

## MINISTER'S ADDRESS

By Yong Nyuk Lin

"Let me begin by congratulating the Singapore Medical Association for their great initiative and drive in organising this 1st National Medical Convention and to welcome all participants, especially those representing fraternal bodies or international organisations.

"This is the 3rd occasion, at which I am privileged to address the Singapore Medical Association, and I must say that your choice of subjects for this Convention reflects your awareness of and your ability to face up to, the medical problems of our times.

"Singapore, for quite some time now has been reasonably successful in the control of many communicable and infectious diseases which, however, are still plaguing the health authorities of most other developing countries. On our part, we find ourselves having to deal with medical and health problems which are prevalent in richer and more advanced countries, but unfortunately without the benefit of their larger financial resources.

### DOCTORS IN GOVERNMENT SERVICES

"When financial resources are limited, we naturally have to determine our order of priorities. Worse still, we were expected to carry out multifarious functions whilst being grossly under-staffed, with nearly 100 vacancies out of an approved establishment of 453 doctors in 1963 (5 years ago). Only this month have we reached the satisfactory situation of a full establishment of 473 doctors. For the first time, we have as many as 24 doctors on the waiting list for posts in Government service.

### NO OVER-PRODUCTION

"It is not true to say that there is an over-population of doctors in Singapore just because 24 doctors are queuing up for Government jobs this moment. In my view we can have twice the number of doctors and still be short of doctors. The more doctors we have, the more specialised they become, with more attending to 1 patient. It should not be forgotten that one of the few beneficial consequences of the accelerated British military pull-out by 1971 will be that we shall be "inheriting" 3 military hospitals at Alexandra,

Changi and Seletar, and we will be hard put to find an adequate number of qualified doctors, surgeons, nurses and technicians to run them for the benefit of our people. The Ministry of Health will have to do a lot of hard rethinking over the next few years. We do not have to plan for expansion. It is already there staring us in the face! How can we fill the vacuum, without thinning out our scarce resources of trained manpower, thus inviting collapse in organisation and administration? That is the problem to be met and overcome it, we must.

### CANCER

"CANCER, unfortunately, has been our No. 1 Killer since 1959, or 9 years ago. Have we been apathetic over this state of affairs? I should say not. As our Radiotherapy Department in Outram Road General Hospital is using rather out-of-date equipment, we decided to build a new Radiotherapy Department and the sum of \$1.3 million was allocated for its development as far back as 1961. This has since become the nucleus of the \$4 million Institute of Medical Specialties, now in course of construction and which is being jointly established with our University of Singapore.

"In August 1964, the International Union against Cancer held a very successful Symposium in Singapore on Cancer of the Nasopharynx and Accessory Sinuses and we are proud to note that the Professor of Pathology of our University, Dr. K. Shanmugaratnam is Chairman of the Committee on Nasopharyngeal Cancer of this international organisation for the period 1966/70. This is indeed tacit international recognition of the excellent work of our doctors, surgeons and pathologists in this field of cancer.

### CANCER OF CERVIX

"In September 1964, we established our 1st Cytology Unit at Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital for cancer screening of cervix of the womb. The 2nd Cytology Unit was established in January 1967 through the generous donation of \$50,000 from the International Planned Parenthood Federation to our Singapore Family Planning & Population Board.

To date, over 13,000 women have been examined with 160 confirmed cases of cancer of the cervix or a pick-up rate of 1.2%.

"In December 1964, I was given the privilege to inaugurate the Singapore Cancer Society and thus became one of its founder life members. This Society now has an active membership of over 330 members. It held a most successful Exhibition in February 1967 and has since established a Cancer Information Centre and a Cancer Registry.

### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

"As for Occupational Health, with the return of a senior Public Health official with the post-graduate qualification of Diploma of Industrial Health (Ag. Senior Health Officer/Environmental Health, Dr. Chew Pin Kee), we were able to establish a new Industrial Health Unit at Halifax Road since January this year. A survey is now in progress under the direction of Dr. S.F.M. Cressal, an I.L.O. consultant, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour.

### NIGHT CALL ROSTERS

"Whilst on the subject of Occupational Health, I gather from statistics that doctors are more prone to have heart attacks than people in other walks of life. Thus heart disease may be considered as being an occupational disease for doctors. Having been in charge of Ministry of Health for the last 4½ years, I can well appreciate why this is so—the continuous burden, responsibility and tension of saving lives from death must have a telling effect on your hearts—stout and strong they may be at the start, a price must eventually be paid for the physical stress and mental strain which you are subjected to over the years.

"Can anything be done to alleviate the situation? Having been doctoring the doctors as it were for some time, I venture to prescribe a simple remedy, if you can only agree to organise yourselves to meet the situation. Take for example, the question of night calls of private practitioners. Whilst the telephone is a great boon and convenience for modern man, it must be a "terror" for the private practitioner, at night. I can well imagine, the state of nervous tension the private practitioner is in when the phone rings—of a possible night call from someone who is ill and needing his visit especially after a hard tiring day in the dispensary, just as the doctor is about to settle down to

dinner to enjoy the company of his wife and children and looking forward to watching his favourite TV programme and a good night's rest, thereafter. The position is of course made much worse when the phone does ring around (say) 2. am., breaking his sleep and to get out of a warm bed into the cold night air even in the tropics is no picnic, either.

