

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

EVENT: THE 9TH REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF DERMATOLOGY

VENUE: THE HILTON HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR (K.L)

DATE: 19 JUN 1990

TIME:

Yang Berhormat Encik Ng Cheng Kiat,
Minister of Health;
Associate Professor H.C. Ting,
Chairman of the Conference Organising Committee;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and gentlemen.

I am honoured to be invited to declare open this Conference. I am informed that this Conference is being attended by the medical fraternity from the Asia-Pacific Region, North America and Europe. Given the prominence and attention accorded to this gathering, I hope it will meet the objectives set by the organisers and contribute positively to the development of dermatology.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2. Over the past two decades, medical technology has developed at a bewildering pace. Each year, more and more sophisticated and innovative technologies are introduced to the profession. The health care delivery system is being subjected to greater and more diverse pressures than in the past and there is constant demand for the introduction of new technology in clinical practice.

3. As resources will always be limited, there is a need to be judicious in the use of available funds so that it will reach the greatest number of people and yield maximum benefit. While new technologies may improve tremendously the effect of treatment, their cost escalate rapidly with each new advance. Developing countries may not be able to afford some of the technologies no matter how efficacious.

4. I understand that several new technologies like investigative dermatology, computer technology and new immunofluorescence techniques have brought exciting new elements into dermatology. Such technologies have managed to capture the imagination of young doctors especially in developed countries. This Conference, I am pleased to note, will be discussing these technologies. Hopefully, after a glimpse of what future dermatology has to offer, this Conference can generate more interest and inspire our young doctors to embark on a career in this not too popular field of medicine.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. The government of Malaysia is committed to providing

for the health needs of the people. We are ready to respond to the changing needs by upgrading our facilities and introducing new services. Malaysia however is still facing a shortage of medical specialists in various fields, dermatology being no exception. About 9% of our hospital outpatient attendances present with skin problems and the demand for this service is high. We therefore need more dermatologists to cope with the increasing demand and also to develop this field further. In the past, dermatology did not appear to be glamorous or interesting enough to attract many of our doctors to give it their life-long commitment. Given the new developments and technologies, however, the Malaysian Government hopes more members of the medical fraternity will specialise in this field in the future. It is axiomatic that skin diseases cannot be completely cured and yet they do not kill. And so the patients keep on coming and 'harassing' the doctors with their conditions. It is altogether very frustrating for the doctor although, of course, they can provide a lifetime income for the practitioner.

6. We have identified several new services in dermatology to be developed such as dermatopathology and photobiology to ensure a more effective skin care for the population. In this respect, our specialists can play a greater role in guiding and encouraging young doctors to pursue this field, not only because the country needs them but also because dermatology can be as interesting and exciting as any other field in medicine, given the new technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. There is a staggering number of chemicals and cosmetics flooding the markets each year. The blatant use of such chemicals and cosmetics in industries and at home, has not been properly controlled and for a long time remained relatively unchecked. As a result, we now have to cope with increasing numbers of occupational diseases and contact dermatitis. These diseases could easily have been prevented through proper handling and usage of the chemicals. Education for the producers and consumers alike on the need for the enforcement and maintenance of high safety standards in working areas and usage of proper labels on consumer products are major immediate remedial steps to be considered. I am happy to note that this Conference will be discussing industrial and cosmetic dermatoses amongst the many topics that will be discussed. These deliberations will enable the prevention, treatment and control of these diseases to be more effective.

8. We must also stress that in our search for new frontiers to explore, we also need to strengthen and intensify our preventive health care programmes. As you are aware, there is universal concern over the control of sexually-transmitted diseases. AIDS in particular has become a major global health problem. Presently, with the cure for AIDS unlikely to be found soon, prevention is the only effective way to curb the spread of this deadly disease. Here the use

of illegal drugs is of particular concern. As elsewhere the incidence of AIDS in Malaysia is greater among drug addicts. Prevention of the spread of drug abuse by any means is essential in the protection of the public from becoming victims of this disease. Additionally unawareness on the part of doctors about the possibility of patients having AIDS may result in unfortunate accidents.

9. In Malaysia, we have taken some measures to check and eliminate AIDS. New measures will be considered if they are deemed necessary. Besides AIDS, we have intensified our health campaign drives against five other diseases. The Malaysian medical authorities are organising a major nationwide programme against heart diseases, hepatitis B, cancer, diabetes and hypertension.

10. Much of this programme will involve promoting awareness of the need to inculcate a healthy lifestyle. These include the value of regular physical exercise, good personal hygiene, healthy dietary habits and well-adjusted family relationships to ensure that maximum level of health is achieved. It is important for every one to realise and accept that the ultimate responsibility for one's own health particularly the preventive aspect lies with the individual, and I hope this programme will help to persuade people of this reality, and will be well received by everyone in the community.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. Once again I wish to thank the Organising Committee for inviting me to officiate the opening of this Conference. I wish you all success in your deliberations. To our foreign guests, I hope you have a pleasant stay in Malaysia and since this is Visit Malaysia Year, I would suggest that you take time off to see our country and witness some of the special events that have been included in the Visit Malaysia Year programme. I bid you welcome to Malaysia.

12. I now have much pleasure in declaring open the 9th Regional Conference of Dermatology.