

# *Singapore Government*

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**SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SPORTS, AT THE OPENING OF THE FIRST ASEAN COURSE IN SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY & PUBLIC SYMPOSIUM, (3-15 SEPTEMBER, 2000) JOINTLY ORGANISED BY INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGEING (INIA), UNITED NATIONS AND SINGAPORE ACTION GROUP OF ELDERLY (SAGE) ON SUNDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2000 AT 10.30 AM AT YWCA, FORT CANNING LODGE**

Excellencies, Professor de Bono, Director of the International Institute on Ageing (INIA);

Dr Troisi, Deputy Director, INIA

Dr Lim Chan Yong, President of the Singapore Action Group of Elders (SAGE);

Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honoured to officiate at this opening of the First ASEAN Course and Public Symposium on Social Gerontology co-organized by SAGE and the International Institute of Ageing.

2. It is indeed timely that such a course is being held in Singapore, in view of the fact that we have the second fastest ageing population in Asia, after Japan. Today, 7% of our population is 65 years and above. By the year 2030, it will increase to 19% of the population. That means 1 in 5 persons will be aged above 65 years.

3. Rapidly ageing populations like those in Singapore and Japan have far-reaching social implications in many areas, including health and long-term care, retirement practices, community facilities and patterns of government spending. We have to prepare ourselves early for the challenges of an ageing population. We need to anticipate and put in place measures that will arrest any adverse consequences before they catch us unawares. For example, we are reviewing our healthcare practices to ensure that they are adequate and sufficient to meet the needs of a greying population.

4. Professional carers such as doctors, nurses and social workers should be trained to provide a high level of care for their clients. The training and development of professional carers is a key aspect that we should consider devoting more resources to. Training is important because the quality of eldercare service delivery depends largely on the quality of the staff and professionals in the field.

5. Currently, some programmes on geriatric training are already available. Since 1999, all final year medical students at NUS must undergo training in geriatric medicine. There is now also a part-time Diploma in Geriatrics course at NUS for primary health care doctors and general practitioners. Nanyang Polytechnic conducts post-basic training in gerontological care for nurses, and its School of Health Sciences offers diploma courses in occupational therapy and physiotherapy. These initiatives are a start in the right direction, but we need to constantly review whether more can and should be done. We need to place greater emphasis on training for professional carers so that they will be able to deliver quality eldercare services. We should also put in place training programmes for service planners and public service administrators to give them a better understanding of the social implications of an ageing population. With this knowledge, they can better plan and implement policies that meet the needs and requirements of our ageing population.

6. Besides providing a high quality of training for staff and professional carers in the field of eldercare, it is also important to ensure that eldercare services are provided in an efficient and effective manner. MCDS and NCSS thus intend to introduce an evaluation system for eldercare services to determine their effectiveness. This is to ensure that these services meet the needs of the elderly and their caregivers. Details of the proposed evaluation framework will be announced when finalised.

7. The “Many Helping Hands” approach has paved the way for the active participation of voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) in the provision of services for the elderly. However, most of these VWO-run facilities cater mainly to the needs of lower income families. With an increase in the number of elderly who are better educated, more affluent and able to finance their own care needs, there is scope for greater participation of private sector providers who can provide affordable eldercare services to this group. There is a need to move away from the old model of providing services based on income level to one which is based on individual needs. Having more players in the market will also increase the availability and accessibility of community-based services to the elderly and their families. MCDS thus intends to encourage greater private sector participation in the provision of community-based eldercare services.

8. The challenges of an ageing population are multi faceted. Thus, we need to address them in an holistic manner. Therefore, I am glad to note that the 12-day Social Gerontology Course is a comprehensive programme that covers the health, economic, psychological and social aspects of ageing. We are fortunate to have the experts in the field of gerontology to share their expertise with the participants of the Course. I understand that the participants of this Course are from various ASEAN countries, and this will enable a healthy exchange of experiences and perspectives. We should continue to learn from one another.

9. To reach a wider audience and to raise greater awareness on Social Gerontology and Health Care in Old Age, today’s Symposium has been organized as a prelude to the Course. In the first part of the Symposium, Prof de Bono and Dr Triosi from the International Institute on Ageing (INIA) will give us a clearer understanding of social gerontology and how this area of study can better equip us

to address the challenges of an ageing population. Prof Kua Ee Heok, Director of SAGE's Centre for the Study of Ageing (CENSA), will also share with us the findings of a longitudinal study on health and social well being of the elderly in Singapore. The second part of the Symposium relates mainly to healthcare in old age. The speakers will cover topics like nutrition, cholesterol and ageing, dental care in old age and the ageing man.

10. Prof Kua will also be launching his latest book "Listening to 'Letter from America'" today. This book is part fact and part fiction, drawing from the experiences of his elderly relatives, friends and patients in Singapore. I understand that part of the proceeds of the sale of the book today will be donated to CENSA to enable it to continue its research on the elderly in Singapore.

11. Therefore, I now have the pleasure to declare: -

- Today's Symposium on Social Gerontology and Health Care in Old Age, and
- The First ASEAN Social Gerontology Course open.

It is also my privilege to launch the book "Listening to 'Letter from America'" written by Prof Kua Ee Heok.

I wish you all much success.

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