the chronic sick who are indigent are paid out of donations to the Foundation. In addition to the full-time 60 visiting nurses we have 132 nurses who have volunteered to assist the Foundation in their spare time. The Board of the Foundation has agreed to reimburse these volunteers their bus travel costs and other supplementary expenditure for food for patients out of donations to the Foundation but so far they have made no claims.

The HNF nurses perform a variety of tasks. They bathe patients, dress wounds, administer injections, check that patients consume their medication, educate stroke patients to rehabilitate themselves and encourage them to be more self-dependent, feed patients through stomach tubes and oversee discharged psychiatric patients.

As the expectation of life in Singapore has increased the numbers of elderly people have also increased. We need to innovate measures to look after them when they fall ill. It is beyond our resources in terms of money and manpower to convert hospitals for short stay acute patients to house long stay chronic patients. Substitute health care has to be found for chronic patients and home nursing is most cost-effective.

The Home Nursing Foundation has been established for only 1½ years but it needs strong and continuing support so that it will become a public institution of which Singapore can be proud.

Problems encountered by the Foundation are:

- 1 Lack of funds to subsidize the elderly sick who have no financial resources.

- 2 The problems of the chronically ill are compounded should their children marry out to start their own nuclear family.
- 3 Nurses face a physical strain in their duties especially when the chronic sick have no family members who can be taught to look after their own kind.

Singapore is a city but it is a city worthwhile living in only if citizens cultivate social values and understand that individual interests are best protected by collective concern for one another. I need to emphasize that cultivation of values and expression of concern for the common weal and the disadvantaged is a task which young people including school children should be encouraged to participate with the middle-aged. Only in this way can we establish traditions and a way of life of which we can be proud as a nation.

I am heartened that the total number of donors to the Home Nursing Foundation is 187 to date. The donations range from \$10 to \$140,000. The fund-raising committee of the HNF will be organizing two shows in November this year and hopes to collect \$100,000 after deduction of costs. To achieve this the committee proposes to charge \$200 per head for one show cum dinner for 800 persons and \$100 per head for another show cum cocktails for 600 persons. The committee however needs help as \$100,000 is a large sum of money. I hope your club will give some thought whether you can co-operate with the HNF to make this fund-raising show a joint project for a national cause.
