

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
( PRIME MINISTER )

EVENT: AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 17TH. MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE  
CONGRESS OF MEDICINE

VENUE: THE HILTON HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 08 SEP 1983

TIME:

Dr. Chow Khuen Wai,  
President of the Malaysia-Singapore  
Congress of Medicine;  
Dr. Ng Chuan Wai,  
Master, Academy of Medicine of Malaysia;  
Distinguished guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Being dedicated to the pursuit of medical excellence, with members drawn from the cream of the medical profession, this Congress organised by the Academy of Medicine of Malaysia represents a major activity in promoting a high standard of medicine. This Congress brings together medical experts from Malaysia and Singapore to share their experiences and the fruits of their research. And with the presence of the Presidents and representatives of the Royal Colleges of Medicine of the United Kingdom and Australasia, as well as many eminent specialists from renowned medical institutions abroad, I feel very privileged indeed to be invited to address this distinguished gathering.

2. Seven years ago, as the Minister of Education, I had the honour to deliver the Tun Ismail Oration at the 11th. Congress. At that time, the Congress was held at the General Hospital, where convention facilities were limited. Judging from your programme and this venue, the Congress has come a long way. This, no doubt, is a reflection of the progress and increased sophistication that you have achieved in the past years.

3. I have not practised medicine for more than a decade. Nonetheless, medicine is always close to my heart, and when the Academy invited me to accept the honorary membership, I felt greatly honoured that I am still remembered as a member of the profession. I may not contribute directly to the practice of medicine as such. However, being an honorary academician, I certainly will become more aware of the aspirations of the profession. I hope I could in some way contribute towards the Academy's objective of promoting and maintaining the highest standard of professional practice in this country.

4. When Malaysia achieved independence more than two decades ago, we only had a handful of medical specialists. The country now has a sizeable number of highly qualified doctors. Most of them hold memberships and Fellowships of the Royal Colleges of the United Kingdom and Australasia. We will, in the foreseeable future, still look to the Royal Colleges to assist us in the training of our specialists. But sending our doctors for training overseas has many inherent drawbacks, in terms of the high cost of training abroad, and the loss of service during the period they are away. Some doctors, sad to say, do not care to return after completing their training.

5. Malaysia needs many more highly qualified doctors to staff the institutions of higher learning, and to man the major hospitals. Equally important, we need specialists who are competent to handle the situation in the smaller district hospitals which are often not well equipped, and which often do not have a full complement of specialists. There is, therefore, a place for the handy-man type of specialist personnel. There is a need to design a programme of post-graduate training geared to the needs of the country. We need to train many of our own specialists and I believe we do have the necessary expertise. I am confident, the Royal Colleges will assist us in this task. The concept of Malaysia Incorporated which I put forward to the nation some time ago, can apply equally well to the area of post-graduate training. It is time that all medical professionals, whether in universities, government hospitals, or the private sector, join forces in a common effort to lay a firm foundation for the development of post-graduate medical training in Malaysia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. Increased affluence has resulted in heightened public expectations for highly skilful medical care. It has also created a demand for private specialist medical care. As a result there is a brain drain from public institutions to the private sector. We now have a situation where the institutions have some of the finest facilities and sophisticated equipments in the country, while a large number of our senior and experienced people are engaged in private practices. Could we have a happy marriage of the two situations? Could the government privatise part of the medical service so that private specialists could render their service to patients in hospitals and at the same time impart their experience and skill to younger colleagues? Should we offer government specialists limited rights to private practice? Such ideas have been tossed time and again. The Government will study the implications and see whether a satisfactory arrangement can be worked out.

7. I understand our 'Look East Policy' has attracted interest from medical professionals, medical technologists and the pharmaceutical firms of Japan. The Technology

Transfer Institute of Tokyo had recently organised a seminar on technology transfer, and now I am happy to see a Japanese medical trade exhibition at this Congress. By looking east I mean emulating those good qualities of countries in East Asia in our effort to develop Malaysia. Our medical services have long benefitted from our traditional ties with those of the West. I am confident we will continue to enjoy this close relationship. However, there is also a good deal we can learn from the countries in the East. The Academy could perhaps take the initiative to foster a closer relationship with its counterparts in Southeast and East Asian countries, so that Malaysia can advance the cause of medicine by marrying the best from the East and West.

8. With these words, it is now my pleasure to declare the Congress open, and to wish you success.