

**SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TAN CHORH CHUAN,
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FACULTY OF DENTISTRY'S 80TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DINNER
7 NOVEMBER 2009, 6.20 PM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ISLAND BALLROOM**

Education Minister and Second Minister for Defence, Dr Ng Eng Hen
Chairman NUHS, Mr Lim Yong Wah
Chief Executive NUHS, A/Prof Benjamin Ong
Dean, FoD, A/Prof Keson Tan
Representative from Lee Foundation, Prof Lim Pin.

Good evening.

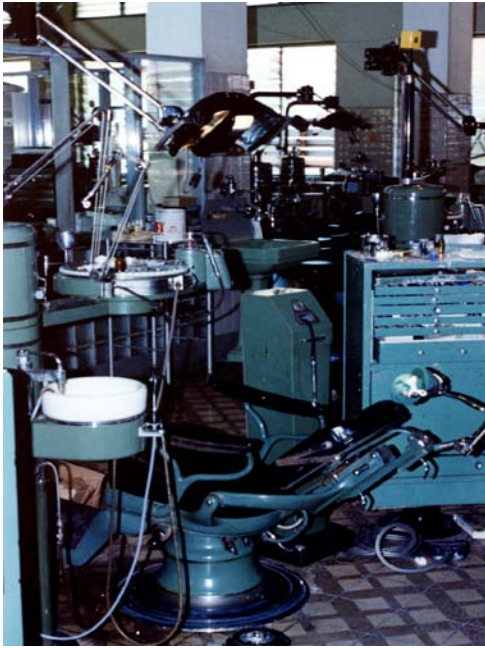
It is wonderful that all of us are gathered here tonight to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of our Faculty of Dentistry.

In particular, I would like to express our deep appreciation to our Guest-of-Honour, Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education for joining us this evening. Thank you, Minister Ng and Mrs Ng – your presence makes this occasion really special.

Dentistry at 80

At 80 years, Dentistry is one of our University's oldest Faculties and we have much to celebrate tonight. To remind ourselves of the tremendous progress that we have made over the years, let me highlight three examples. As I am a frequent user of our dental services and am therefore very careful not to offend our dental colleagues, let me say first that the examples are meant to be light-hearted!

When we were designing the NUS Calendar for this year, each Faculty was requested to select a picture for its page. Guess what the candidate photo for the Dental Faculty was?



It was a picture of the old foot-pedalled dental chair used by our dental students some 30-40 years ago. I am told by my senior colleagues that students had to spend as much effort trying to adjust the chairs, as they did in learning how to drill, fill and extract.

Today, of course, the modern dental chair is the norm. These chairs operate at the mere touch of a push button and dental students don't need strong legs anymore to power the chair.

Eighty years ago, dental students had to spend many hours on plaster work, gold casting and the making of dentures. In addition, part of the skills training involved the use of cadavers.

Compare that with the state-of-the-art training that students receive today. What you see is a group of students in a laboratory, practising on simulators which provide a visual and haptic experience. They hone their dental skills using actual tools on plastic teeth, in a safe and high technology environment.



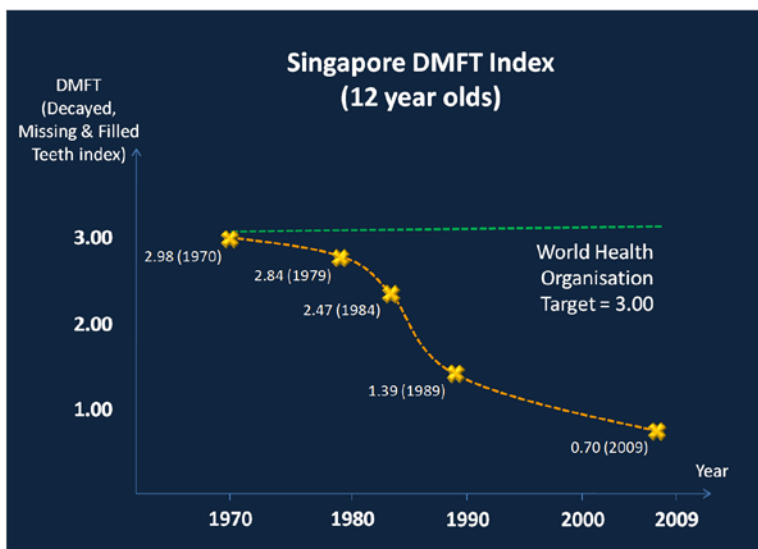
Many of us remember fondly the old Dental Clinic building at Sepoy Lines. Here is a picture of it around 1938 and this is the current location of the Faculty of Dentistry on the Kent Ridge Campus.



