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ADDRESS BY MR YEO CHEOW TONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT THE TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY
ON 4 SEPTEMBER 93 AT 10.30 AM

Ladies & Gentlemen

This morning's ground breaking ceremony represents another milestone in the development of Singapore's medical services. The building of the new Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) demonstrates the government's commitment to ensuring that Singaporeans will continue to enjoy affordable, high quality medical care in the years to come.

2. There are many good reasons for Singaporeans to be proud of our healthcare system. Our people are served by a comprehensive range of healthcare facilities, many of which are of world standard. Every Singaporean, regardless of his income level, has access to quality health care.

3. Our national health status is good. Singaporeans today can expect to live as long as their counterparts in the developed countries. Our infant mortality rate, at 5 per thousand births, is lower than that of the USA, which has an infant mortality rate of 9, UK with a rate of 8.4, and many other developed countries.

4. What is significant is that we have reached this high standard of health by spending 3.1% of our GDP on health care. In comparison, the US spends 14% of its GDP on health, Canada 9%, and the other developed countries between 6-9%. Their high expenditure on health care has become a huge burden on their economy. It is draining much-needed resources from important sectors such as infrastructural development and maintenance of law and order.

5. The challenge facing us is how to continue keeping our health care expenditure low, relative to our GDP. The cost of healthcare will continue to rise steadily, concomitant with increases in our salary levels. This is inevitable, since wages make up between 60% to 70% of health care costs. The cost of new high-tech medical equipment and modern drugs are also much higher. On the other hand, our economy is maturing. It will grow at a slower rate in future years.

6. We must therefore find ways to reduce the rate of increase in health care costs, and to contain the demand for medical services. Otherwise, medical expenses will take up an increasing share of household expenditure. We will then end up in the same sad situation faced by developed countries today.

Fundamental Philosophies for Healthcare

7. To slow down the rate of increase of health care costs,

my Ministry will direct its efforts at three key areas:

8. First, we will continue to nurture a healthy nation by promoting good health habits. Singaporeans work very hard at succeeding in life. But we must realise that material success is worthless if we are too sick to enjoy our success. We can reduce the chances of our falling ill. To do this, every Singaporean must take full responsibility for his or her own health, and live a healthy lifestyle. This does not require much effort at all on the part of the individual.

9. Second, we will help those who fall ill to recover quickly, by ensuring that all Singaporeans continue to have access to good and affordable basic healthcare services. To achieve this, my Ministry will ensure that we have adequate primary health care clinics and hospital beds, as well as sufficient trained medical and paramedical personnel. We will continue to provide sufficient subsidised medical facilities to serve lower income earners.

10. Third, we will continue to increase efficiency and productivity in our government and subvented medical facilities by improving on their management, and through competition and market forces.

11. With restructuring, our larger government-owned hospitals now have the autonomy to manage their operations in the most cost-effective way. They are free to innovate, to change operational procedures, to introduce cost-saving measures. They compete with each other to be more efficient and productive, and to provide a better service to patients. Yet at the same time, they co-operate closely with each other by sharing their innovations, expertise and knowledge.

12. My Ministry also monitors their purchase of expensive medical equipment, to ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication which will only lead to sub-optimal utilisation, wastage and higher costs.

Preparing for the Future: The New TTSH

13. While hospitals can upgrade their operational and organisational software, they can do little to overcome their physical constraints. Most of our old hospitals, like TTSH, were built in the days when labour was plentiful and inexpensive, when most citizens could only afford Class C wards. With their sprawling layout, it is not unusual for staff to travel a few hundred metres each time they need to go to another department or to fetch something.

14. Our old hospitals are no longer efficient to manage and operate, and are unable to meet the increasingly sophisticated expectations of Singaporeans. The government has therefore decided to rebuild Tan Tock Seng and Kandang Kerbau Hospitals, and to replace Toa Payoh Hospital with a new general hospital in Simei.

15. TTSH today occupies 32 hectares of prime land. Staff,

patients and their relatives need to walk 700 metres, or half a mile, to get from one end of the hospital to the other. In contrast, the new TTSH will only occupy less than one-fifth of the existing TTSH site. Yet, the new hospital will have 138,000 sq metres of built-in area, more than double the space available today. The excess land released will more than pay for its re-building cost of \$360 million.

16. TTSH was started in 1844 by local philanthropists to cater to the poor. Befitting its history of "service and charity", 70% of the beds in the new TTSH will be in heavily subsidized 'C' and 'B2' wards. This will allow the new hospital to continue providing good quality care for the lower income groups.

Ageing Population

17. The new TTSH has been designed to cope with the challenges posed by our rapidly ageing population. Today, 9% of the population, or about 260,000 Singaporeans, are above 60 years of age. This number will increase to 860,000 by the year 2030, making up one quarter of our population. As Singaporeans live longer, and as the number of elderly increase, chronic diseases will become more prevalent.

Neuroscience Centre

18. One chronic condition that we are already seeing increasing numbers of, is degenerative conditions of the brain. Facilities for Neurology and Neurosurgery are highly technology-based and expensive. We will need to centralise such facilities in order to avoid wasteful duplication.

19. The government has decided to locate its Neuroscience Centre in the new TTSH. The Centre will also have facilities for neuroscience research. TTSH today treats the largest number of patients with neurological conditions. It has the largest pool of specialists in the neurosciences.

20. It is therefore appropriate that TTSH will host the new Centre. Although it will build on resources already available in TTSH, the Neuroscience Centre will also be open to other specialists in the private and public sectors. By working together, they will be able to develop well integrated clinical programmes that will further enhance patient care.

Geriatric Medicine

21. As in the Neurosciences, TTSH was the first hospital to develop the speciality of Geriatric Medicine. It has the largest pool of Geriatricians, Therapists and Geriatric Nurses. TTSH will continue to enhance its expertise and treatment capabilities in this speciality. As our population matures, TTSH will have an even greater role to play in ensuring that elderly patients with complex medical problems are managed appropriately, and that they retain their mental and physical faculties for as

long as possible.

Other Focal Areas

22. Other specialities that the new TTSH will give special emphasis to include Respiratory and Rehabilitation Medicine, and Rheumatology. These are specialities that TTSH is today already well known for. With these five speciality areas, together with its other medical and surgical specialities that are already well developed, the new TTSH will no doubt be well equipped to address the medical needs of tomorrow.

23. With that, let me close by congratulating the many people at various levels involved in the planning of the new TTSH. Your hard work and vision will now be translated into physical form. Together with all of you, I look forward to the successful development of the new Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

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