

Singapore Government

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Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354/3362207/3362271

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SPEECH BY MR TEH CHEANG WAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AT THE PRESENTATION OF AWARDS TO CHAMPION BLOOD DONORS
AT THE SCHOOL OF NURSING AUDITORIUM, SINGAPORE GENERAL HOSPITAL
ON FRIDAY, 23 APRIL '82 AT 5.00 PM

It gives me great pleasure to be here for this evening's award presentation ceremony in honour of 55 champion blood donors.

The life-giving properties of blood have been known since ancient times. Early man learnt that anyone badly injured in a hunting accident or a fight died if he lost a lot of blood. Thus, throughout history, blood has been given all sorts of mystical qualities. These false beliefs persist even today and form a formidable barrier to efforts to get people to donate blood. It is quite common for patients to object to a doctor taking a small syringe of blood for tests, because they think that even this small loss is going to weaken them. When it comes to asking people to donate blood, these fears become even more intensified although they are totally unfounded. I am told that the amount of blood taken in one donation is replenished by the body very quickly: the plasma within a day and the cells in two weeks. So far, we have been very lucky that there are Singaporeans who are willing to come forward to give blood voluntarily.

Last year, the Blood Transfusion Service received 55,038 blood donations. This was 1,225 donations more than in 1980. However, for the same period, blood transfusions given to patients rose by 2,330 units. This accelerated demand for blood will continue as both the public and private health sectors are growing rapidly. The demand for blood is increasing at a faster rate than the increase in supply. If the trend continues, it means that the Blood Bank will have no reserves for emergencies. Patients who need blood transfusions will have to wait and surgical operations will have to be postponed.

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There is thus an urgent need for more people to become blood donors. The Blood Bank's present donor panel of only 36,684 persons cannot support the blood requirements of a population of over two million people. The champion donors present this evening are a fine example of public-spirited Singaporeans. However, the strength and health of the nation depend on the quality of all the citizens and not only a minority. If the citizens are selfish and uncaring, the society they create will be cold or even inhumane. On the other hand, if the citizens are loyal, patriotic and take their social duty seriously, a strong, caring society emerges. Our voluntary blood donation system can function well only in a conducive social climate as it needs the support of the whole community for its blood requirements.

The high standard of medical care which we have in Singapore makes heavy demands on the Blood Bank for various blood components which can be processed from a single donation. For example, concentrates of red blood cells can be prepared to treat patients with severe anaemia. Patients with life-threatening infection and haemorrhage may need specially prepared concentrates of white blood cells, blood platelets and blood clotting factors. Special techniques can be used to deep-freeze and store blood and plasma for several years. Although medical science has made such great advances in the field of blood transfusion technology, there is still no artificial substitute which has all the properties of human blood. The Blood Bank still has to depend on human beings for blood. It should not take an emergency or a disaster before people think of giving blood. The drama of saving lives goes on everyday in our hospitals. Each life is precious and each gift of blood could mean the difference between life and death. By giving blood regularly, Singaporeans help to ensure that blood is always available when it is needed. One day it may be a friend or someone in the family who needs the blood.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend those organisations and firms whose staff are among the regular blood donors. Deserving special mention is the Singapore Airlines group whose staff members made about 1,000 donations last year. Thanks are also due to the Singapore Armed Forces whose personnel donated

30 per cent of the total blood collection last year. The examples of SIA and the SAF should be emulated by other commercial organisations, youth and community groups and institutions of higher learning. Donating blood is one of the best ways to inculcate in our youths the importance of fulfilling their duty to society.

Finally, on behalf of the Government of Singapore, I would like to extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude to all our regular and champion blood donors for their life-sustaining gift.

Thank you.

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