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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE (EDUCATION),
AT THE MALAYSIA AIRLINES (MAS) CELEBRITY TENNIS
GALA DINNER IN AID OF THE HOME NURSING FOUNDATION
AT HOTEL HYATT REGENCY ON THURSDAY, 26 MAY 1988 AT 8.00 PM

I am very pleased to be present at this charity function organised by the Singapore Home Nursing Foundation. This function is linked to the MAS Celebrity Tennis Gala Tournament to which several celebrity stars have come specially to play for charity. I want to thank them on behalf of those who will receive the benefit of the funds raised by this function - namely the aged sick and the non-ambulant aged who are being cared for by the Home Nursing Foundation.

The Home Nursing Foundation is not a large organisation. It has only 361 members including volunteers and full-time nurses. However, this group of people are able to attend to the needs of quite a number of old people - about 3300. What is even more revealing is the quality of the service that they provide. This is best indicated by the number of visits that are made to each client or patient. Last year, the HNF volunteers made over 42,000 visits to the people that they are caring for. This averages out to more than 12 visits a year per client or at least once a month. We can see that the work of the HNF is not a token but is thorough and sustained.

As Singapore's population slowly ages, I can see the need for the kind of services provided by the HNF increasing. The vast majority of old people will be living with their own families and will be cared for by them.

This is the best way. It agrees with our Asian values. But there will always be some who need extra help because of illness or physical disability. This is where the HNF has a key role to play by providing help in the home context. This seems to me to be the ideal approach in which the old person is still living at home with his or her family but has access to outside nursing and professional help of the type provided by the HNF. This would be better than asking the old person to go to an old folks home, unless he is destitute and there are no better alternatives.

From the statistics provided by the HNF, the number of clients in the care of the HNF has risen from about 2,000 in 1978/79 to 3300 in 1986/87. This is an increase of over 1.6 times. I do not see any reason why the trend should slow down given that our population is slowly ageing.

I believe that the work of the HNF and others providing a similar service should be encouraged. They need both more volunteers and more funds. There are perhaps many church and religious groups who do not yet see this as an area of direct service. They could consider getting involved. Likewise, funds are needed. Singaporeans are generous. Instead of waiting for the income tax department to take away your money to be disbursed to meet social needs, would it not be better to keep taxes low and let individuals donate directly to social needs and charities with tax deductibility as an incentive!

May I conclude by wishing the HNF success in the good work that it is doing.

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