"As the majority of our doctors of about 700 in number (or 60% of the 1,200 doctors on the Medical Register) are in private practice, I cannot understand why all 700 doctors should be kept living on tenterhooks, 365 days of the year! Never knowing whether they can have a night free from night calls—always fearful of that telephone ringing in the middle of the night and having to go to the aid of the sick and injured. Always tense, waiting, never relaxed. It is a vicious hold—no wonder your hearts conk out faster. Why not get together and agree amongst yourselves to set up a roster for night calls? Say, 10 doctors on call, each night. If 300 doctors could agree to be on the roster, it means that each doctor on the roster need only be on call, once in 30 days or 1 month or 12 times a year only! Think of the advantage of this system—the peace, the relaxation and the true enjoyment of your leisure hours for 29 out of 30 nights each month! What a boon! You benefit and the public benefits too, because they can always be assured of the services of a pool of 10 private doctors every night, by just telephoning one central agency. Ambulance and police escort may be arranged, if necessary. I understand the S.M.A. has been thinking along the same lines. I can assure you that our Ministry will be most pleased to co-ordinate and integrate such work so that our Emergency Units at Outram Road General Hospital and Thomson Road General Hospital can ensure such a scheme to be a greater success.

"If more doctors can join the roster, so much the better. Imagine it, once it operates smoothly, you will feel as free as if you have been a slave released from bondage! Don't you want to do something about this? I'm sure you will. Of course, if you have a very ill patient on your hands, you will want to be in constant touch with him, night visit or no night visit and doctor/patient relationship is not being interfered with. What I'm referring to are the normal night calls from someone who falls ill suddenly, in the middle of the night and wanting to get the assurance and services of a private doctor. There must be quite a number of such cases each night for a city of 2 million and there is no valid reason

for all 700 doctors to be always "standing by—on call", as it were, for no useful purpose except to increase the incidence of more heart attacks amongst doctors.

#### NON-PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC WORK

"I have no doubts whatsoever that professional subjects are being extremely well looked after in Singapore by S.M.A. and its members. What I would like particularly to stress today is the need for more members of the medical profession to take a greater interest in public affairs and/or politics. I would like now to express my high appreciation and commendation of the following 10 doctors for rendering distinguished full-time/or part-time public service/or community service to the Republic, at present:

1. Prof. E. S. Monteiro, one of the 2 to be honoured by your association for award as Honorary member, and our distinguished Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia.
2. Dr. Phay Seng Whatt, Chairman of the Public Service Commission.
3. Dr. Ong Swee Law, Chairman, Public Utilities Board.
4. Prof. Yeoh Ghim Seng, M.P. for Joo Chiat and Chairman of the Detainees Aftercare Committee.
5. Dr. B. K. Sen, Member of the Public Service Commission.
6. Dr. Goh Poh Seng, Chairman of the National Theatre Trust Board of Trustees, and Member of Board of Governor National Youth Leadership Training Institute.
7. Dr. Chan Ah Kow, Member of Board of Management, People's Association.
8. Dr. E. M. T. Lu, Member of the National Theatre Trust, Board of Trustees.
9. Dr. Oon Chiew Seng, Members of Detainees Aftercare Committee.
10. Dr. Nalla Tan, Member of Detainees Aftercare Committee.

"There are many of you, I know, who are playing most valuable and dedicated roles in various voluntary and welfare organisations which are associated with your professional

interests like Family Planning, St. John's Ambulance, Red Cross, Blind, Deaf, Spastics, Retarded Children, etc. These must continue to receive your full support if we are to progress but genuine interests in public affairs and politics are not only important but vital in the crucial years ahead, if there is to be continued security, economic and political stability for Singapore *i.e.* our survival, and none of us can afford to shirk our responsibility to do our bit in this regard.

"There is so much latent, high-grade potential for political leadership in your midst which I am determined to see harnessed for the greater good of our young nation. I do seriously put to you that doctors should not confine their attention and energies solely to doctoring the physical and mental ills of our people. I am not disputing your right to perform the noble job for which you have been trained, of curing the sick, of healing the wounded and saving of lives. You are doing an excellent job at it, but, there is something more yet to be done, of meeting the challenge of our times by coming out in greater numbers to be leaders of constructive nation-building in Singapore. Out of 1,200 doctors, surely just 1 doctor M.P. in a Parliament of 58 members is a most disproportionate representation of your talents—surely there must be more amongst you interested enough to do his bit of carrying some share of the burden of continuing constitutional progress of our nation?

"Now that I have posed the problem before you, I am confident that when the "call" comes—the light tap on your shoulder for a quiet chit-chat over a cup of coffee and a request to serve on this Committee or Board, that you will not hesitate to respond and to accept your share of non-professional public work. Having suggested a way out for you to rid yourselves of the perpetual terror of night calls, surely I am not asking too much in return, if I ask you to sacrifice some hours of your leisure time for community service. So let's look forward to seeing more doctor M.P.s and more doctors taking a greater role in our public, community work and welfare organisations, hereafter.

"It remains for me now to conclude by declaring open this 1st National Medical Convention and Exhibition of the S.M.A. and to wish all participants every success in their deliberations.