

Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Opening Ceremony of the 30th Singapore Malaysia Congress of Medicine

The President of the Congress, Master of the Academy of Medicine, Malaysia
Prime Minister and Mrs Mahathir
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to open this combined congress of the two Academies of Medicine of Malaysia and Singapore. I am happier still to personally welcome the Prime Minister of Malaysia and Mrs Mahathir to Singapore. And I am most happy that Dr Mahathir is the Gordon Arthur Ransome Orator, not me.

Singapore and Malaysia are very close neighbours. It was not too long ago that both countries and both Academies were united as one. Going our separate ways in the 1960s has not diminished our friendship and fellowship. On the contrary, the reverse has been happening in the last 10 years. As both our countries pursued economic growth and the well-being of our peoples, we have achieved success in many areas, some through mutual cooperation and others through friendly and at times intense competition. Our people have benefited. Our nations are stronger today than ever before. Our higher level of prosperity shows up in our health indicators. Life expectancy is longer and infant mortality lower. The pattern of diseases has changed. More people suffer from chronic degenerative conditions than infectious diseases—a sure sign of well-fed people ministered to by modern medicine.

Advances in medical knowledge and medical technology have an impact on the way healthcare is delivered. In Singapore, as part of our rebuilding programme of hospitals, we have concentrated resources in National Medical Centres. Malaysia also has several well established medical institutes. We would both benefit with greater co-operation between our doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals.

Malaysia is embarking on a multi-media super corridor. We have the IT 2000 programme to make Singapore an intelligent island. With these uses of information technology, there will be greater opportunity for IT applications in medicine. Computers are now an integral part of laboratories, wards and clinics. Many operational activities of hospitals and clinics are electronically driven. You should work on Telemedicine to enable our doctors to share information and expertise.

When there was one medical school for our two countries, the University of Malaya based in Singapore, all the doctors, dentists and pharmacists were trained together. This bonded the medical alumni wherever they practised. I know that PM Mahathir and his wife, both medical doctors, have treasured their network of friends in Singapore. I have no doubt that this network contributes to the strength of Singapore-Malaysia relationship. Through the two Academies, networking of our doctors and dentists can continue to grow. It will add to the close relationship between our two Ministries of Health whose senior officials visit each other regularly and collaborate and co-operate at both working and social levels. The best brains in Singapore schools continue to be attracted to a career in Medicine. Our medical faculty continues to offer places in both the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Dentistry to Malaysian students. The medical students will continue to extend the networking between the two medical communities into another generation.

The Academy of Medicine, Singapore, was founded in 1957 as a professional academic body serving all medical and dental specialties. Its primary objectives are the fostering of postgraduate and continuing medical education, the maintenance of the highest professional standards and the promotion of research. It has done well there past four decades and should continue to ensure that we have well-trained, certified, competent and updated specialists. The Academy should now look to enhancing its activities in the region by collaborative medical research with our ASEAN neighbours. Rapid socio-economic growth and the demographic change in the region have had its impact on the health of the people. This offers a wide and rich source of material for both clinical and epidemiological research which will benefit the health of our people.

The Academy must now look to playing a regional role in training. Together with the Ministry of Health and the National University of Singapore through its School of Postgraduate Medical Studies, courses leading to Master of Medicine degrees, can be made relevant to the region's rather than Singapore's needs alone. With a greying population, courses in geriatrics is also worth considering. We should offer ASEAN doctors more fellowship for

clinical attachments or training courses in Singapore. Medical cooperation with our ASEAN colleagues will contribute to better overall ASEAN relationships,

I would like to see the leadership of the Singapore and Malaysian Academies take up the many challenges open to them and strengthen Singapore-Malaysia relationship in the process.

It is now my pleasure to declare the 30th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine open, and to wish all participants an intellectually stimulating meeting and productive networking.
