

Singapore Government

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8 OCT 1979

Acc. No.	NARC	
79	0024	20

MC/SEP/37/79 (Health).

SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR HEALTH, DR TOH CHIN CHYE, AT
THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN
AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL ON FRIDAY,
28 SEPTEMBER 1979 AT 8.00 PM

This year's National Health Campaign calls attention to diseases which can be collectively described as diseases linked to stress situations or self-imposed by cultivating lifestyles that place the person at risk. The five diseases are respiratory disease, ischaemic heart disease (in layman's terms, heart attacks), high blood pressure, diabetes and mental illness. A survey was carried out on 299 inpatients in the medical wards at one hospital, Alexandra Hospital and 2362 patients at outpatient clinics. It was found that 36 per cent were suffering from cardiovascular diseases (heart and blood vessels), 38 per cent from diabetes and nine per cent from diseases of the lungs.

Last year cancer caused 2386 deaths of which one in five were due to cancer of the lungs. Among lung cancer patients 86 per cent were cigarette smokers, two per cent ex-smokers and 12 per cent non-smokers. The death rate from lung cancer over a period of 30 years in the U.K. and Norway has been found related to the increase in the number of cigarettes smoked per person per year. On stopping smoking, the relative risk of developing lung cancer declines so that after ten years the risk is almost as low as for the non-smoker.

Ischaemic heart disease is due to an inadequate blood supply to the muscles of the heart. There are several risk factors and cigarette smoking is one of them. For those who have had a heart attack the risk of a fatal recurrence is halved after giving up smoking.

Another disease associated with cigarette smoking is chronic bronchitis. Smokers cough more than non-smokers. Their lung function is impaired so that the volume of air inhaled and exhaled is diminished. Persons with chronic bronchitis show breathlessness and are more

predisposed to infection of the lungs. The prevalence of chronic bronchitis is very much higher when cigarette smokers are also exposed to atmospheric pollution. Thus young infants particularly those in their first year of life run a risk of developing bronchitis or pneumonia if they have parents who smoke. Coughing and sputum decrease or disappear on stopping smoking.

British physicians have calculated that in countries where smoking has been a widespread habit, it is responsible for 90 per cent of lung cancer deaths, for 75 per cent of bronchitis deaths and for 25 per cent of ischaemic heart disease deaths among men under 65 years of age.

Apart from its effects on the mortality rate, smoking results in chronic ill health. This means loss of working days, excessive demands on medical services and for hospital care.

Mental illnesses do not cause premature deaths. However, psychiatric patients are a heavy socio-economic liability to their families and to the society. The number of admissions of patients into Woodbridge Hospital has increased from 2,798 in 1975 to 4,447 in 1978 and psychiatric outpatient attendances have increased from 51,825 to 69,945 during this period. One certain way of preventing mental illness is to take definite action for the mentally ill not to propagate themselves. Schizophrenia, a severe form of mental illness, can be inherited. History is full of examples of madness transmitted from one generation to another in a family. The story of Mary and Charles Lamb, the brother and sister team who wrote the Tales of Shakespeare, is one such example. Mary inherited mental illness from her mother. Charles himself was for a short time mentally deranged and the curse of madness acted as a shadow throughout his life. Madness also ran in various members in different generations in the royal family of the Roman Empire.

Studies have shown that while in the general population, the risk of getting schizophrenia is 0.9 per cent, the risk is 16.4 per cent in children of one schizophrenic parent and 39.4 per cent in children of two schizophrenic parents. The only way to prevent schizophrenia from being transmitted is sterilization. Parents and guardians who do not wish to be landed with the burden of looking after schizophrenic grand children would be well advised to seek advice on sterilization for schizophrenic children.

The activities of the National Health Campaign 1979 will, I hope, make us all aware of self-cultivated lifestyles, which can lead to illness, and to make us a more health conscious society.

It is with great pleasure that I now declare the campaign open.
