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SPEECH BY MR WEE TEH WEE,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE,
AT THE SINGAPORE CANCER SOCIETY'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER
AT THE RAFFLES BALLROOM, WESTIN STAMFORD
ON FRIDAY, 28 JULY 1989 AT 8.00 PM

Cancer has become an important public health problem of our nation and so too of the world after the post war years. In the late 1950's, deaths from all forms of cancers constituted on the average, eight per cent of all deaths. Over the last five years, it has been responsible for over 22 per cent of all deaths in Singapore. Cancers of the lung, stomach and liver are the leading causes of cancer deaths in men while in women, they are cancers of the lung, breast and stomach. In 1988, cancers claimed 3,179 people, making it the leading cause of death.

The Cancer Society was established in 1964, at a time when cancer trends were rising. The early founders of the Society, some of whom are still in active service today, must be congratulated for their foresight in harnessing public support to fight this aggressive disease.

The Society has grown from a small group of public-spirited persons using borrowed premises to one that has its own office, theatre, screening clinic, minibuses for patients, and a host of educational and rehabilitative programmes that it can be proud of. In addition, the Society has raised funds for much-needed research in the continuing battle to uncover the mysteries about the disease and the ways to prevent and treat them.

Public attitudes to cancer take a long time to change. Twenty-five years ago, when knowledge was lacking and skills deficient, cancer was very much a dreaded disease. Such fears did not help the patient and relatives cope with the problem. Worse, it did not encourage patients to seek prompt attention to early warning signs. Both the Ministry of Health and Cancer Society have rightly focused their attention on public education to prevent and to detect early signs of cancers.

The anti-smoking campaign has successfully reduced the adult smokers among men in Singapore from 44 per cent in 1977 to 25 per cent in 1987. Today, about 70 per cent of all newborn in Singapore and over 90 per cent of all newborn delivered in government hospitals, are immunised against hepatitis B. This compares to a national coverage of less than 50 per cent a year ago. Talks and exhibitions to encourage Pap-smear screening for cancer of the womb and self-examination of the breasts have also been held by the Ministry in collaboration with the Cancer Society. These are examples of the endless effort to fight cancers of the lung, liver, womb and breast.

The Society has also made great strides in the area of welfare support and rehabilitative programmes. I am pleased to see that, besides providing financial aid, the Society now has three minibuses to provide needy patients with transport to and from hospital for daily treatment. This is a step in the right direction. They can cut down on expensive hospitalisation, and what is more important, they can remain at home with their loved ones. Your rehabilitative groups such as the Stoma Club, Reach to Recovery, Helping Hands, New Voice Club, Hospice Care - are all laudable endeavours. I am sure that you will need more volunteers to help out, to bring cheer to the cancer victims and their relatives.

Your theme for this 25th Anniversary is very appropriate. The Cancer Society cannot do all the work on

its own. The services that your members and volunteers provide cannot be purchased with money alone. They must come from the heart, and I know that the more support you get, the more you can do for the people.

Cancer is not a disease that can be treated by a single surgeon or physician. It needs a comprehensive approach by teams of experts who, together, understand cancer in all its forms and are confident in treating cancer in whatever age group or area of the body it may occur. These specialists must be experienced with, and have access to the modern diagnostic technology needed to identify the type and extent of a patient's disease. They must be well versed in all methods of cancer treatment - surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and immunotherapy - and know how each is best used separately or in combination.

With active research programmes, patients can benefit from the latest treatment methods. All this will be realised in the Government's recently opened Oncology Centre at the Singapore General Hospital. Expertise in the diagnosis, treatment and research will be compassionately combined for the benefit of each patient.

The magnificent anniversary donation of \$750,000.00 to this Centre by the Singapore Cancer Society is an indication that the Society intends to continue this tradition of service to the community and the nation. On behalf of the people of Singapore, I thank the Society for this generous donation.

Let us all Singaporeans, heed this call - "WITH THE NATION AGAINST CANCER". On this note let us also warmly congratulate the Singapore Cancer Society on its 25th Anniversary and offer our best wishes for continuing successes in all its endeavours and projects in the years ahead.

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