

OPENING ADDRESS

THE SMA SILVER JUBILEE NATIONAL MEDICAL CONVENTION (1985)

Kwa Soon Bee

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES & GENTLEMEN

I am officiating at this Opening Ceremony of the SMA Silver Jubilee National Medical Convention and the 1985 SMA Lecture on behalf of Mr S Rajaratnam, Senior Minister, Prime Minister's Office who is unable to attend as he has just undergone a major operation. I was accordingly called upon by your President to stand in and say just a few words. I shall do this.

25 years may not be a long time in the history of a country. But for Singapore and its medical service it has been a period of significant change which justifies a pause as we reflect on the past and plan for the future. I would like to highlight some of the major changes that have taken place over the past 25 years from 1960—1985. During that period our population increased from 1.65 million to 2.53 million. The percentage of the young aged 14 years and below fell from 45.4% to 24.7% whilst those between the ages of 15 and 59 increased from 50.6% to 67.6%. The elderly over 60 increased from 4.0% to 7.7%. Thus our population has not only increased in numbers but there has been a reduction in percentage and number of young and an increase of the old. We are hopefully not only older but wiser.

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Our crude birth rate fell dramatically from 37.5 to 16.2 per thousand whilst our crude death rate fell slightly from 6.2 to 5.2. Infant mortality fell significantly from 34.9 to 8.9 per thousand. This is one of the lowest infant mortality rates comparable to that in the developed countries. Maternal mortality fell from 0.4 to 0.1 per thousand. Life expectancy at birth increased from 62.5 years to 71.2 years.

The principal causes of death in 1960 were cancer followed by pneumonia, heart disease, tuberculosis and gastroenteritis. Last year it was cancer, heart disease, pneumonia, cerebrovascular disease, accident, poisoning and violence.

During this 25 year period admissions into Government hospitals have more than doubled and the A&E attendances increased by four and half times.

The number of doctors increased from 640 in 1960 to 2,504 in 1984, giving a doctor to population ratio of 1:2,553 in 1960 and 1:1,010 last year. The number of dental surgeons increased from 98 to 475. The total number of nurses increased from 1,703 to 8,482 and the number of pharmacists increased from 95 to 409.

During this same period Singapore's Gross National Product increased from \$2,189 million to \$38,515 million. Our per capita GNP increased from \$1,329 to \$14,594. Government recurrent expenditure on health increased from \$29.8 million in 1960 to \$358.0 million last year, whilst development expenditure increased from \$0.8 million to \$8.2 million. Total Government health expenditure per capita has increased from \$18 per person per year in 1960 to \$174 in 1984.

These are significant changes. The improvements in

the state of health and in the standard of health care have been made possible by the policies of the Ministry of Health and the combined effort of the medical profession, both the GPs and the Specialists in the private and public sectors. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the members of the SMA for their contributions in this direction.

But what of the future? Will the rate of development and progress over the next 25 years be as rapid and as significant as the last 25 years? Will we be able to sustain our rate of development and maintain the standard of health service and provide the level of sophistication and care that the public have come to expect? I have given you the background to the past 25 years and have posed the questions for the next. These are topics which I believe guest lecturers and delegates to this Convention will be discussing. Your seminar topic Health Care over the Next 25 Years will be a most fitting and timely subject to be considered by the distinguished delegates attending this Convention. I have no doubt that you will come up with some interesting discussions and suggestions. As I did not have the time to prepare the answers to these questions nor do I wish to steal the thunder of the other speakers I have decided to leave these as questions to be debated.

It leaves me now to thank the SMA for the privilege of officiating at the Opening Ceremony and to wish our distinguished guests and delegates an enjoyable session. I close with the wish that our guests from overseas will have an enjoyable stay in Singapore. Thank you.