All these changes notwithstanding, there were 3 constants that have marked the Faculty of Dentistry and its graduates, alumni and staff, which continue till today.

A Proud Tradition of Education and Service

The first is the tradition of providing outstanding dental services to our patients.



The graph shown is an illustration of this. It highlights the state of dental health in Singapore. The first comprehensive survey on the oral health of school children in Singapore was conducted in 1970. THE DMFT or the dental caries index for 12 year-olds then

was 2.96 which even in 1970 had surpassed the WHO global target of 3.0 DMFT set for the year 2000. Our current DMFT index for Singapore is 0.7 which is among the best in developed countries.

Second, a singular focus on top-rate dental education.

When the Dental School started in 1929, it did not receive any applications. In the past few decades, however, Dentistry has become one of the most sought-after courses in NUS, attracting extremely bright and talented students. A major factor for this has been the quality of education offered by the Faculty, which today is widely regarded as providing one of the finest dental education programmes in the Asia-Pacific region.

Third, the Dental Faculty has a proud record of numerous graduates and alumni who become leaders in the profession and in society, in Singapore and beyond.

I am delighted that several of these alumni are with us tonight.

Among our distinguished former colleagues are great leaders like Professor Edmund Tay – the first and the longest serving Dean of the Faculty from 1966 to 1985, and Dr Lee Ek Chong who had served as Head of then Department of Dentistry, in the mid-1960s.

Many of our graduates have also gone on to distinguish themselves in their professional endeavours. One such outstanding alumnus is Dr Choo Teck Chuan – from the Class of '55 – who not only went on to establish the World Dental Education Society (WDES), but through the WDES and the World Dental Federation, has also been generously funding overseas attachments and study bursaries for our dental students.

I would also mention the former Dean, Professor Chew Chong Lin, whose very substantial and impactful work has won him many accolades including recognition as Outstanding Clinician-Educator at this year's National Medical Excellence Awards.

There are many others who have excelled in clinical service and education, and who have played a key role in driving for excellence in dental education and practice. I apologise that because of the constraints of time, I am unable to mention all of you

by name but we owe you all a special debt of gratitude for your deep and important contributions.

Changing Face of Dental Education, Research and Practice

Today, the Faculty of Dentistry is well-known, strong and growing vigorously. It is now poised for even greater heights of attainment.

In dental education for example, transformational changes are taking place. The revamped competency-based dental curriculum offers rich opportunities for our students to develop not only their clinical and technical skills, but also acquire and hone soft skills like patient management, communication, health promotion and disease prevention.

In research, the Faculty is making a real impact. In particular, the Faculty has actively forged the integration of basic science with clinical research. Through its inter-disciplinary and institutional collaborations, the Faculty has been able to build synergies and multiply its research impact.

Initiatives such as the Centre for Advanced Dental Education reflect the Faculty's continuing commitment to the professional development of its graduates and dental practitioners, preparing them for future challenges in Singapore's healthcare sector.

Looking ahead, the Faculty will soon be making a partial move to its new building taking shape at Medical Drive. The main facilities at the new building will include student clinics, dental laboratories complete with the latest simulation equipment, as well as new dental imaging facilities for students' use. The new facility will help further the Faculty's mission of delivering an outstanding education expected of a leading dental school.

Closing

The founding fathers of the dental school had a bold vision. From its modest beginnings in 1929 as a dental department within the King Edward VII College of Medicine, our Faculty of Dentistry has come a long way in every respect.

This evening, we celebrate the past, present and future. Standing tall on the outstanding foundations built over the past 80 years, the Dental Faculty can look with confidence to the years ahead, as it strives for new peaks of excellence.

On this happy note, I would like to congratulate the Faculty of Dentistry for its sterling achievements and wish it every success in its exciting journey ahead.

May I also take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you a very meaningful and enjoyable time of reunion and celebration this evening.

Thank you.