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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR
EDUCATION, AT THE OPENING OF THE ANTI-DRUG ABUSE
AND GLUE-SNIFFING EXHIBITION AT LIANG COURT
ON SATURDAY, 7 MAY 1988 AT 5 PM

In the mid 1970s, heroin addiction appeared in Singapore and threatened to reach epidemic proportions. It was fuelled by the spread of drugs from Vietnam and Thailand as a result of the Vietnam War.

However, thanks to the introduction of tough laws directed against drug traffickers and addicts, the problem was checked and contained.

The recent resurgence of the drug problem due to "ant" traffickers who come across the causeway shows that the drug menace is by no means over. We must be constantly vigilant and firm in enforcing our laws to keep the problem down.

Glue and inhalant abuse is of more recent origin than the hard drugs. Although the specific effects may be different, the end result is the same - compulsive addiction leading to eventual death.

How serious is the glue and inhalant abuse problem? The following figures speak for themselves. In 1984, the number of such cases detected were 763. By 1987, the number of cases had risen to 1,112. One problem is that glues and inhalants are common commercial items and can be obtained in many shops.

The new law passed in Parliament recently will help to curb the problem of glue and inhalant abuse. First, the law requires that suspects must undergo a blood

test and confirmed cases be put under regular supervision. If they persist in their abuse, they will be detained in a rehabilitation centre for treatment. This can be for up to one year.

Secondly, shops selling inhalants or glue to known addicts will be requested not to sell the items to the addicts. They may also be required to keep a register of people they sell the items to. If they persist in selling to known addicts, they will be prosecuted.

Such measures will help to curb the spread of inhalant abuse. However, the best safeguard must be the home itself. If the family is vigilant and takes early action when it notices that one of its sons is behaving strangely, then the problem can be nipped in time. By the time the addict reaches a stage when he is heavily intoxicated and is suffering brain and kidney damage, it is too late - perhaps even for rehabilitation.

Many glue and inhalant abuse victims are teenagers. Some will be in school. The symptoms of abusers can be publicised in anti-glue and inhalant abuse campaigns in our schools and vocational institutes. This will alert teachers and enable them to spot potential abusers so that action can be taken.

Finally, members of the public can help also by reporting youths who appear to behave strangely or who congregate in dark, out of the way corners. Some people feel that it is not their business to report. If they do not, how can the problem be contained and prevented from spreading? We have a duty to report such cases both for the sake of the addicts themselves as well as for the good of society.